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UN-Iraq

SANCTIONS AGAINST IRAQ VIOLATE INTERNATIONAL LAW, SAYS FORMER UN ENVOY

KUALA LUMPUR, Jan 22 (Bernama) -- Former United Nations (UN) Humanitarian Coordinator to Iraq, Hans Van Sponech today labelled the ten-year economic sanctions imposed by the world body on the west Asian country as "violations of international law."

He said the reasons behind the UN Security Council's decision on the controversial sanctions against Iraq after the Gulf War in 1990 had since lapsed and could not stand on their own anymore.

"The sanctions were imposed after the UN perceived that Iraq is posing danger and threat on its neighbouring countries. But now, I asked 'what threat' (does Iraq posed for the continuation of the sanctions)," he said during a public forum on Promoting a Culture of Peace: The Effect of UN Imposed Sanctions, here.

Van Sponech, who held the UN post from 1998 to 2000 before resigning to protest against the crippling sanctions, said it was an immoral and unethical act against the innocent people of Iraq.

The public forum, organised by the Pan Pacific and South East Asia Women's Association of Malaysia was opened by its patron, Datin Seri Dr Siti Hasmah Mohamed Ali who is the wife of Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad.

Also present was the UN's special envoy to Myanmar, Tan Sri Razali Ismail.

Van Sponech said the once-feared Iraqi military had been reduced to a third-rate force after countless bombings by the United States-led multinational coalition during the Gulf War and the period after that.

"There is nothing to fear about the Iraqi military anymore," he said, adding that the conclusion that Iraq was no more a threat was agreed by the US's former state secretary Madeleine Albright.

But the US and its ally Britain would proceed to demonize Saddam Hussein's government as a means to continue the sanctions, he said.

During the forum, Van Sponech also provided the audience with statistics which came as a result of the UN sanctions calling it a "frightening information" on the current state of humanitarian condition in Iraq.

He said as a result of the sanctions, 21 percent of Iraqi children suffered from malnutrition while child mortality increased by 196 percent apart from a higher incidence of leukemia.

Van Sponech also said, the countries which wanted the continuation of the sanctions had engaged in "organised lies" to present a different picture of Iraq to the world community.

"They (the countries) are portraying a picture that doesn't exist," he said, adding that he did not expect the Iraqis to get justice especially "in a courtyard full of chicken."

The former head of UN's humanitarian efforts in Iraq also called for the abolishment of the UN-administered "Oil-for-Food" programme aimed at enabling the country to sell its oil to buy basic needs.

The measure he said, was devised earlier only as a temporary solution but now the UN was trying to make it permanent by refining and institutionalising the programme.

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