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APEC-NEWS-DISGUSTING LEAD

AL GORE'S SPEECH MOST DISGUSTING IN MY LIFE, SAYS RAFIDAH

By: Azlina Aziz & Durga Varma

KUALA LUMPUR, Nov 16 (Bernama) -- The Minister of International Trade and Industry Datuk Seri Rafidah Aziz slammed US Vice-President Al Gore's speech at the Apec Business Summit dinner here tonight, saying that it was most disgusting for the Number Two man in America to condone riots and street demonstrations in Malaysia.

A clearly incensed Rafidah, who also attended the function at the Putra World Trade Centre here, told Bernama that "it was a most disgusting speech" and smacked of blatant interference in Malaysia's domestic affairs.

Addressing over 1,000 top-level government officials and captains of industry from the Pacific Rim, Gore irked the many Malaysian diners present when he referred to the people involved in the reformation movement as "brave" people.

"I am surprised a man like Al Gore would condone riots and demonstrations and calling these movements as people power and to even say those involved in the "reformasi" movement were brave people of Malaysia.

"That is a direct interference in the domestic affairs of the country," said Rafidah. "I hope that I would never hear such a disgusting speech again. My goodness, (it is) such a blinkered outlook."

Gore's remarks somewhat smacked of intrusion into the affairs of another country and crossed the borders of international diplomacy, similar to the condescending attitude displayed by US Secretary of State Madeleine Albright yesterday.

Albright, who also attended the Apec ministerial meetings here, spoke of US concerns as to whether former Deputy Prime Minister Datuk Seri Anwar Ibrahim, who is facing charges of corruption and sexual misconduct, would get a fair trial.

Rafidah said that Gore's remarks "perhaps reflects the narrow-mindedness of some people who do not understand what things are all about around here."

"I couldn't care less what the US wants to offer to anyone in the world. They can't buy us so cheap," she said.

Asked to comment on the views by a delegate that Gore's comment was not meant for Malaysia but for Apec countries, she said:

"Listen, when you say +Reformasi and brave people of Malaysia, who do you think he is kidding now?

"That is the most disgusting attitude and I pity the Americans. I have many American friends based here who have apologised profusely for their so called vice-president," Rafidah said.

As far as she was concerned, she said Apec would survive whether Gore was here or not.

She said it was a pity that the Apec Business Advisory Council's (Abac) fine work was spoilt by Gore tonight.

When asked by a foreign reporter whether she was angry, the minister reiterated that she was totally disgusted with what Gore had said.

Rafidah said this total letdown by the American official was uncalled for as so much enthusiasm had been shown by those involved in Abac.

But Rafidah maintained that despite Gore's speech, the Apec spirit would not flag.

"We will not allow this narrow-minded attitude in some people to let us down," she said.

The minister said there was so much to look forward to in Apec in which people really put their minds to achieve economic recovery.

On whether such a speech was expected, she said: "We always expect lectures from people...we are so used to it but never in such a disgusting manner and rude, and interfering in local affairs. I mean somebody should have told him about his manners."

When asked about what was Dr Mahathir's impression about the speech, Rafidah said: "Oh no, our prime minister perhaps is not as uncouth as I am but I am sure he feels bad." -- BERNAMA

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