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Trade unions hit out at 'extremely rude' statement

KUALA LUMPUR, Wed. - Trade unions today joined other organisations in hitting out at Al Gore, saying that the American Vice-President was out of place in making the statement.

They said Gore should have stuck to the economic agenda of the Apec meeting.

In his speech to the Apec Business Summit dinner on Monday night, Gore had voiced praise for the reformasi movement, describing the protestors as the "brave people of Malaysia".

He told over 1,000 business leaders at the dinner that democracies were faring better in the economic crisis than nations "suppressing freedom".

Cuepacs secretary-general N. Sivasubramaniam said: "As a guest, he not only embarrassed but insulted Malaysians. It is very difficult for Malaysians to stomach such crude remarks."

He said if Gore wanted to, he should have raised the issue at an appropriate forum.

National Union of Plantation Workers executive secretary A. Navamukundan said: "If he had any views on our internal matters, he should have the good sense to discuss it with the appropriate people at the appropriate forum.

"He should not just talk about anything and everything anywhere," he said.

Navamukundan said although Gore was entitled to his personal opinion, there were certain "codes of conduct" leaders have to follow when visiting other countries.

Federation of Employees' in Banks and Financial Institutions general secretary K. Sanmugam said only Malaysians could decide whether the country's laws were harsh.

"If the people (Malaysians) don't like the laws, only they can ask for a change.

"What Gore seems to be doing is to support a very small group to overthrow a government. Is this what the US calls justice and human rights?" he said, adding that the Americans should be held responsible if Gore's remarks fuelled riots and led to deaths.

"The US seems to be advocating human rights for the whole world except for themselves," he said.

The National Council of Government Supportive and Subordinate Groups general secretary Ahmad Shah said Gore's remarks were "extremely rude".

"Outsiders have no business to interfere in our affairs. We are an independent nation. It looks like the US loves to poke its nose in the affairs of other nations."

He said the 200,000 strong union supported Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad and were totally against reformasi.

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