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OIC-Ministers

OIC FOREIGN MINISTERS MEETING GETS UNDERWAY

By: Muin Abdul Majid

DOHA, Qatar, Nov 9 (Bernama) -- Foreign ministers of the Organisation of Islamic Conference (OIC) began their preparatory meeting here Thursday as the Islamic world more than ever now is confronted with various political and economic challenges that need urgent attention.

Meeting ahead of their leaders' summit, the ministers are expected to draw up the agenda and review draft resolutions prepared by senior officials of the 56-member body.

Speaking to Malaysian journalists prior to the start of the ministerial meeting, Foreign Minister Datuk Seri Syed Hamid Albar said the most important thing now was for Muslim countries to show that they were united if they wanted their positions to be counted by the world view.

"We must put aside whatever differences or views that we have which can lead us to be disunited," he said.

The three-day leader's summit beginning Sunday is the ninth in the 31-year history of the OIC which was established in Morocco in Sept 1969 with the aim of, among others, strengthening solidarity among Muslim countries and cooperation in the political, economic, social, cultural and scientific fields.

Syed Hamid said the world was watching how the Muslim world addressed the Palestine and Israel question in the quest for peace in the beleaguered region rocked by weeks of violence with the deaths of nearly 200 people, mostly Palestinian Arabs.

"But if the Muslims continue to be divided, surely we will continue to be sidelined on the international scene," he said.

On the other hand, Syed Hamid said issues facing the Islamic ummah were not necessarily Arab issues.

"The issue of the ummah is the Islamic community. That's why we must be able to gain the respect of others and our dignity," he said, adding that Malaysia had and would continue to play a significant role to uphold the dignity of the Muslim ummah.

The Doha summit is shadowed by reports that several major OIC countries, including Saudi Arabia, would boycott it due to "deteriorating situation in the Palestinian territories".

But it is a known fact that some Muslim countries are unhappy over the fact that Qatar maintains ties with Israel which include an Israeli trade office in Doha and a Qatari office in Tel Aviv.

On the boycott threat, Syed Hamid said he had not received anything official about it.

The ministerial meeting was opened by the Qatari Foreign Minister Sheikh Hamad bin Jassim bin Jabor al-Thani at the seafront Sheraton Doha hotel on a rather windy and drizzly day in Doha.

Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad had said that he would be attending the Doha summit.

This would be Dr Mahathir's fourth summit attendance. The last OIC leaders' gathering was held in Iran in 1997.

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