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HER FATHER'S DAUGHTER

DATIN PADUKA MARINA MAHATHIR

The daughter of Tun Dr Mahathir Mohamad, the former Prime Minister of Malaysia, Datin Paduka Marina Mahathir is an icon in her own right. A spirited activist who was the former President of the Malaysian AIDS Council (MAC), she is not only still heavily involved in the effort to bring AIDS awareness to the world and stopping the spread of HIV, but is also a columnist, blogger, occasional TV and film producer and dedicated wife and mother. Her work in HIV/AIDS in Malaysia sparked many controversial debates given the sensitivity of the nation yet she continues to strive. "At the very least, I hope I have raised some awareness of HIV. As for the impact, we still see numbers growing. What's important is not what I say or what I do but, more importantly, what sort of policies are created along the way," she shares.

Although she agrees that we have definitely come a long way from the time where people refused to even address the subject to now where there is free treatment in some hospitals, Datin Paduka Marina feels that there is still much to be done where prevention is concerned. "I'm just coming from a meeting where it is forecasted that, by 2031, there will be a total of one million new infections per year. That is a large number and it certainly means that what is being done is not good enough. Unless we change the way we grapple with social issues and respect human rights, we won't have much of a future," she stresses.

"I try and do what I can and it has come some way but the situation can definitely improve further. I think we are not doing enough for prevention and many things are still not being addressed. We must understand that human rights cannot be separated. We need to open space for people to talk and voice their opinions. Everybody has a value and we are not giving that equal value to everyone. My wish for Malaysia is that young people are allowed to breathe. This will bring about change that is much needed."