

Putting Congo record straight

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DATUK Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad yesterday denied that the peace-keeping force sent to the Congo in the sixties were underpaid or that the Government owed them \$34 million.

In a written reply to Mr Han Kok Kit, (DAP-Sungei Besi), the Prime Minister, who is also the Defence Minister, said allegations that the Government exploited the soldiers concerned and underpaid them were unfounded and irresponsible.

He said Malaysia was invited to join the UN peace-keeping force in the Congo when there was an outbreak of violence in the country.

The Government was proud to accept the invitation and viewed Malaysia's participation as a contribution towards world peace.

"We should be proud that our country which had only been independent for three years then had carried out its responsibilities with dedication," he said.

Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir said the question

of the allowance arose because of a misunderstanding on the amount that should be paid.

According to the PM, Malaysia's involvement in the UN contingent was on the understanding that Malaysia should pay a large portion of the expenses first and later claim it from the UN.

The amount, was agreed to by both the UN and the Malaysian Government.

Allegations that the United Nations had paid US\$10 a day per soldier to the Malaysian Government were unfounded.

He said if such payments were made, the Government would not hesitate to pay the soldiers concerned.

The Government, he added, had contributed \$265,108.42 to the United Nations for the Congo operation.

Based on the agreement, he said, the Government had reclaimed the wages and the allowances paid out to the soldiers.

"The UN repaid the Government \$5.6 million. This includes the cost of uniforms, equipment and special allowances," he said.