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KL conference to sow seeds for peace

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PETALING JAYA: When Tan Sri Lim Kok Wing was in South Africa a decade ago, overseeing the country's first post-apartheid elections, he witnessed humanity at its worst.

"People were killing each other, not just with guns but also with spears," he said.

In Sarajevo later to raise funds, he felt the sufferings of the people in the war-torn country

These experiences prompted Lim to set up the Malaysian World Peace Foundation.

The non-profit organisation, of which Lim is chairman, aims to promote peace through various networks, presentation of awards and conferences, such as the Kuala Lumpur World Peace Conference this weekend.

To be opened by Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad on Saturday, the inaugural conference will feature forums conducted by advocates of peace, as well as political, academic and social personalities.

Over 1,000 delegates are expected to attend.

Among them are South Africa Deputy President Jacob G. Zuma, Singapore's Institute of Defence and Strategic Studies (terrorism research head) Dr Rohan Gunaratna and former Swiss president Adolf Ogi.

Other speakers include former Foreign Minister Tengku Ahmad Rithauddeen and Umno Youth chief Datuk Hishammuddin Hussein.

Deputy Prime Minister Datuk Seri Abdullah Ahmad Badawi will close the conference on Sunday

The talks will be moderated by,

among others, UN Special Envoy to Myanmar Tan Sri Razali Ismail and Defence Minister Datuk Seri Najib Razak. Topics of discussion include disarmament, terrorism and inter-faith.

Lim stressed that peace is not just about non-violence but encompasses issues like wealth distribution and eradication of hunger

For example, in 2001, the US spent US\$900 billion (RM3.420 billion) on weapons. In contrast, the UN, only spent US\$10 billion (RM38 billion) on relief efforts.

"The wealth of the world's three richest men is more than that of the 50 poorest countries," Lim said.

The conference will also put Malaysia among the voices the international community can bank on to speak on peace and against injustice.

The conference and foundation came to prominence last month when French Prime Minister Jacques Chirac was awarded the first Kuala Lumpur World Peace Award on July 22, during his visit to Malaysia. Chirac was selected primarily for his outspokenness and relentless opposition to the invasion of Iraq.

The foundation hones its efforts will culminate in the setting up of the Kuala Lumpur World Peace Centre which will host exhibits and programmes that promote global peace.