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Ministers and politicians slam support for movement

KUALA LUMPUR, Tues. - Government leaders and politicians were the loudest voice in lashing out at US Vice-President Al Gore's comments in praise of the anti-government reformasi protest.

Education Minister Datuk Seri Najib Tun Razak said Gore showed total disregard for diplomacy and international relations.

"He had come here to attend a multilateral economic forum and took the opportunity to criticise the Government and express his support for a movement which contravenes the rule of law," he said.

Works Minister and MIC president Datuk Seri S. Samy Vellu wants Gore to retract his statement, saying it was a blatant interference in Malaysia's internal affairs.

Transport Minister and MCA president Datuk Seri Dr Ling Liong Sik said it was the height of arrogance. "This is not reflective of the Americans. I have been to the United States and in my opinion, Americans don't behave like this at all."

When told that Gore's statement had been endorsed by President Bill Clinton, Dr Ling said: "Both of them are the most shameful examples of America."

Umno Youth acting chief Datuk Hishammuddin Hussein said Gore's irresponsible action only confirmed what Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad had said all along about the United States and its leaders.

Describing them as "arrogant hypocrites who talked about democracy and the rule of law but in the same breath condoned riots", he said Umno Youth would be sending a memorandum to the US embassy soon.

The Council of Menteris Besar and Chief Ministers also condemned the actions of foreign leaders who tried to interfere in Malaysian affairs.

Its chairman, Tan Sri Wan Mokhtar Ahmad, said this reflected their lack of understanding in international diplomacy and the local culture. He was reading an emergency resolution passed by Menteris Besar and Chief Ministers.

"We also oppose deeply the statements by foreign leaders who question the integrity of the judicial system," he said.

Asked if the resolution was aimed at a specific foreign leader, Wan Mokhtar said it was aimed at all foreign leaders attending the Apec forum who had made statements in an attempt to interfere.

Dewan Rakyat Speaker Tun Mohamed Zahir Ismail said Gore's statement was out of place. "A speech made at dinner should not touch on sensitive issues. I am shocked at Gore's statement. It was rude of him."

Barisan Nasional Backbenchers Club information chief Abdul Rahman Sulaiman advised leaders attending the Apec forum to observe decorum and refrain from interfering in Malaysia's internal affairs.

"We strongly urge the United States to mind their own business," he said.

Entrepreneur and Second Finance Minister Datuk Mustapa Mohamed said Malaysia had never received such rude treatment before. However, he was confident that the country's economic ties with the United States would not be affected as the American business community knew the real situation.

Culture, Arts and Tourism Minister Datuk Sabbaruddin Chik said Gore's statement was unprecedented. "The statement can only be described as

arrogance."

MCA Youth chairman Datuk Chan Kong Choy said the party condemned this sort of arrogance and interference in domestic affairs.

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