

**4th EAST ASIA MINISTERIAL FORUM ON FAMILIES (EAMFF)
“SAFE AND RESILIENT FAMILIES: PROTECTING AND
EMPOWERING AT-RISK AND HIGH RISK FAMILIES”,
KUALA LUMPUR, MALAYSIA
7 – 10 NOVEMBER 2010**

**COUNTRY STATEMENT
BY
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MALAYSIA**

**9 November 2010 (Tuesday)
Ministerial Forum (14.30 – 17.00 hours)**

Madam Chairperson,
Honourable Ministers,
Distinguished Delegates,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

On the outset, allow me, on behalf of the Government and the people of Malaysia to extend a warm welcome to the honourable ministers and fellow delegates to this Ministerial Forum. Indeed, Malaysia is honoured to be given the opportunity to organise this fourth forum of the East Asia Ministerial Forum on Families. As the host country, it is our sincere hope that this Forum will be a sweet, memorable and fruitful one.

Madam Chairperson / Distinguished Delegates,

A family is a living, evolving institution, affected by socio-economic factors as well as by the changes that shape the social environment in which it functions. More often, the changes and transformations have brought both gains and losses to family institutions. Hence, the challenge today is to reinforce positive changes and secure those in the new environment, and at the same time, to mitigate the negative consequences of changes, without dampening the momentum for positive evolution.

The roles and functions of the family become integral and central in the national development agenda at the international level, including in the Asia Pacific region. As we may recall, the family agenda took its prominence since the First East Asia ministerial Forum on Families (EAMFF) held in Hanoi in 2004. The Hanoi statement called for regional cooperation on family related matters while the Singapore Statement in 2006 called for building resilient families and subsequently the Bali Statement 2008 focused on strengthening collaboration for programs on family resilience with the aim of exploring the broader role of the family in society. Hence, to keep the momentum, Malaysia as the host for the Fourth EAMFF chose the theme *“Safe and Resilient Families: Protecting and Empowering At-Risk And High Risk Families”*.

The Government of Malaysia believes that families are the cornerstone of a healthy, dynamic and productive nation. However, not all families have the ability and tenacity to cope with current challenges and crisis facing them. Therefore, programmes that instill character building and family

values are imperative to promote greater resilience, integrity, solidarity and cohesiveness of the family institution. On the other hand, family support services and programmes are equally important to strengthen marriage and promoting equitable responsibilities and tasks among the family members.

Some of the risk factors for at-risk and high-risk families that are commonly highlighted are poverty, unmet needs for family planning, family health and low education achievement. These risk factors need to be addressed at state and community levels in order to create simultaneous action between the government initiatives and the community self-empowerment to reduce the risk factors.

Madam Chairperson / Distinguished Delegates,

In Malaysia, efforts to eradicate hard core poverty by the end of December 2010 and reduce the poverty rate from 3.6 per cent in 2007 to 2.8 per cent in 2010 are being intensified through the initiatives designed under the National Key Results Area or NKRA of Low Income Households. This NKRA was launched by the Government in April 2009 and the Ministry of Women, Family and Community Development was given the responsibility to lead the NKRA.

Allow me to highlight the success of the initiatives undertaken under the NKRA. With the implementation of the poverty eradication programmes under the NKRA such as providing skills training, micro credit facilities and job opportunities for the productive group, 24,132 households or 54 per

cent of 44,463 households registered under the eKasih (the national registration database for the poor) have been successfully lifted from the hard core poverty line. In addition, through the collaboration of *Amanah Ikhtiar Malaysia (AIM)* a micro-credit institution and the Department of Women's Development under the Ministry has successfully trained 1,455 women to become entrepreneurs who managed to earn a stable monthly income.

Madam Chairperson / Distinguished Delegates,

There are significant reductions in fertility and increase in contraceptive use in most of the countries in the Asian region. However, the unmet needs for family planning are high in some countries. A study shows that the disparity between the lower and higher economic quintile with regard to total fertility rate and use of contraceptive is significant. The larger family size among the poor makes it more difficult to reduce poverty. Those women in the lowest education category and lowest wealth quintile had the highest unmet need for both spacing and limiting. Therefore, the low income households that have been identified under the NKRA, has also been introduced to family planning services.

In regard to sexual and reproductive health, the Ministry and the National Population and Family Development Board provide the leadership in shaping the country's policies and programmes related to both issues. With its commitment to improving reproductive health, one pressing concern that is deemed important is the increasing number of new HIV / AIDS infection. Surveillance data on HIV and AIDS shows that up to

December 2009, a total of 87,710 HIV infections have been reported to the Ministry of Health since 1986. Last year, more than 3,000 new HIV cases were reported and 805 persons died of AIDS related illnesses. About 14,000 persons have died of AIDS since epidemic began in Malaysia. Twenty five percent of all new HIV cases are now women and girls. This phenomenon raises the concern on the vulnerability of women and children to HIV/AIDS transmission. To address the issue, the Ministry and the National Population and Family Development Board are focusing on educating the young as one way of halting the spread of HIV/AIDS. A special project named, “Improved Existing RH package under Kafe@Teen Programmes for Up-scaling with Involvement from Key Stakeholders” has been implemented to address the issues on reproductive health of young people.

The Government is also concerned with the disintegration of family institution, particularly as a result of separation and divorce. Since the instability of family institution will deteriorate family values and relationship, and ultimately destroy the psychosocial and moral fabric of societies, Malaysia is making a great stride to preserve family values for the interests and betterment of the future generations i.e. the children. We believe that **“Investing in children is investing in future human capital of the country”**. We uphold the principle that a resilient family is a protective factor for early childhood development while at-risk and high-risk family which experienced violence and depression, on the other hand, is the risk factor for child development.

In this regard, Malaysia is blessed with a demographic bonus whereby more than one third or 41 per cent of our population is below the age of 19 in 2009. To ensure this treasure is safeguarded and to ensure the optimal development of the children, measures have been undertaken to integrate the pre-school education in the mainstream national education system. As such, the Government aspires to increase the participatory rate from 67 per cent in 2009 to 87 per cent by 2012. In addition, the Government's commitment on early childhood education and development is reflected through the establishment of PERMATA programme which emphasises on the development of young children's intelligence, talent and performance.

Madam Chairperson / Distinguished Delegates,

Malaysia has achieved most of the goals set in the ICPD-PoA as well as the Millennium Development Goals (MGDs) particularly in the areas of poverty reduction, universal education, reduction in maternal and child mortality, gender equality, and environmental sustainability. However, the current challenge for Malaysia is to maintain the momentum in dealing decisively with the remainder of the MDG goals especially in reversing the spread of HIV/AIDS, and to identify the next set of priorities that will keep the nation moving ahead towards its ultimate objective of becoming a fully developed nation.

As a way forward, Malaysia will continue its efforts to enhance the safety and resiliency of families. To this end, an integrated family centres are being established at the state level and another 55 centres will be in

operation at the district level. These integrated family centres serve as “one stop centres” that conduct educational and training programmes on family development as well as providing services such as counseling and reproductive health clinical services. The aim of the centres is to facilitate and accelerate the realisation of individual, family and society which are resilient, ethical, healthy, knowledgeable and harmonious through effective, friendly and quality delivery services. To ensure the services provided are accessible to the community at the grass root level, 15 mobile family centres are made available at every state.

In order to describe, monitor and track the well-being of the family as a whole in coping with current changes and its impact on the Malaysian society and families, the Government is embarking on a project to build a set of indicators on family well-being to serve as baseline information. As there is no one indicator that can capture the full dimension of the domain on family, a group of Malaysian experts are in the midst of discussing and reaching on an agreement on the concept of family, family well-being as well as identifying the indicators that can be used to measure family well-being. The indicators identified will be tested out and a field study to measure family well-being will be carried out in 2011.

In order to maintain centrality of family aspect in social development, a National Family Policy has been finalised and expected to be approved by the Government in due course. The policy, among others, aims towards the realisation of a caring, strong and resilient family system as enshrined under Vision 2020. A plan of action, that accompanies the policy will provide guideline for all actors to maintain the centrality of family in social

development as well as to prioritise issues and actions pertaining to family within various social domains.

Madam Chairperson / Distinguished Delegates,

Turning to the expected outcome of this Forum, my delegation has every confidence that each and everyone of us has our own good practices, intervention programmes, policies and research on family development that will be of interest and worth sharing among us. At this juncture, we wish to express our view that the good practices on research and intervention programmes are best shared through the development and establishment of a family repository within each participating country.

We are also of the opinion that regional collaborative efforts in strengthening family resiliency are imperative and need to be intensified. Hence, the manifestation of the dynamics of family structures and functions such as the needs and issues of dual income families, divorce, blended families, dysfunctional of parenting roles (including the emerging trend of “Disneyland Dads”, “Deadbeat Dads” and “Disappearing Dads”) and work-life balance are worth considering for the future agenda of this Forum. Measures to face challenges to achieve work-life balance and work-life harmony, which are prevalent among working mothers, are very much desired. Addressing the issue of work-life balance will not only provide enabling environment for women to pursue their professional aspirations but most importantly they are able to fulfill their desire to become mothers and wives as well as to carry out their family responsibilities.

Madam Chairperson / Distinguished Delegates,

In conclusion, my delegation would like to emphasise that networking and sharing of expertise, researches, demographic and statistical data as well as good practices among the countries in the region is crucial in our efforts to rebuild, reengineer and empower the high-risk and at-risk families towards creating safe and resilient families. Therefore, my delegation sincerely hopes that the establishment of a family repository will be realised at the national level and the possibility of its establishment at the regional level is explored.

Thank you.