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NAM-Siti Hasmah (Statement)

NAM FIRST LADIES SAY "NO TO WAR"

By Harlina Samson

PUTRAJAYA, Feb 24 (Bernama) -- As war looms over Iraq, the Non-Aligned Movement's (NAM) First Ladies Dialogue today adopted a statement which, among other things, calls for peace and says "No To War".

Datin Seri Dr Siti Hasmah Mohamed Ali, the wife of the Malaysian Prime Minister, said the statement of the First Ladies and accompanying spouses would be submitted to the NAM Chairman Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad, who will make a closing statement at the end of the Kuala Lumpur Summit tomorrow.

She said the dialogue's final statement was mostly on women's concerns about peace and saying "NO TO WAR", and their appeals to governments to prevent armed conflicts and to devote more resources to building and sustaining peace.

"Our intention is to express our concerns about war and having had the summary adopted as the dialogue's final statement, we hope to present it to the Chairman of NAM so that he would include it in his final speech at the closing of the summit.

"We hope that he will include the concerns of the First Ladies (and accompanying spouses) about war and advocating peace. Hopefully, he would include a paragraph or two about our concerns," she told a media conference after the First Ladies Dialogue, themed "Investing in Peace", the first ever to be held at a NAM summit.

The 10-point statement lists the concerns of the 38 spouses of heads of state and government, and others, including those accompanying ministers and participants.

Among others, they wanted governments to take efforts to overcome the most imminent threats to global peace, such as social and economic inequalities that give rise to poverty, inadequate healthcare and education, malnutrition and unemployment.

Women, they said, would strive to contribute towards bringing about socio-economic development and educating their children to develop trust, empathy, and respect for human rights and dignity.

They urged the mass media, schools and institutions of higher learning and religious bodies to promote formal and informal education to nurture values of a lasting culture of peace, tolerance, co-existence and gender equality.

Noting that all conflicts must be resolved through United Nations resolutions and its Charter, they said the UN Security Council should not allow any pre-emptive war.

The First Ladies also called on the UN to take the lead in the global war against terrorism by tackling the root causes of disputes that gave rise to violence.

They also called on governments to fulfil their obligations in accordance with international conventions and treaties relating to nuclear weapons and weapons of mass destruction.

Dr Siti Hasmah said the discussion at the 90-minute dialogue was very fruitful and the responses were encouraging.

"One of the spouses even suggested that a group of the First Ladies should be initiated to go to the US and convey to the President (George W. Bush) their concerns on war against Iraq. It was a very good move and they realised they have to do something (to persuade the US not to attack Iraq)," she said.

Asked whether such a move would be helpful to avert war, she was confident it would but was not sure whether the trip could materialise.

She said networking among women was very important as it would give them an opportunity to share knowledge and their experiences of conflicts.

-- BERNAMA

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