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NAM-Wrap-up

NAM LEADERS WRAP UP SUMMIT, APPEAL TO IRAQ TO DISARM TO AVERT WAR

KUALA LUMPUR, Feb 26 (Bernama) -- Leaders of the developing world wrapped up their summit here late Tuesday by calling on Iraq to comply with United Nations Security Council resolution to disarm to avert war.

They pledged to help strengthen the UN, saying "it is an indispensable international organisation for the maintenance of peace and security."

The leaders of the Non-Aligned Movement (NAM), which makes up two-thirds of the UN, met here amidst the threat of a United States-led war on Iraq over its failure to account for its weapons of mass destruction.

Malaysian Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad, who opened the summit Monday with a strong anti-war message, told a press conference at the close of the summit that NAM's immediate priorities would be to solve the Palestinian crisis and to see war was averted in Iraq.

Dr Mahathir, who is the new NAM chairman, said however it was not necessary for leaders of the grouping to visit Iraq to check on the arms inspection as they were convinced that Baghdad was cooperating with UN weapons inspectors.

The leaders said they believed a diplomatic and peaceful solution was still possible even if the US had indicated it was ready to invade Baghdad.

Even if war was necessary, it should be authorised by the UN first, the leaders said.

Iraqi Vice-President Taha Yassin Ramadan, who led his country's delegation to the summit, had invited NAM to send a high-ranking delegation to Iraq to look into Baghdad's cooperation with the weapons inspectors.

"The competent authority to carry out such a task would be the arms inspectors. Nobody would take NAM leaders' words if their findings showed that there are no weapons of mass destruction in Baghdad," Dr Mahathir said.

The leaders, expressing grave concern at the continued destruction and devastation of the Palestinian society, also demanded an immediate withdrawal of Israeli forces from Palestinian territories to positions before they were occupied in September 2000.

Palestinian leader Yasser Arafat, who had to skip the summit because of fears that Israel would not allow him to return, told NAM via video conferencing from the occupied territories to send a fact-finding mission to Palestine to investigate Israel's war crimes.

About half of NAM members are Muslim countries whose leaders expressed solidarity with Arafat as the elected leader and the symbol of struggle of the Palestinian people.

Dr Mahathir who in his opening speech Monday called for war to be outlawed, told the press conference that no one should possess weapons of mass destruction of whatever kind, including conventional weapons which could eventually become weapons of mass destruction.

Zimbabwe president Robert Mugabe told the summit that the US itself had not destroyed its own weapons of mass destruction as well as refusing to sign the treaty on nuclear disarmament.

He also slammed Britain, Zimbabwe's former colonial master, describing it as a born-again colonialist and ferocious hunting dog "sniffing for more Third World blood".

"We, their hunted game, are for slaughter," said Mugabe.

North Korea, facing a standoff with the US over its resumed nuclear programme, took a swipe at Washington which its Vice-President Kim Yong Nam

said had threatened the sovereignty and right of existence of the developing countries.

His country was compelled to withdraw from the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treat "to cope with the grave situation in which its supreme interests are extremely threatened by the reckless U.S policy", Kim said.

Commenting on the Korean crisis, Dr Mahathir told the press conference that he believed Pyongyang would like to negotiate directly with Washington to resolve the standoff.

"North Korea is not really bent on declaring war or doing anything but North Korea has got weapons and weapons are being tested. They are not nuclear weapons as far as I can make out," Dr Mahathir said.

When asked about North Korea's reported missile yesterday, Dr Mahathir said:"Other countries are also testing weapons, so I supposed just because they test weapons doesn't mean that they are declaring war."

The NAM leaders declared their opposition to unipolarity, denouncing unilateral military actions by certain countries against non-aligned or developing nations, allegedly to wipe out terrorism but only to veil a broader political and economic agenda.

They condemned the use of the term "axis of evil" to target other countries to mask political and economic pursuits.

The leaders underscored the need to exercise solidarity with the targeted countries and denounced unilateral preparation of lists accusing countries of supporting terrorism, describing it as a form of psychological and political terrorism.

Washington has labelled Iraq, Iran and North Korea, all members of NAM, as the "axis of evil" for their alleged support of terrorism and their efforts to build or acquire weapons of mass destruction.

The NAM leaders reiterated their call for a UN-backed international summit conference to identify the root causes of terrorism and formulate a joint response to all forms of terrorism.

They condemned the continued unilateral application of coercive economic and other measures, including extra-territorial laws, to prevent a number of developing countries from exercising their right to decide their own political, economic and social systems.

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