

Headline	Call to allow drugs for addicts under treatment		
MediaTitle	New Straits Times		
Date	30 Nov 2011	Color	Full Color
Section	Local News	Circulation	136,530
Page No	20	Readership	330,000
Language	English	ArticleSize	336 cm ²
Journalist	N/A	AdValue	RM 9,939
Frequency	Daily	PR Value	RM 29,817



Call to allow drugs for addicts under treatment

KUALA LUMPUR: A former top cop is calling for the “decriminalisation” of certain drugs for treating addiction.

Former Criminal Investigation Department director Tan Sri Mohd Zaman Khan, who is now the Malaysian AIDS Council (MAC) president, said this would be among their proposals to the government to stem the rate of new HIV infections.

“In countries like Portugal, possession of a small amount of drugs like opiate for treatment is legal.

“Don’t get me wrong, I don’t want the government to make drugs legal. This is just for medical purposes.”

Zaman said the other item on the MAC wish list was several amendments to the law so that drug users under treatment were not arrested.

“If an addict has an identity card from the Ministry of Health stating that he is in the treatment programme, he should not be detained unless he is involved in a crime.”

The MAC, he said, would be forwarding their recommendations to the government soon.

Zaman was speaking to the *New Straits Times* in conjunction with World AIDS Day (WAD), which will be celebrated worldwide tomorrow.

The theme for this year’s celebration is “Getting to Zero” and it aims to raise awareness on the disease.

It is a call to rally countries all over the world to amplify their efforts to achieve the three zeroes — zero new infections, zero AIDS-related deaths and zero discrimination.

MAC has included another zero to its list — zero mother-to-child transmission. Zaman said the “daring” theme had a lot to do with the fact that the number of new infections were on the rise.

Last year, a total of 3,652 new infections were recorded. Sexual

transmission (48.7%) had narrowly surpassed the number of cases from shared needles (47.4%).

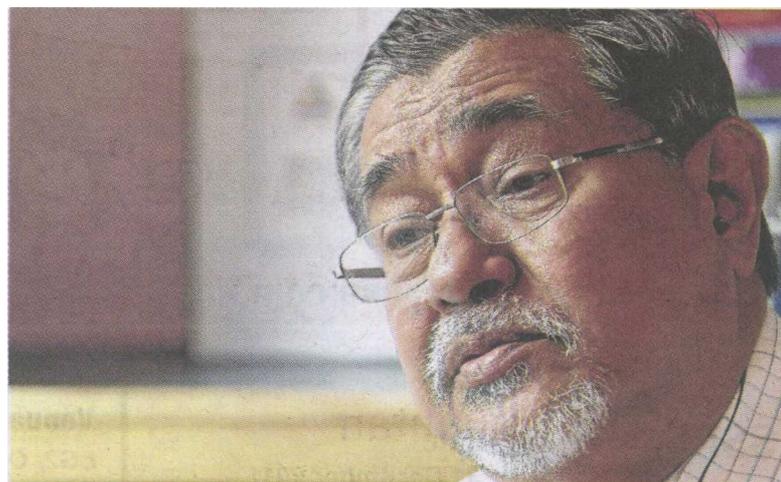
The MAC is also shifting its focus from men to women as more housewives and sex workers getting infected through unprotected sex.

When asked if sex education was the answer to the problem, Zaman said Western countries had implemented this, but a new problem surfaced — teenage pregnancies.

“This is not the ultimate solution. People just seem to have a careless attitude when it comes to being careful during sex.”

Zaman acknowledged that at one time, there was horror and revulsion at the mere mention of HIV. But society has now better understood the problem. He said WAD was a good platform to remind people that HIV has not gone away, nor are the prejudices surrounding it.

“Many things still have to be done,” Zaman added. — **By Elizabeth Zachariah and Nadirah H. Rodzi**



Malaysian AIDS Council president Tan Sri Mohd Zaman Khan says the number of new HIV infections is on the rise. Pic by Mohd Yusni Ariffin

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Tackling HIV infection

- **The Needle** and Syringe Exchange programme (NSEP), the mainstay of reducing HIV transmission among drug addicts, was introduced in 2006 and has been expanded to more than 20 sites nationwide.

- **Compulsory detention** of drug addicts has been abandoned, shifting to voluntary, non-conditional treatment, including methadone maintenance therapy (MMT) at Cure and Care centres.

- **MMT is also available** at 19 prisons nationwide.

- **First-line anti-retroviral** therapy is fully subsidised while second-line anti-retroviral therapy is partially subsidised for HIV patients. The therapy is available in prisons.

- **Commitment by state religious** authorities in



addressing HIV vulnerabilities in the Malay population (70% of cumulative HIV cases) is strengthened through the „HIV & Islam“ programme led by the Islamic Development Department of Malaysia.