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More donation for one-stop centre for HIV patients

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KUCHING: The Malaysian AIDS Foundation (MAF) has received a RM70,000 donation to strengthen its efforts to end AIDS in Sarawak following the launch of Teratak Kasih Tok Nan, the state's first one-stop support centre for people living with HIV.

The donation was handed over by Teratak Kasih Tok Nan patron Datin Patinggi Jamilah Anu during her visit to the centre here yesterday.

Also dropping in for a visit was UNAIDS regional director for Asia and the Pacific Eamonn Murphy.

Since opening its doors in May this year, the centre serves as a safe space for HIV-impacted peo-

ple and families in the local community to access HIV-related health, social and welfare services.

It is also a halfway home for those coming from outside Kuching to access HIV treatment at the Sarawak General Hospital, with a maximum capacity of 13 occupants at a single time.

It is operated by the Sarawak AIDS Concern Society (SACS), a partner organisation of the Malaysian AIDS Council.

"I am proud of what the centre has achieved in such a short time, especially its impact on improving access to lifesaving HIV treatment despite its being readily available – a struggle that many people living with HIV in Sarawak have to face at the expense of their health

and wellbeing," Jamilah said.

She noted that stigma continued to fuel the AIDS epidemic, perpetuating unfounded fear in the community, silencing those affected by it and causing those at high risk of HIV to be more vulnerable.

"Together with MAC and the SACS team running the centre, I remain committed to the Sarawak AIDS response. I hope all stakeholders, both in the government and non-government sectors, will also play their roles in making the fight to end AIDS a priority for the state," she added.

The donation will be channelled to high-impact HIV treatment, care and support programmes under MAF, particularly for underserved people in Sarawak's interior.

MAF's AIDS ending campaign in Sarawak kicked off last December with a Kuching Gala held in conjunction with World AIDS Day to raise funds for the one-stop support centre, later renamed Teratak Kasih Tok Nan after Jamilah's late husband and former chief minister Datuk Patinggi Adenan Satem, whose leadership was instrumental in igniting the state government's AIDS response.

A total of 2,436 HIV infections had been reported in Sarawak by the end of last year since the first case in 1989, of which 542 resulted in AIDS-related deaths.

While yearly new HIV infections are still comparatively low, the trend showed an increase from 147 cases in 2011 to 258 last year.