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Mahathir-OIC

M'SIA URGES MUSLIM COUNTRIES TO CLOSE RANKS TO PREVENT WAR AGAINST IRAQ

By: Ahmad Zukiman Zain

DOHA, March 5 (Bernama) -- Malaysia has stepped up the call to prevent a possible war against Iraq by appealing to fellow Muslim countries to close ranks and work together "at this crucial and challenging time".

Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said that for too long, the Muslim countries had been marginalised while important decisions affecting the Muslim ummah were decided and imposed upon them from the outside.

"The OIC's voice has not been shown due consideration because we have failed to speak with one voice," he told the Organisation of Islamic Conference (OIC) extraordinary meeting here to discuss the Iraqi crisis and the deteriorating situation in Palestine.

The one-day meeting was opened by the Emir of Qatar, Shaikh Hamad bin Khalifa Al-Thani, who heads the 57-member OIC.

This is the third high-level meeting in the region within a week to try to find a way to avert a United States-led war after an Arab League summit in the Egyptian Red Sea resort of Sharm el-Sheikh and the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) meeting here on Monday.

Speaking as the first leader after the opening remark by Shaikh Hamad and listening to a recorded speech by Palestinian President Yasser Arafat, Dr Mahathir noted that as they meet today, worldwide opposition against war in Iraq continues to be strongly demonstrated.

"Unfortunately, short of a miracle happening, an attack on Iraq will soon take place with or without the sanction of the United Nations," he said.

He said that as OIC leaders, they had to help make the miracle happen by joining forces with the rest of the world against war, in particular the war against Iraq.

Malaysia is set to take over from Qatar the leadership of the OIC when it hosts the organisation's summit in October.

Dr Mahathir, who is the Non-Aligned Movement (NAM) chairman, has a week ago stated at its summit in Kuala Lumpur that war must be banned as the world must be freed from the shackles of the age-old belief that killing people can solve problems of relations between nations.

In Doha here, he highlighted the clear message adopted by the 116-member NAM and the subsequent informal consultation among OIC leaders in Kuala Lumpur to oppose war against Iraq and calling for a speedy solution to the Palestinian problem.

"The situations in Iraq and Palestine are linked," he said pointing to the fact that the Middle East could not be stabilised merely by attending to the Iraqi problem alone.

"The war against Iraq is likely to worsen the Middle Eastern situation and the terrorist problems of the world," he said.

Dr Mahathir stressed that rendering Iraq totally defenceless and ensuring easy victory would not make the war any more acceptable to Muslims.

"Of course permitting Israel to carry out terror attacks and remain in possession of nuclear weapons and threatening to use them will only anger Muslims more and increase recruits for terror attacks," he said.

It was for this reason that Malaysia was convinced that the causes of the situation in the Middle East must be carefully analysed so as to formulate a better strategy for a more acceptable result, he said.

Saying Malaysia remained committed to the fundamental principle of non-use of force in solving conflicts between nations, it also opposed to the possession or use of weapons of mass destruction by everyone, without exception.

"And Malaysia is certainly against unilateral action," he said.

In keeping with this stand, he said Malaysia fully supports the initiatives taken by several members of the United Nations Security Council (UNSC) to extend the time-frame of the United Nations Monitoring, Verification and Inspection Commission (UNMOVIC) and International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) to complete their inspection in Iraq.

He said that Malaysia was encouraged by Iraq's decision to fully cooperate with UNMOVIC and IAEA as well as to comply with the relevant UNSC resolutions.

Baghdad has shown its cooperation when it scrapped its Al Samoud 2 missiles but remains conscious of a US-led invasion as Washington orders more troops to the Persian Gulf despite signs of growing opposition from other big powers and allies.

The US dispatched fresh troops to join the more than 250,000-strong US and British force as a divided 15-member UNSC considers whether to approve a new draft resolution authorizing war.

"If UNMOVIC finds no weapons of mass destruction, it must be assumed that there is none. The UNSC must then refuse to sanction war against Iraq," he said.

Dr Mahathir said that sanction on Iraq must also be lifted if the arms inspectors found no weapons of mass destruction.

"The people of Iraq have already suffered greatly because of the sanction," said Dr Mahathir who received Iraqi Vice-President Izzat Ibrahim in an unscheduled meeting soon after his arrival here yesterday.

Turning to the deteriorating situation in Palestine, the prime minister reiterated Malaysia's stand on the urgent need for a UN Protection Force.

He said that Israel was using the excuse of the fight against terrorism after Sept 11, 2001 to conduct terror attacks against the Palestinians.

"The bulldozing of Palestinian houses in order to kill the families of suspected terrorists is totally immoral," he said.

He also noted that more than 2,800 Palestinians including children had been killed and more than 43,000 were wounded since the beginning of the intifada in September 2000.

"The Jews who suffered so much during the Holocaust should know the suffering that they are causing," he said.

Dr Mahathir said that world Jewry must persuade Israelis to stop the killing of Palestinians as "only then can we expect Palestinians not to retaliate in kind".

He said that Malaysia welcomed the efforts of the "Quartet Mediators" in drawing up a Road Map for Israeli withdrawal from the West Bank and the establishment of an independent Palestinian State by the year 2005.

"It is frightening that Israel should be allowed to ignore world opinion while others may not," he said.

Dr Mahathir said that in the search for peace, Muslim countries had already made a great concession by agreeing to recognize Israel in return for the regime's acceptance of an independent Palestinian state.

"Since it was the Western countries which created Israel, they must now exert pressure on Israel to accept the Road Map and to stop the senseless killings of innocent Palestinians," he said.

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