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Identifying root causes of terrorism: Our efforts paying off

MALAYSIA'S tireless efforts to include identifying the root causes of terrorism in global efforts to combat the menace are beginning to pay off with Asian and European leaders issuing a declaration along similar lines and rejecting any attempt to link terrorism with religion.

The leaders, meeting in Copenhagen for the fourth Asia-Europe Meeting (Asem), declared that the fight against terrorism required a comprehensive approach by the international community and "should duly take into account the root causes of terrorism".

However, "the root causes should not be acknowledged as justifications for terrorist or criminal activities", they said in the "Asem Copenhagen Declaration on Cooperation against International Terrorism" issued yesterday.

"We also reject any attempt to associate terrorism with any religion, race or nationality, and also reject any notion that we can be divided along these lines," the Asian and European leaders said in the four-page declaration.

"We pledge to work together to combat this threat to global peace and security, sustainable economic development and political stability and emphasise that the fight against terrorism must be based on the principles of the UN Charter and basic norms of international law."

Asem is an informal process of dialogue and co-operation between Asia and Europe comprising 10 Asian countries and 15 member states of the European Union and the European Commission.

The leaders also said that fighting the problem required a comprehensive approach by the international community comprising political, economic, diplomatic and legal means in accordance with domestic laws.

The declaration was issued after a political dialogue on the international situation in the aftermath of Sept 11 attacks on the United States and new security issues.

Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad was among the 21 heads of state and government who participated in the closed dialogue.

Since Sept 11, global efforts to fight terrorism have been purely concentrated on military means which have been singularly espoused by the United States, but some countries such as Malaysia have been voicing their determination to include reasons why people resort to terrorist activities in combating terrorism.

The leaders also adopted an Asem Copenhagen Co-operation Programme on Fighting International Terrorism, which includes the organisation of an anti-terrorism seminar to be held in China in 2003 before the fifth Asem Foreign Ministers' meeting in Indonesia to look at ways to strengthen the United Nations' leading role and Asem's co-operation on anti-terrorism.

The leaders, who converged on the Bella Centre amid tight security, also condemned all acts of terrorism, saying that they were criminal and unjustifiable, irrespective of their motivation, forms and manifestations.

They also concurred that international co-operation in anti-terrorism activities, including regional co-operation such as that of the European Union and Asean, as well as bilateral co-operation, had greatly progressed and that it was "essential that the international community steadily continues efforts in this regard".