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DIALOGUE KEY TO A BALANCED WORLD, SAYS ASEF CHIEF

SINGAPORE, Nov 18 (Bernama) -- Dialogue between regions, cultures and societies is a vital instrument in achieving a better and balanced world, says Asia-Europe Foundation (Asef) executive director Delfin Colome.

Asef's capacity in strengthening dialogue between regions was now a model to follow in efforts to promote better world understanding, he told Bernama after receiving a US\$100,000 cheque from Malaysian High Commissioner to Singapore, Datuk Hamidon Ali at Asef's headquarters here today.

The US\$100,000 is Malaysia's second financial contribution to Asef, which was set up in 1997 to promote understanding between the peoples of Asia and Europe through intellectual, cultural and people-to-people exchanges.

Malaysia contributed US\$377,000 in the first five-year phase (1997-2002). The second will go towards Asef's budget for another five years from 2002.

Asef is funded by voluntary contributions from the governments of Asem (Asia-Europe Meeting) countries and the European Commission.

Todate, 26 countries are members of Asef. Most of the projects are also supported financially by partner institutions and private enterprises.

For example, the Asia-Europe meeting in Copenhagen in September this year brought world leaders together, in the wake of rising tension in West Asia, said Colome.

The "meeting of minds" between Malaysian Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad and French President Jacques Chirac, for example, was testimony to the importance of dialogue between world leaders in tackling the issues at hand, given the impending war between US and Iraq.

"Not all countries in Europe support (US President George W.) Bush's decision to attack Iraq," he said.

Using Asef as a model, Colome said that the European Union was now planning to create a Euro-Mediterranean Foundation, bringing together the developed nations of Europe and the developing countries in the Mediterranean, including Islamic nations.

Meanwhile, Hamidon said that Asef's role was to build bridges between Asia and Europe in the long term, noting that its programmes were aimed at promoting better understanding among different cultures and societies of different regions.

The programmes undertaken by Asef, such as the collaboration with universities, were important in breaking the barriers and promote better understanding among the youths from both regions, said Hamidon.

Colome said that since its inception in 1997, Asef had implemented 200 projects in the core areas of intellectual, cultural and people-to-people exchanges, resulting in the creation of 8,000 young ambassadors in both Asia and Europe.

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