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Root causes of terrorism must be removed first

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AT the recent Asean Leaders Summit in Phnom Penh, Asean leaders called on the international community to avoid indiscriminately advising their citizens to refrain from visiting or dealing with Asean countries in the absence of established evidence to substantiate rumours of possible terrorist attacks, as such measures could only help achieve the objectives of the terrorists.

In a strongly worded declaration agreed upon by all the Asean leaders, it deplored the tendency by some quarters to identify terrorism with particular regions or ethnic groups.

It also called on the international community to refrain from issuing travel advisories.

The declaration was pushed by Malaysia at the Senior Officials Meeting prior to the summit in view of the latest developments in the region following the Bali bomb blast and terrorist attacks in Zamboanga and Quezon.

There are strong and cogent reasons for Asean leaders to issue the joint declaration for it is most unjustified on the part of the international community to issue travel advisories to their citizens against visiting Asean countries based on rumours of possible terrorist attacks.

Calls by certain countries to their citizens not to visit the Asean region because of possible terrorist attacks did have some effect.

It does have some effect in Malaysia too, I believe, but the Malaysian authorities are certainly going all out to assure foreign tourists that Malaysia is a safe country to visit despite the unsubstantiated reports in some foreign media and ill-advised calls by some developed countries against visiting Asean countries.

In this connection, it is very reassuring to note a report in the NST on Nov 7 with the heading: "Malaysia safe to visit, say Australian, European tourists".

It is grossly unfair for certain developed countries to single out some countries as "not safe" for their citizens and classify the Southeast Asian region as "high risk".

What is the yardstick used by these developed countries to determine which country is safe and which unsafe? Terrorists do not recognise borders.

As Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad pointed out recently, even the best-protected country could not guarantee that there would be no terror attack. We are dealing with invisible enemies.

Even developed countries are also unsafe when their people are exposed to danger, wherever they may be. The crux of the issue is how to deal with the issue of terrorism and not to identify which country is unsafe in the absence of established evidence.

I concur with the view that the most effective way to deal with terrorism is to identify the causes and to address these causes.

Terrorism cannot be eliminated unless the root causes are removed and the breeding grounds of terrorism addressed.

Remedial measures must be guided by two cardinal principles, namely the elimination of injustices and the promotion of human welfare.

Justice requires that fundamental injustices like foreign occupation and brutal oppression be removed whether it is Palestine or elsewhere.

Another fundamental injustice is the denial of avenues to register and

voice grievances and seek redress. The promotion of human welfare beginning with the eradication of poverty must be another guiding principle of measures to address the root cause of terrorism.