

13 OCT 2003

OIC-Syed Hamid (With pix)

MOVE ON FROM MERE RHETORIC, MALAYSIA URGES OIC

PUTRAJAYA, Oct 13 (Bernama) -- The Organisation of the Islamic Conference (OIC) has been crippled by its inability to move with the times and to project an Islamic perspective to events and issues affecting the Islamic world, Foreign Minister Datuk Seri Syed Hamid Albar said today.

He said it was unfortunate that the 57-member organisation was crippled due to the lack of political will to remove the constraints to deal with crucial issues.

The OIC is also faced with problems due to its limited financial capabilities to implement its numerous resolutions and the difficulty in getting member states to fulfil their financial obligations.

Syed Hamid was delivering his opening statement at the OIC Ministerial Preparatory Meeting at the Putrajaya Convention Centre (PCC) here.

The two-day meeting, chaired by Syed Hamid, will finalise the agenda for the 57-member OIC 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 since the inception of the organization in 1969.

There was a need for the OIC to move away from mere rhetoric, as manifested by the resolutions taken all this while.

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

He said that the OIC leaders were meeting here at a time characterised by great challenges confronting the Muslim Ummah, such as the threat of unilateralism, globalisation and terrorism, the precarious situation in the Middle East and the uncertain future of Iraq.

"Muslim countries have been sidelined. Worst still, we continue to be dominated by the big and powerful.

"All these are set against a world plagued by simmering disputes, internal conflicts, ethnic strife, dangerous diseases and foreign domination," he said.

Syed Hamid said that foreign occupation of Iraq must be brought to an end as soon as possible as desired by the Iraqi people.

The occupying powers must work in earnest on a time table for a democratically elected government to be installed within a reasonable time frame, he said.

"It is therefore our moral duty to assist the people of Iraq to regain their sovereignty and integrity.

"The right to determine the future and destiny of their country and control its wealth and natural resources must be returned to the people of Iraq," he said.

The Iraqi issue is expected to dominate talks at this summit apart from the concern over Israel's continued aggression against the Palestinians and its recent aerial attack on neighbouring Syria.

In upholding the principle of multilateralism, the UN must be given the central role in assisting the Iraqi people determine their own future and in the reconstruction of their country, Syed Hamid said.

He urged the OIC member countries to extend their undivided support to the government and peoples of Syria and Lebanon in their legitimate right to defend their sovereignty and integrity in the face of Israeli military adventurism.

"The blatant aggression against Syria, a fellow member of the OIC, must

be condemned in the strongest terms as provocative, arrogant and dangerous," he said.

Israel should immediately cease its military incursions and all acts of violence, terror, provocation, incitement and destruction in the occupied Palestinian territories.

Describing the situation in Palestine as "grave", Syed Hamid said that the Israelis' vicious military campaigns, provocations and destruction of Palestinian homes would only lead to a spiralling upheaval in the already volatile situation.

He said the OIC must also be equally concerned over Israel's threat on the personal safety of Palestinian leader Yasser Arafat.

The Israeli decision "to eliminate him" was clearly an act of state terrorism and in contravention of international law, he said.

"We demand that Israel desist and rescind its decision to pursue any act of deportation, forced exile or even the elimination of President Arafat as the move could further complicate the already extremely delicate situation," he said.

Member countries need to make concerted efforts towards restructuring the OIC by improving the efficiency of the Jeddah-based General Secretariat, he said.

Syed Hamid urged member nations to examine the OIC Secretary-General's report on the restructuring of the General Secretariat.

He said trade and economic cooperation should be enhanced to close the economic disparities among the more developed and less developed OIC members.

-- BERNAMA
RV MKO AAM