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Remembering those who died of AIDS

MEENA L. RAMADAS

KUALA LUMPUR: A community memorial service held last Saturday crossed the race barrier when clerics from different religions came together to commemorate those afflicted with AIDS (Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome).

About 400 Muslims, Christians, Buddhists and Hindus gathered at the event to remember 13,000 people who died of AIDS in Malaysia.

The multi-faith gathering, organised by PT Foundation, also intended to show support and encouragement for those living with HIV (human immunodeficiency virus), their families and the communities most at risk of the virus.

In his speech, PT Foundation chairman Hisham Hussein said: "In Malaysia, religion plays a very strong role in creating a more compassionate and effective response to the HIV/AIDS epidemic.

"By working closely with religious bodies we at PT Foundation can foster better understanding and support for marginalised communities most affected by HIV while ensuring that their religious needs are also supported."

The event coincided with the International AIDS Memorial Day,



Women, Family and Community Development Ministry director-general Datuk Dr Noorul Ainur Mohd Nur (middle) officiates at the International AIDS Memorial Day 2011 on Saturday.

which aims to reduce discrimination against people affected by HIV/AIDS as well as mobilise communities, civil society and community leaders to advocate the advancement of public policies for the prevention and spread of HIV.

Hisham said dialogues between these groups are crucial as the Malaysian AIDS Council has established that sexual transmission has superseded drug-related transmissions to become the main driver of the HIV/AIDS epidemic in Malaysia.

"In 2010, sexual transmission accounted for 48.5% of all new cases while injecting drug users, the previous epidemic driver, accounted for 47.6%," he said.

"From June 1986 to December last year, more than 91,000 people have been infected with HIV in Malaysia," he added.

PT Foundation provides education on HIV/AIDS prevention, care and support programmes as well as sexuality awareness and empowerment programmes.