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Humanitarian Law

KL HOSTING TALKS ON RELEVANCE OF INTERNATIONAL HUMANITARIAN LAW

KUALA LUMPUR, June 9 (Bernama) -- Fifty-three people from the Asia-Pacific Region are here to discuss the issue of adequacy of the International Humanitarian Law (IHL) in relation to modern-day conflicts.

Director of International Cooperation of the Geneva-based International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRS) Dr Francois Bugnion said the issue of the relevancy of the law had been asked repeatedly by various parties, especially in the aftermath of Sept 11.

"As a consequence of the Sept 11 tragedy, a lot of questions are being asked whether the IHL is still relevant in today's armed conflicts."

"There are also allegations that the law is out-dated and it does not apply in the global war against terror," he told reporters after chairing the IHL Regional Asian and Pacific Seminar.

The two-day seminar brings together government representatives, legal practitioners and academics from Malaysia and 20 other countries in the Asia-Pacific region.

The seminar will discuss ways of improving various aspects of the humanitarian law, in particular how specific provisions of the Geneva Convention of 1949 for the protection of victims of armed conflict could be better implemented.

It would also identify challenges posed to existing rules of the IHL and not go about creating a new law.

Dr Bugnion said to obtain as many views as possible, the ICRC decided to organise five expert seminars -- two have been conducted in Cairo and Pretoria and two others, one in Mexico City next month and the other in Brussels this September.

"In order to obtain as many views as possible, we decided to organise five expert seminars in different regions of the world covering the same subject matter," he said.

The collection of thoughts, ideas and proposals made by these experts will then be included in a consolidated report which will be presented to the 28th International Conference of the Red Cross and Red Crescent in December this year.

Meanwhile, ICRC Regional Communications Coordinator, Françoise Zambellini said Malaysia had been chosen as the hub to promote the IHL.

Being a peaceful and stable country, Malaysia also had good infrastructure and logistics which made it the best location.

"Besides that Malaysia also has a credible and outspoken leader in Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad whose voice is respected in the international field," she said.

In its effort to promote respect for the IHL, the ICRC always reminded countries to take all necessary steps to ensure that this law was respected and applied effectively.

Thus ICRC had been conducting many programmes to enhance knowledge of the IHL especially among the armed forces of countries so that they were fully aware of the IHL.

"We are also educating secondary school children on what the IHL is all about and will soon start a similar programme with university students," she said.

The IHL formed a major aspect of International Law and comprises the rules which, in times of armed conflict, seek to protect persons who are not or are no longer taking part in the hostilities and to restrict the

methods and means of warfare employed.

-- BERNAMA

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