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Siti Hasmah: UN must realise sanctions against Iraq only causing untold horror

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KUALA LUMPUR, Tues. - Malaysians, particularly the younger generation, should be mindful of the hardships endured by countries like Iraq and should not take their own well-being for granted.

Datuk Seri Dr Siti Hasmah Mohd Ali, who led a 10-member delegation to Iraq from March 25 to 29, said today the horrors the delegation witnessed during their stay were "unimaginable".

"Personally, I was most affected by the plight of the children. I have 13 grandchildren and I would not want to see them in the same condition, ever," she said.

"The younger generation in Iraq have no hopes for the future, they are only trying to survive from one day to the next."

Dr Siti Hasmah, who is Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad's wife, was speaking to reporters after relating her experiences during the Jendela Pagi television programme on TV1.

Dr Siti Hasmah spoke of the poor conditions of schools, hospitals and other social support systems after 10 years of harsh economic sanctions imposed on Iraq following the Gulf War.

She said hospitals were suffering from a severe shortage of medicine, equipment and medical literature, leaving doctors unable to treat their patients and unaware of the latest medical developments.

"They don't even have enough blood bags. Incubators have to be shared among babies and doctors don't have the catgut they need to sew up incisions after operations.

"Schools are not being maintained, there are not enough books and many children are dropping out, which was very rare before sanctions were imposed. This is what saddens us."

Dr Siti Hasmah said schoolchildren had to resort to using chalk to write out their lessons on the classroom walls, a far cry from the time when Iraq's education system was so advanced that students were allowed free study up to university level.

"When we went to the Al-Ameriah shelter, we saw what happened after bombs had been dropped during the war. The hot water pipes had burst and flooded the shelter, and the children were boiled to death inside," she said.

She said that during her meeting with Iraqi President Saddam Hussein, he had not asked for help but expressed his thanks to the Malaysian Government and Dr Mahathir for raising the issue of the lifting the sanctions at the United Nations Security Council.

"Iraqis don't want financial aid, for they have the money, the human resources and the intellectuals needed to re-build the country. They only want us to spread the word that the sanctions must be revoked."

When asked if Malaysians should start a fund to send aid such as medical supplies to Iraq, Dr Siti Hasmah said the fund, although potentially useful, would only be able to help within limits. "If we want to do this, we would have to send things with the approval of the UN. But how much can we send to help 22 million Iraqis?"

Dr Siti Hasmah said she intended to raise the issue of revoking economic sanctions against Iraq at future international conferences.

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