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US-Palestine
US COMMITTED TO CREATION OF PALESTINIAN STATE, SAYS POWELL

By: Salmy Hashim

WASHINGTON, July 26 (Bernama) -- The United States is committed to work "as quickly as we can" towards the creation of a viable Palestinian state that will live side-by-side with Israel in peace, Secretary of State Colin Powell said here Thursday.

"And as we move forward, Israel has to recognise that the occupation has to end. (We have to) get into some of the root causes, the end of (Jewish) settlement has to take place, the Palestinian community has to be opened up.

"The settlement activity has to stop. In due course, we have to find a way to deal with the settlement problem in order for there to be coherence to the Palestinian state," Powell said.

"Yes, it is a major issue that would have to be dealt with -- both the construction of settlement as well as what happens to settlements that are there now -- as a state is created," he said in a roundtable interview with five Asian journalists, including Bernama, at the State Department before he departs for Asia on Saturday.

Powell's Asian trip from July 27 to Aug 3 includes Malaysia, India, Pakistan and Brunei where the Asean Regional Forum will be held.

He will stop over in Singapore, Indonesia and Manila. His discussions in Southeast Asia will likely focus on terrorism and regional security.

The former general said that the deployment of United Nations peacekeepers to reduce tension in hot spots like Gaza and the West Bank would not work at this time.

However, he said, the US, working with other members of the Quartet that includes the European Union, Russia, and the United Nations, was committed to moving the peace process forward "and we will not be deterred by acts of violence and acts of terrorism."

"I know that (Prime Minister) Dr Mahathir believes that terrorism cannot be seen as an acceptable way of trying to achieve a political goal. And those terrorists who have taken these kinds of acts are not only killing innocent civilians -- they're really destroying the dreams of Palestinian people to have a state.

"President (George W.) Bush has put me on a solid framework on how to proceed. It begins with the end of terror activities, it begins with the end of violence directed against innocent civilians. It begins with the transformation of the Palestinian community, more responsible actions on the part of its leaders, and it also involves obligations that Israel will have to meet...Israel has to act in a way that recognizes the consequences of its actions," he said.

Powell welcomed Japan's readiness to help and said that the country could play an important role in the rebuilding of a Palestinian state by assisting with recovery efforts, construction, humanitarian aid, and sharing its experiences in the creation of a modern, functioning, democratic state.

Japan is a member of a task force that includes Norway, the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank.

"Japan is part of the UN, but my Japanese colleagues made it clear that they want to play a more active role because they believe they have something to bring to the table, not only money but capacity and ideas," he added.

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