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Concerned women gain support

Petition campaign against more reflexology centres, spas in Miri to end next Monday

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MIRI: A petition campaign against Miri City Council's decision to allow more reflexology centres and spas to open here is progressing well.

It reads: "We, the undersigned, being the residents of Miri are concerned with the large number of reflexology centres, massage centres, nightclubs, KTV centres, etc in Miri and hereby protest against the recent decision by Miri City Council mayor to lift the ban against the issuance of licences to operate such centres."

So far, more than 20 non-governmental organisations have thrown their support behind the initiative by a group calling itself "Concerned Respectful Women".

Formed by professional women, it is worried about reports of alleged prostitution going on in these establishments, and that the masseuses who were usually foreigners, would lead men, particularly husbands, astray.

The group wants the council to revise its decision, and also to drive home the point that prostitution, if unhindered, would lead to major social and health problems.

The group wants more stringent rules and regulations to be enforced and close monitoring and enforcement of such regulations by the authorities.

It also appeals to the authorities, especially the police and Immigration Department, not to ignore the situation. The campaign began last Sunday and will end next Monday.

"Response has been good so far and based on feedback, we are expecting more signatures," said the group's spokesman who declined to be named, yesterday.

"This is no longer just a Miri problem but the state and the country as well. Prostitution is not selective, its clients could come from all over the country as Miri is the melting pot for many major oil and gas businesses, timber, retail and service industries."

According to statistics gathered by the group, Ibans topped the list of

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sexually transmitted disease (STD) carriers, followed by Chinese and Malays.

There was a marked increase in HIV/AIDS cases in the city from 2009 until last year, the spokesman said.

In 2009, 13 HIV cases were reported and this increased to 30 last year while AIDS cases increased from five in 2009 to 18 in 2010.

The breakdown based on racial

denomination involving STD cases in 2010, 37% was reported among Ibans, 23% among Chinese, 20% among Malays while Kayan and Kelabit, 3% each.

Among Kenyah and Indonesians, it was 7% and 4% respectively.

There was also a marked increase in gonorrhoea, the most common of the STD cases here with 43 reported

last year compared with 13 in 2009. Seven deaths due to STD complications were also reported in Miri last year.

"These figures were derived from those who sought treatment from government hospitals while those who sought treatment from private clinics, their figures are not disclosed," said the spokesman.