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Cook-Rights

COOK SEES NO REASON TO REVIEW HUMAN RIGHTS DECLARATION

KUALA LUMPUR, Aug 28 (Bernama) -- British Foreign Secretary Robin Cook said today he personally does not see a case for a revision of the fundamental principles of the United Nations Universal Declaration on Human Rights.

He said that in his discussion with Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad, he did not get the impression that Dr Mahathir or anybody in Malaysia sought to challenge the fundamental rights of the declaration which, according to him, was supported by people everywhere.

Cook said this in response to a question after delivering a speech on "Southeast Asia and Beyond: Britain's Partners for the 21st Century," at a function organised by the Institute of Diplomacy and Foreign Relations, here.

Dr Mahathir last month said Malaysia might submit a proposal to review the UN declaration which was already 50 years old. It caused a lively debate between Asean and China on one end, and the United States and the European Union on the other at the closing of the Asean Post-Ministerial Conference last month.

Cook said: "I personally do not see a case for revisiting the fundamental rights of the declaration."

On the currency crisis affecting Southeast Asia, he said the financial difficulties experienced by some countries in the region now should be seen for what they were.

"They are financial problems, they're not problems of the underlying economic structure," he said.

He also did not share the opinions expressed in some European newspapers, writing off the so-called Asian "economic tigers".

He said it was "extremely difficult" to see how one could handle the problem of international speculation with respect to exchange rates.

Speaking at a news conference later, Cook said he told Dr Mahathir that although Britain was now closer to Europe, it was not turning its back on the rest of the world.

On Bosnia and Herzegovina, Cook gave Dr Mahathir a personal assurance that he would continue to take every possible step to bring indicted war criminal Radovan Karadzic to justice.

Touching on Britain's preparations for next year's Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting in London, Cook said he and Dr Mahathir discussed the idea to use the gathering to develop a Commonwealth agreement on forestry management.

On Myanmar, he said Britain and Malaysia did have "honest and genuine" disagreements on how best to try and achieve change in Myanmar.

"Malaysia and other Asean countries adopt a position of constructive engagement whereas Europe and Britain have tended to take the position that until the government of Myanmar behaves in a more responsible fashion, both in terms of recognising democratic rights and taking action on the drugs trade, it is not possible for us to have a deep dialogue with them.

"Possibly a combination of the two with dialogue from its immediate neighbours and pressure from the rest of the world may actually succeed in the long run," he said.

In his speech, Cook underlined six areas for partnership in the context of relations between the two countries and the respective regions -- economy, security, human rights, the United Nations, environment and drugs.

He said human rights were a fundamental of foreign policy and there was room for debate on the implementation but not the principle.

He also said that there should be no doubt about Britain's commitment to making a significant contribution to the stability of the region.

On the environment, Cook said a national action plan on urgent issues like climate change, pollution and bio-diversity was necessary.

The foreign secretary and his entourage later left for Jakarta, the second leg of his tour of Southeast Asia. -- BERNAMA

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