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G8-WRAP UP

G8 LEADERS END MEETING WITH GREATER HOPE FOR ECONOMIC RECOVERY

By: Yong Soo Heong

EVIAN, June 3 (Bernama) -- The past is the past and let's move on to the next stage, so says Canadian prime minister Jean Chretien.

The war is over, he said in reference to the tensions which had erupted between various leaders of the Group of Eight (G8), an organisation comprising the world's seven most industrialised countries (France, Germany, Britain, Japan, Italy, Canada and the United States) and Russia.

Chretien's response to a question to the war in Iraq was perhaps the best line from among the leaders as it underlined the need to forget their past differences which had threatened their solidarity.

Chretien said that the mood at Evian was even better than St Petersburg in Russia when several of the G8 leaders came to attend the 300th anniversary celebrations of the Western Russian city.

French President Jacques Chirac and US President George W. Bush described the tenor of their talks as cordial and positive.

Chirac together with German Chancellor Gerhard Schroeder and Russian President Vladimir Putin, had campaigned against the invasion into Iraq and had even pledged to prevent a United Nations (UN) Security Council vote authorising the use of military force against President Saddam Hussein.

But the Evian gathering had enabled the leaders to put behind them some of their differences over the invasion into Iraq, which was launched on the premise that Iraq possessed banned weapons of mass destruction. However, until now, the weapons had yet to be found.

In a final statement at the end of their meeting, the G8 leaders said they shared the conviction that the time had now come to build peace and reconstruct Iraq.

"Our shared objective is a fully sovereign, stable and democratic Iraq, at peace with its neighbours and firmly on the road to progress," the G8 statement said.

The G8 leaders also welcomed a UN announcement to hold an international conference on the reconstruction of Iraq as some countries had said it would be hard for them to provide funding if the reconstruction was not under the auspices of the UN.

To be fair, Russian leader Putin ought to be credited for having held the St Petersburg anniversary celebrations prior to the G8 Summit as it afforded the two opposing sides (the United States and Britain on one side and France, Germany, Russia and Canada on the other) on the Iraq war to meet for the first time since the military intervention began in March.

The G8 leaders also re-affirmed their confidence about strengthening global economic growth because the major downside risks had receded.

"We are confident in the growth potential of our economies," the G8 leaders said.

They added that their common responsibility was to raise growth in their own economies and thus contribute to a stronger global economy.

The G8 leaders said that since contribution from G8 countries would have to rely on structural reforms, they re-affirmed their commitment to implement the reforms in labour, product and capital markets.

They also said they saw the need to strengthen investor confidence by improving corporate governance, enhancing market discipline and increasing transparency.

Malaysia, a non-G8 country, which was represented by Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad at the Enlarged G8 Summit which preceded the

G8 Summit, had been stressing on the need to have greater discipline in the financial markets since 1997.

The G8 leaders also commented on illegal logging and said they were determined to strengthen international efforts to tackle this problem to ensure sustainable forest management and endorsed an Action Plan to reduce the threat posed by excessive exploitation of marine resources and to enhance maritime security.

While Evian has been free from demonstrations, the same cannot be said for Geneva and Lausanne on the Swiss side of Lake Geneva.

Demonstrator violence continued for the third night running on Tuesday night in Geneva.

The demonstrations were originally intended to be peaceful marches by anti-globalisation groups as well as other special interest groups like Greenpeace and Friends of the Earth.

But Swiss police said that violence reared its ugly head as these peaceful groups had been infiltrated by the violent-bent Black Bloc protestors who are known by their black ski-masks.

On a brighter note, peace and quiet have returned to Lausanne and security forces took down the concrete and barbed wire barricades near the Ouchy boat quay as the non-G8 leaders who had come for the informal summit had left for home.

Business in the little cafes that dot the boat quay has begun to pick up and the crowds are expected to swell as the summer heat rises. --

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