

13 OCT 2003

OIC-WrapUp

FOREIGN MINISTERS AGREE ON RESTRUCTURING OIC

By Shakir Husain

PUTRAJAYA, Oct 13 (Bernama) -- Foreign Ministers of the Organisation of the Islamic Conference (OIC) today agreed to revitalise the 34-year-old organisation by restructuring its General Secretariat and carrying out other necessary reforms.

The ministers held their meeting here to prepare the agenda for consideration by Heads of State and Government at the Leaders' Summit on Thursday and Friday.

Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad will chair the summit, the first to be held in the Asia Pacific region.

The 10th OIC Summit in this new Malaysian federal administrative capital is expected to be dominated by the continuing Israeli violence against Palestinians, this month's Israeli attack on Syria and the Iraqi situation.

Pakistan has suggested the formation of an eminent persons group that would present recommendations on revitalising the OIC within a year.

Malaysian Foreign Minister Datuk Seri Syed Hamid Albar said there was widespread support among the member states to turn the OIC into a body which enjoys the respect and credibility at international level.

A Malaysian agency is conducting a study on how the 57-member organisation should be reformed, he told Bernama at the Putrajaya Convention Centre here.

"We have got a lot of concrete plans under study. So, we hope that when everything is tabled and the concept is accepted, we can move forward," said Syed Hamid, who is chairing the Ministerial Preparatory Meeting.

Earlier, speaking at the opening session of the ministerial meeting, OIC Secretary-General Abdelouahed Belkeziz, whose term expires next year, thanked outgoing OIC Chairman Qatar for discharging its responsibilities in the past three years.

Before handing over the chairmanship of the ministerial meeting to Syed Hamid, Qatar's Foreign Minister Sheikh Hamad Jassim Jabar Al Thani, said the "Palestine and Al Quds Sharif cause" were among the OIC's top priorities and concerns.

Syed Hamid, in his opening statement, said it was unfortunate that the OIC was crippled due to lack of political will to remove the constraints to deal with crucial issues.

"Malaysia is confident that given a clear direction, we can make the Ummah stronger to face the global challenges," he said.

A significant inclusion at the summit was a brainstorming session, an interactive discussion among the ministers.

The ministers discussed four major issues -- restructuring of the OIC General Secretariat, Science and Technology as a means of development, Information and Communications Technology (ICT) and the use of the gold dinar in international trade.

"The ministers did a very good analysis and very strong self-criticism on why the OIC has remained weak all the time," said Syed Hamid, who chaired the session.

The ministers discussed how the OIC could achieve unity to solve the problems confronting the Islamic world.

It was pointed out during the session that women should be given a greater role in the affairs of Islamic countries.

The ministers felt that the Islamic countries must increase trade among

themselves to achieve better economic development.

Syed Hamid pointed out that the current intra-OIC trade was only two per cent of the member states' total global trade while the European Union countries conduct 60 per cent of their trade among themselves.

It had been suggested that the OIC reforms should include a mechanism that could enable the organisation to follow-up on its resolutions.

One way is for the Jeddah-based organisation to be staffed by competent people.

On the question of Malaysia proposing its candidate for the OIC Secretary-General's post, the minister said the matter was still being discussed.

"Many countries have given us the indication that they are quite willing to consider our candidate," he said.

Speaking at a press conference, he appeared to discount the possibility of a contest for the post, saying the choice would be made on the basis of a consensus.

Asked whether there was any pressure from the Arab League to invite the United States-controlled Iraqi governing council to attend the summit, he said there was no such pressure.

"In fact, Iraq thanked us for inviting them. The representative of Iraq has asked us to help them because the country is still under occupation.

"They're still going through the post-invasion period. So, there is a need for OIC countries to support them," he added.

-- BERNAMA  
SKH AZZ TS