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# Greater support for red ribbon

More celebrities joining programme to fight stigma against people living with HIV/AIDS

**A** GROUP of celebrities have joined hands again with the Malaysian Aids Council to lend their voices to help raise awareness of the plight of people living with HIV and AIDS.

Malaysian pop singer-songwriter Datuk Siti Nurhaliza, actress Datin Paduka Umie Aida, artistes Faizal Tahir, Fahrin Ahmad, Dayang Nurfaizah, Owen Yap, Anantha, Uthaya, Zainal Alam Kadir and Shah Shamshiri are back for the second phase of the Red Ribbon Celebrity Support Programme.

Also joining in the programme for the first time this year are veejay Joey G and artistes Winnie K and Kenchana Devi.

Council president Datuk Zaman Khan said the celebrities had helped create better awareness among the general public.

"The council initiated this programme in April 2009 with a line-up of 10 celebrities based on their popularity and strong appeal in their

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respective community.

"This alliance particularly works to increase awareness and fight the stigma and discrimination towards people living with HIV.

"The programme is also part of the MAC Strategic Plan for 2008-2010 that advocates a supportive environment to address the issue (of stigma and discrimination)," Zaman said during the official launch of the programme at Hard Rock Hotel Penang on Saturday.

He added that since 1986, 87,710 people in Malaysia were known to be HIV positive, and every day 10 new Malaysians were infected.

"The extent of stigma and discrimination against Malaysians living with HIV in the society is alarming.

"Three out of four Malaysians said they would feel ashamed if they were infected with HIV, while one out of two said they would feel ashamed if someone in their family had HIV and AIDS," he said, citing a survey spon-

sored by Synovate (M) Sdn Bhd in 2008.

He said the celebrities' responsibilities ranged from making special appearance at events organised by the council or the Malaysian Aids Federation, visiting shelters and acting as media spokespersons.

"Medication is important, but equally important is that one needs support from friends and family, and an environment free from stigma and discrimination.

"When all these are there, a person who is HIV positive can lead a normal and productive life," Zaman said.

Except for Siti, Faizal and Kenchana Devi, all participating artistes attended the launching ceremony where they pledged their full commitment towards the programme.

Earlier in the day, they participated in several workshops to better prepare themselves for the programme.

**»Medication is important, but equally important is that one needs support from friends and family, and an environment free from stigma and discrimination«**

DATUK ZAMAN KHAN



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**Gung ho:** Local celebrities showing their enthusiasm after the launch of the programme at Hardrock Hotel in Penang.