

22 FEB 2003

NAM-Wrapup

IRAQ AND REVITALISATION OF NAM DOMINATE PROCEEDINGS

By: Neville D'Cruz

KUALA LUMPUR, Feb 22 (Bernama) -- After intense rounds of discussions, foreign ministers of the Non-Aligned Movement (NAM) today reached consensus on numerous issues ranging from the revitalisation of the 47-year-old grouping to matters pertaining to international politics, particularly on Iraq.

The Iraq crisis and how to rejuvenate NAM to become a dynamic movement that could effectively champion the lot of the developing countries dominated much of the proceedings.

Moves are afoot to strengthen the chair of NAM by way of a special mechanism to help the chairman, in this case Malaysia, to undertake NAM work and functions with more efficiency.

Another initiative to boost the NAM coordination bureau in New York will be by having it interface with the United Nations' offices similar to those in Vienna, Geneva and Nairobi.

"Among the measures proposed is to use the Troika system to help the chairman implement the duties of NAM and the Troika Plus mechanism comprising countries that are past NAM chairmen," Malaysia's Foreign Minister Datuk Seri Syed Hamid Albar told the media.

The Troika will consist of South Africa (outgoing chairman), Malaysia (incoming chair) and Cuba, the next host.

As expected, Iraq and the threat of a United States-led war featured prominently in today's discussions.

At the end of their deliberations, Syed Hamid told the media that a draft on the statement on Iraq was ready to be endorsed by the leaders, who will meet on Monday and Tuesday.

All foreign affairs ministers advocated the United Nations (UN) exerting greater authority on the issue to bring peace to the Gulf region.

At the opening session the ministerial meeting today, South Africa's Foreign Minister Nkosazana Clarince Dlamini said the UN should be the sole authority to resolve the crisis. Tension in West Asia is high with the growing fear of war breaking out in Iraq.

But she said Baghdad must comply with UN Resolution 1441 and allow weapons inspectors unlimited and unconditional access to carry out their job.

Iraqi Foreign Minister Dr Naji Sabri said oil was one of several options available to developing countries to retaliate against the transgression of their sovereignty by other countries.

He said if US could use food and medicine to punish countries that disagreed with Washington, then nations affected could similarly employ their own resources to stop policies that robbed them of freedom and dignity.

Meanwhile, Timor Leste's Foreign Minister Jose Ramos Horta accused UN Secretary-General Kofi Annan of not doing enough to avert war in Iraq. Annan should have visited Baghdad more often to defuse the highly volatile situation over alleged weapons of mass destruction, he said.

Horta said the international community also had a role to play by trying to bring the warring parties to the negotiating table to avoid a military conflict.

When opening today's meeting, Malaysia's Deputy Prime Minister Datuk Seri Abdullah Ahmad Badawi said NAM was duty-bound to change the world order to ensure the continued primacy of the multilateral process in the

affairs of nations.

Unilateralism, he said, was inimical to NAM's interest. "It (unilateralism) must strongly be resisted lest we find ourselves marginalised and our aim of creating a more just and secure world unfulfilled," he said.

Abdullah said in a unipolar world, NAM must continue to maintain its independent position in global affairs and must continue to pursue peace and stability in the international order and to speak out against war, violence and terror.

The issue of Israel's aggression against the Palestinians again reared its ugly head with the Mayor of the city of Jenin, Walid Musa Abu Mowes, urging NAM to press for the withdrawal of Israel from occupied territories.

Speaking to newsmen after meeting Malaysian Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad today, Walid Musa said Jenin had seen too many killings, especially of defenceless women and children. More than 5,000 homes have been demolished and about 13,000 Palestinians jailed while 70 percent of the population is unemployed.

Walid Musa said the Malaysian government had agreed to raise the promised US\$50,000 (RM190,000) aid to build two schools in Jenin to US\$1 million (RM3.8 million).

Meanwhile, Palestinian President Yasser Arafat has prepared a message of gratitude to Dr Mahathir which will be delivered at the Leaders' Meeting if he does not turn up.

Arafat is still seeking a guarantee from Israel that he will be allowed to return home if he attends the Summit.

In other issues of the day, India said it was opposed to the airing of bilateral issues at the Summit as it was vital that NAM put up a united front to the rest of the world.

"We (NAM) are going to revitalise. So, the first thing is that we should not devitalise ourselves by debating bilateral issues," India's Foreign Secretary Kanwal Sibal said, when asked on the prospect of Pakistan trying to raise the Kashmiri issue at NAM.

-- BERNAMA  
NDC MFJ YBY