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Imam-Slams

AL AQSA IMAM SLAMS US-ISRAELI PRESSURE ON ARAFAT

By: Shakir Husain

DUBAI, Dec 9 (Bernama) -- Jerusalem's Al Aqsa Mosque Imam Sheikh Ikrima Sabri has called on Islamic countries to unite against any US-Israeli moves to coerce Palestinian President Yasser Arafat to stop the intifada (uprising) against Israeli occupation.

He appealed to the Organisation of Islamic Conference (OIC), which is meeting in Doha on Monday to discuss the Palestinian issue, to reject the American and Israeli pressure on Arafat.

Sabri said Arab and Islamic countries must not confine themselves to "mere denunciations of Israeli acts of aggression."

"Muslim leaders have a responsibility to follow up through action on the resolutions they pass. They must show unity and speak with one voice," Sabri, who is on a visit to the United Arab of Emirates, told Bernama in an interview on Saturday.

"There is nothing new in the pro-Israeli bias of the United States. America has always acted (on the question of Palestine) under the influence of its Jewish lobby," Sabri said.

He criticised the US and Britain for supporting extremist Israeli leader Ariel Sharon's policy of targeting Palestinian National Authority installations.

The Al Aqsa imam conveyed a message of gratitude for Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad when he called on Malaysian Ambassador Datuk Syed Hussein Al Habshee in Abu Dhabi.

Sabri hailed Dr Mahathir's strong support for the Palestinian cause and appealed to the Malaysian people to remain steadfast in their backing of the intifada.

Sabri, who last visited Malaysia in 1992, expressed his desire to visit Malaysia again to update himself with Islamic matters in the country.

He said Muslims from all over the world would like to pray at the Al Aqsa Mosque, the third holiest site in Islam, but they could not do so because of Arab East Jerusalem's occupation by Israel.

"The Israeli occupation regime enforces a brutal siege of areas surrounding the mosque. Palestinians coming to pray are humiliated and assaulted.

"About half a million people can pray at the mosque, but the Israeli blockade of Palestinian territories has brought the number of people coming to the mosque down to 100,000," Sabri said.

He defended the Islamic Resistance Movement (Hamas) against US charges of "terrorism," saying the organisation was fighting for the freedom and rights of the Palestinian people.

"The accusations are totally baseless. Hamas is pursuing a legitimate struggle. Resisting occupation is not terrorism," he added.

-- BERNAMA

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