

PM: UN powerless against Israel

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KUALA LUMPUR: Malaysia is saddened by the decision of the United Nations to abort its planned fact-finding mission to the refugee camps in Jenin on Wednesday, said Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad.

He said the decision announced by UN Secretary-General Kofi Annan, underscored the ineffectiveness of the world body in tackling the Palestine issue.

"If one country like Israel can defy the whole world, what is the use of UN?" he told reporters after opening a seminar on Developing an ICT Culture organised by Umno Youth at the Putra World Trade Centre yesterday.

Annan had announced that he would disband the 20-member team, waiting in Geneva, because of mounting Israeli conditions for the mission that Israeli Prime Minister Ariel Sharon believed was biased against the Jewish state.

Dr Mahathir said even if there were legal provisions in

the UN charges that allowed for actions to be taken against Israel for defying the wishes of the world community, they were in effect useless as there was no one to enforce them.

He said the effectiveness of the enforcement of any of the UN charters depended on the strength of the countries that support such action.

"When the most powerful country in the world is against taking any action against Israel, indirectly Israel has the power of that country in its hands," he added.

Dr Mahathir also hit out at Muslim countries for not being united in tackling the issue, saying: "As long as the Islamic countries are fragmented, they do not have the combined strength to counter the arrogance shown by Israel. Even when we called for a meeting to discuss this issue, not all Islamic countries will attend.

"When we made a decision or come out with any effective method to tackle this issue,

there are bound to be some Islamic countries that will work against it to ensure that the action will fail," he added.

Dr Mahathir said Malaysia felt that the first step to solve the problem was to have a UN presence in Palestine and for Israel to stop its violence against innocent Palestinian civilians.

The next step, he said, was for Israel to leave all the occupied areas and return them to the Palestinians.

Asked whether he would discuss Malaysia's proposal with US President George W. Bush during their scheduled meeting middle of this month in New York, Dr Mahathir said he could only try.

"I don't know how much time I will be allocated. Normally, when we meet powerful people, our time will be limited. I am not sure how much time I will have, maybe an hour or maybe only 45 minutes," he added.

Meanwhile, the International Movement for a Just

World said the latest development proved that Israel was above the law and that the international community had no right to scrutinise its actions.

Its president Dr Chandra Muzaffar said that by placing insurmountable obstacles in the path of the now aborted UN investigation, Israel had created an impression that it had a lot to hide.

"It has lent credence to the view that what took place in that refugee camp was nothing short of a dastardly slaughter in which perhaps a few hundred people died," he said in a statement.

He urged all world civil society groups to set up an international panel made up of individuals well-versed in the issue to ascertain the entire truth about Jenin and to make it known to the world.

Chandra also proposed the world's leading authority in international law, Prof Emeritus Richard Flak to head the inquiry.