

Dr M: We're willing to sell weapons

Arms for the

as embargo is 'invalid'

Bosnians

By Saiful Azhar
Abdullah

JITRA, Sat. Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said today Malaysia is willing to sell arms to Bosnia Herzegovina in the light of the Organisation of Islamic Conference (OIC) declaration that the United Nations arms embargo on the country was invalid.

"We will sell (weapons).... At the same time, we will also supply more weapons to our peacekeepers because our troops are not well equipped unlike the Nato soldiers. The Nato soldiers are equipped complete with heavy weapons like tanks and fighter aircraft.

"Our soldiers are not allowed to have such weapons because they don't trust us," Dr Mahathir said when asked by reporters to comment on reports that the OIC had declared the UN arms embargo on the former Yugoslavia republic, imposed in 1992 by the UN Security Council, 'invalid'.

He was speaking after opening the first badminton court under the Badminton Foundation of Malaysia's Gelanggang Rakyat 1001 courts plan.

The OIC declaration was issued after a meeting of Foreign Ministers of eight member countries including Malaysia, Nato member Turkey and Iran who form an OIC 'contact group' on Bosnia.

The other attending the Geneva meeting were Morocco, Pakistan, Saudi Arabia, Senegal and Egypt.

The Prime Minister said the arms embargo on Bosnia was something that violated UN policies.

"Under the UN Charter, any country has the right to defend itself. But while Nato and the UN forbid the supply of arms to all parties, the Serbs are being supplied with weapons and oil to attack the Bosnians.

"They are allowing the slaughtering of Bosnians by the Serbs. I have never seen such injustice in this world. The OIC countries want the Bosnians who are facing the Serb atrocities to defend themselves."

Asked to comment on the Western allies' threat of military strikes in Bosnia if the Serbs continued their at-

tacks, Dr Mahathir said: "I will believe it when I see it. I consider them liars. Haris (Silajdzic, the Bosnian Prime Minister) has described them as "a bunch of jokers and appeasers".

The meeting in London ended with the 16 nations agreeing to respond "substantially and decisively" if the Serbs continued their offensive.

Foreign Minister Datuk Abdullah Ahmad Badawi, who represented Malaysia at the OIC meeting in Geneva, also expressed scepticism.

"I cannot expect much from the London meeting," he was quoted by Reuter as saying. "I won't believe them unless they really do something."

In Geneva, Bosnian Foreign Minister Mohammed Sacirbey, who attended the OIC meeting, said he had been gives pledges of weaponry. He told a news conference OIC military chiefs and defence ministers would be meeting to work out details of "help" to his country.

OIC member countries "call on members of the United Nations to provide urgent means for self-defence to the Government of Bosnia and Herzegovina" under UN Charter provisions, the declaration said.

And it added: "The OIC member countries consider *de jure* invalid the immoral and politically detrimental arms embargo imposed against the Republic of Bosnia and Herzegovina, a member of the UN."

The ministers said the OIC, linking nearly all the world's Muslim-controlled states, "would provide all necessary assistance and support" to joint efforts of Bosnia and Croatia in safeguarding their sovereignty and territorial integrity.

They would also give "all kinds of support" to strengthen the Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina, a structure under which the ex-Yugoslav republic's Muslims and mainly Catholic Croats have joined in uneasy alliance.

The declaration appeared to be a response to what the OIC states clearly feel is an unsatisfactory outcome of

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Sarajevo gets firm pledges of aid

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an international meeting in London of 16 states on the crisis caused by recent Serb offensives in eastern Bosnia.

The Governments of the five big powers -- the United States, Russia, France, Germany and Britain -- attending the meeting as well as top UN officials have argued strongly for keeping the embargo to prevent a collapse into all-out warfare.

Bosnia's Muslims and Zagreb say it favoured the Serbs -- both in Croatia where they hold large areas of territory and in Bosnia where the local Serbs inherited heavy weaponry from the old Yugoslav communist army.

Only this week, President Bill Clinton won agreement from the US Congress to postpone a vote on lifting the embargo for the Muslim-led Bosnian Government.

Sacirbey told a news conference there was no obligation for OIC Governments to ship weapons for his Government's beleaguered forces.

"At the same time, of course, the message is quite clear that they and we feel there is no impediment to weapons being provided to our country in self-defence," he declared.

Asked after the news conference if he had been given firm promises of weaponry, he replied: "Yes, I have." But he declined to provide details.

According to the declaration, Islamic states who already have troops with the Unprofor protection force in Bosnia would leave them there if Unprofor pulled out.