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Mahathir-Mines

MAHATHIR SPEAKS OUT AGAINST ATTEMPTS TO REJECT LANDMINES BAN

KUALA LUMPUR, Sept 19 (Bernama) -- Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad today lamented the rejection by superpowers of attempts to outlaw land mines throughout the world.

The superpowers are still bent on inventing, developing, testing and selling weapons including better land mines, he said in a keynote address on "Malaysia in the Next Millennium: Challenges for the New Generation" at a Universiti Malaya Alumni gathering here.

"It would seem that some people feel that the world needs a cheap way of killing people," he said without identifying the superpowers.

Some 100 countries ended a two-week conference in Oslo on Thursday by formally adopting the final draft of the treaty to rid the world of a weapon that kills or maims 26,000 people a year. The treaty is due to be signed in Ottawa, Canada, in December.

The United States remained outside the treaty after President Bill Clinton said his first priority was protecting US troops -- which he charged the Oslo agreement has failed to do.

Dr Mahathir said millions of the mines were scattered throughout the world, killing and maiming innocent people long after the wars were over.

Experts have said that while the treaty will help stop the use of land mines, it would still take US\$33 billion (RM99 billion) and 11 centuries, at the current pace, to clear the 110 million active mines scattered in 64 countries around the world.

Dr Mahathir also expressed concern over the continued arms race despite the end of the Cold War.

"New and more sophisticated weapons are continuously being invented, tested and produced for military forces which vie against each other in the sophistication of their murderous capability.

"If there are no enemies to fight for the moment, future enemies were identified in order to justify vast sums of money being expended on research, development and production of arms," he said.

The Prime Minister said that to recoup the vast investment in arms production, small countries were persuaded to buy.

"These countries do not foresee any attacks from anyone but they were persuaded that they must keep up with their friendly neighbours who have been persuaded to equip their forces with certain weapons.

"And so they too buy even more costly weapons. And when they do this the media from the weapons trading nations condemn these countries for carrying an arms race," he said.

Saying these were happening today, Dr Mahathir said in this area the future would not change radically from the present.

"The next century, the next millenium will see all these things continue to happen. There may be variations but only in degree and sophistication," he said at the function organised by the Universiti Malaya Alumni Association as part of its lecture series. -- BERNAMA

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