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Mahathir-Peace

ADDRESS MUSLIM PROBLEMS, NEGOTIATE AND WORK FOR PEACE, SAYS MAHATHIR

By: Harlina Samson

TOKYO, Dec 13 (Bernama) -- Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said today that the issues of expropriation of Muslim lands and oppression of Muslims all over the world must be addressed to enable the interdependent world foster peace.

He said that the interdependent world must turn to the negotiating table, sincerely try to understand the problems and work determinedly for peace.

There could be no peace and dialogue unless the true grievances of the Muslims were acknowledged and attended to, he said.

He said that there was obvious confusion between religious confrontations and territorial expropriation, and even though some elements of religion were involved, today's serious confrontation between non-Muslims and Muslims was nothing more than a wish for retaliation and revenge.

"If these two factors are acknowledged and the negotiation is fairly conducted with the objective of removing the causes, God willing, peace will ensue," he said in his keynote address at a symposium entitled "Islam: Fostering Peace and Dialogue in an Interdependent World," at the United Nations University here.

The symposium was organised by the United Nations University, ambassadors of Organisation of Islamic Conference (OIC) member countries and the Diet (Japanese Parliament) Committee of Islam.

Reminding the packed audience of the recent terror attack in Mombasa, Kenya, he said that the vow by the Israelis that they would hunt down the terrorists illustrated the attitude of retaliation and revenge very well.

"But it is most unlikely that the Israelis are going to be safe after the killers are eliminated. The anger thus and those who support their cause will ensure new recruits will stage new attacks," he said.

Thus, he said, there would be no progress in the fight against the terrorists and instead there would be escalation.

"So, how do we foster peace and dialogue in our interdependent world in a world of anger and rage by everyone? The simple answer is that we will not be able to foster peace and dialogue as long as both sides are set on seeking revenge," he said.

Dr Mahathir also reiterated that the interdependent world could only foster peace and dialogue if they return to sanity and focus on the causes of terrorism instead.

He believed that the root of Muslim terrorism was the fact they were weak and incapable of negotiating on equal terms with their detractors, and imposing the will of the powerful on the Muslims was not dialogue for peace.

"We should all acknowledge that both the Muslim and non-Muslim detractors are at fault," he said.

Dr Mahathir said that the fact that Muslims have been oppressed and abused since the disintegration of the Ottoman Empire could not be denied, and it has resulted in anger, bitterness and frustration among the Muslims and the net result was terror attacks.

He said that the Muslim governments may be forced to agree, but not their people, some of whom would continue to fight in whatever way they can.

The Prime Minister said that the Muslim governments were not in

complete control of the extremist elements in their countries, but without a cause, the anger would diminish and there would be less recruits for terrorism.

Eventually, he said, terrorism would cease for lack of support.

Touching at length on the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, Dr Mahathir said that what had happened in West Asia was not a religious war, as prior to the establishment of Israel, the Arabs and the Jews lived in peace with each other in Arab Palestine.

"The Palestinians are fighting today because of the creation of Israel, forcibly expropriating Arab land and property and expelling the Palestinians from their country and their homes," he said, adding that for 50 years now, a territorial dispute has been misrepresented as religious dispute.

The Prime Minister said that the Muslims support the Palestinian struggle because there was a common bond in their religion, and besides, nobody else would help them.

Touching on Christianity which had undergone many changes and division too, he said that the Jews had invented Zionism, which are more creed, more national than religious.

"United, they have been able to survive pogroms and inquisitions, finally to emerge as a powerful force when democracy gained for them equal status and their combined votes decide who governs the powerful countries where they reside," he said.

Recalling European history when the Jews were denied any land to call their own, Dr Mahathir said they made a final choice to have a homeland for the Jews in Palestine, but not in Europe.

He said that it was a mistake as the Arabs could not see any reason why they should be made to pay debts owed by the Europeans.

Since then, he said, the Palestinian territorial issue had plagued the world, caused misunderstanding and bitter confrontation between Arabs, Europeans and Jews which most people attribute to difference of religions.

Dr Mahathir said that Palestine was not the only cause celebre for the Muslims because the antagonism towards the Muslims and their countries continues, and that the Christian crusade against Islam has never really ceased.

In many cases, he said, in Iran, Iraq, Chechnya, Sudan, Libya and South Asia, Muslims were being oppressed.

"Thus, while Iraq, Iran and North Korea are labelled as the Axis of Evil, action is concentrated only on Iraq and Iran, Muslim countries," he said.

The Prime Minister said that Muslims condemn all acts of terror as much as non-Muslims and most of them show their willingness to cooperate in the fight against terrorism, but their contribution does not free them from suspicion and threats of attack by the people with whom they collaborate.

As the superpower treat the war against terrorists and terrorism like a conventional war, he said that a loss of cooperation in the fight against terror could happen and terror attacks would be part of their lives.

"The world is set for a very long and painful war which will keep everyone in a state of fear, strangle world economy and render most of the advances in science and technology useless," he said.

Stressing that Islam means peace, Dr Mahathir said that the interdependent world should all depend on each other instead of just one party or one power.

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