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Mahathir-Disputes

DR MAHATHIR CALLS FOR PEACEFUL SETTLEMENT OF DISPUTES

KUALA LUMPUR, Aug 9 (Bernama) -- Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad today called on the world to make some effort to return to sanity, and to the peaceful settlement of disputes between nations and religions.

Dr Mahathir said that in recent times, the world had witnessed some of the worst international violence in the history of mankind such as the Sept 11 2001 attacks resulting in the deaths of a few thousand innocent people and the retaliation which was no less brutal, killing unnumberable innocent people, unconnected with Sept 11.

The Prime Minister said that war as an instrument of national policy still existed and unless the powerful reject war as an instrument of national policy, peace would be impossible.

"But is peace for the world, for the countries and the peoples of the world possible? Of course it is. Peace has to be fought for, not on the battlefields but in the conference rooms. There is no such thing as a war to end all wars, a war for permanent peace," he said in his keynote address when opening the inaugural World Peace Conference here.

Dr Mahathir said that the whole world must fully believe in peace before the world could stop wasting money on defence.

"It would be a sad commentary on our 21st century civilisation if we accept that peace is impossible, that the world must always live in fear of war, must always arm to the teeth at tremendous cost and still be in fear," he said.

According to the Prime Minister, the powerful were not interested in peace and only the weak were interested and as such the weak must together initiate and promote peace.

However, he said that fortunately there were many from the powerful countries who believe in peace and everyone should welcome their cooperation to promote peace.

The Prime Minister also said that some people would question why Malaysia should take this initiative to promote world peace.

"Malaysia had known wars, conventional and guerilla. But Malaysia had striven to settle conflicts within it and between it and other countries in a peaceful way, through negotiations rather than confrontations and wars. And Malaysia has largely succeeded," he said.

As such, Dr Mahathir suggested that the world should have a look into how Malaysia achieved these things and the people live in harmony and peaceful coexistence despite being a multiracial and multireligious country.

"I do not suggest our way is the best for everyone, but I do suggest that we are a relevant example of how the differences between people can be settled without violence," he said.

There is some tension, some disagreement but by and large Malaysians of every race and strata get along quite well with each other. No one seeks to assimilate anyone else. But we do seek to integrate and we have done this quite well, he said.

Touching on history, he recalled the violence of Christendom as it expanded, saying that the Jews were subjected to periodical pogroms because they were supposed to slaughter Christian children in order to use their blood for religious ceremonies.

Dr Mahathir said that the Christians were also very intolerant of their own heretics.

"The Spanish Inquisition saw the fake trials and burnings at the stakes of the Christian heretics. And when Christians discovered new land, they forced the conversion of the natives on pain of death. They claimed that it was their Manifest Destiny to bring Christianity and civilisation to the natives, failing which they should exterminate the heathens," he said.

"But we all know that there was nothing Christian in all these things that they had done. Christianity was a convenient excuse for doing unChristian things."

The Prime Minister said that similarly many Muslims invoke Islam when they commit unIslamic things.

"The Al-Quran is very clear. Muslims can only fight in self-defence. And when the enemy sues for peace, Muslims must respond positively," he said.

As such, Dr Mahathir said that it was therefore right for a peaceful Muslim country to campaign for peace and to create a World Peace Award.

"We have made our first award to the most deserving person in our times. President Jacques Chirac of France, the first recipient, has courted unpopularity in his rejection of war as an instrument of policy. He is the only First World leader who remained in close contact with the condemned leaders of the Third World and tried to reason with them," he said.

He also said that in today's war, everyone was on the frontline where the ordinary non-combatants were as much the targets as were the soldiers.

"Their death is not even honoured. They are called collaterals," he said.

Speaking on nuclear weapons, Dr Mahathir said that a nuclear war could really completely destroy the world, but the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty which was crafted for all countries to subscribe was not signed by the powerful countries capable of producing nuclear weapons.

However, Dr Mahathir pointed out that eliminating nuclear weapons would not end wars, for conventional weapons were as much weapons of mass destruction as were nuclear weapons.

"The strange thing is that as soon as a new weapon is invented, a defence against it would follow. Then there would be a weapon which can overcome the defence. And then a new defence system would be invented to counter the weapons which can penetrate the defence," he said.

According to the Prime Minister, in order to recover some of the cost of developing expensive weapons, the rich countries hawk their weapons all over the world and poor countries were advised by high pressure arms salesmen to buy and equip their armed forces with these weapons.

"Weapons may represent an investment for the security of a nation but otherwise they have no return on investment. If there is no research into newer weapons and everyone is equipped with old-fashioned rifles, the winners would still win and the losers would still lose," he said.

He also stressed that only when wealth was fairly and evenly distributed in the globalised world community, the world will be free from the tensions, the bitterness and the anger which make the deprived resort to violence and terrorism, thus breaking the peace.

Dr Mahathir said that for the countries and the peoples of the world, valuing peace must be cultivated deliberately, must be made a part of the national cultures beginning in the schools and throughout life.

"We need a culture of peace particularly among those who are arming themselves to the teeth, who constantly develop arms and who sell them to confronting pairs of countries," he said.

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