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OIC-Wrap up

SUMMIT CALLS ON MUSLIMS TO CLOSE RANKS, BENEFIT FROM RESOURCES

By: Shakir Husain

PUTRAJAYA, Oct 16 (Bernama) -- Islamic leaders holding an historic summit in Malaysia today heard calls for closing ranks and using their immense natural resources for economic progress compatible with modern demands.

The 10th summit of the Organisation of the Islamic Conference (OIC) here appeared to jettison the past complacent attitude as the leaders acknowledged that practical steps were required if the world's 1.3 billion Muslims were to live without "oppression and humiliation from which they suffer today."

In his opening address, Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said the governments of all the Muslim countries should close ranks and have a common stand on issues.

"The whole world is looking at us. The whole Muslim ummah is placing their hopes in this conference... They expect us to do something, to act. We cannot say we cannot unite even when faced with the destruction of our religion and the ummah," Dr Mahathir told the summit attended by 33 heads of state and government, a significantly high level of participation in the 34-year-old OIC's history.

Dr Mahathir said it was possible for the Muslims to counter their enemies if they used their strengths and wealth.

The Muslims control the largest oil reserves and the votes of the 57 member countries could "make or break international organisations", he said.

He said Muslim leaders should not enjoy power for themselves but should make use of it "judiciously, prudently, concertedly" for "our people, the ummah and Islam."

While Dr Mahathir was blunt in attacking the detractors of Muslims, he appealed for more understanding between the OIC and those countries willing to deal with Muslims on equal terms.

"We also know that not all non-Muslims are against us... We must win their hearts and minds," he told the summit, themed "Knowledge and Morality for the Progress of the Ummah."

Special guests at the meeting were Russian President Vladimir Putin and Philippine President Gloria Arroyo.

Putin thanked Dr Mahathir, chairman of the 10th OIC summit, for inviting him to the Islamic gathering.

"We know that the vast majority of member countries of the organisation supported our initiative to develop relations with the OIC. And we see in this not just a gesture, but a far-sighted and strategic decision," the Russian president said in his speech.

The issue of Palestine reverberated in most speeches as the summit called for an end to Israeli occupation.

The OIC's Al Quds Committee chairman King Mohammed VI of Morocco said the Palestinians must regain their legitimate rights for an independent state with Jerusalem as its capital.

Mahathir, in his speech, said the Jews ruled the world by "proxy" as they have gained control of the most powerful countries.

He said the Muslims must use their brains to ensure that they attained success in ending the Israeli occupation of Palestinian land. Mahathir, who retires as prime minister at the end of this month, was accorded a special honour by the OIC.

The Research Centre for Islamic History, Art and Culture, an OIC organ, has instituted the "Mahathir Award for Islamic Studies" in recognition of the prime minister's efforts in helping Muslims.

Deputy Prime Minister Datuk Seri Abdullah Badawi, speaking on behalf of the 117-member Non-Aligned Movement (NAM), urged the OIC to be an action-oriented body to be relevant to its members.

"We must continue to stand up for the principles that are dear to us -- for equity, justice and fair play for all... The struggle for a world free of conflict and war should be the common struggle of both the NAM and OIC," he said.

Speaking for the Asian group, Indonesian President Megawati Sukarnoputri said the OIC should undertake thorough reforms.

"We should have the courage to see that there is renewed determination, attitude and conduct among the members to carry out fundamental review over the structure and mechanism of the OIC," she said.

OIC Secretary-General Dr Abdelouahed Belkeziz urged the OIC members to come up with a single Islamic perspective and create a new Islamic awareness of the future threats to Muslims.

"Our political, economic, social, developmental and cultural structures must be renewed and harmonised so that they are attuned to modern developments," he said.

Speakers at the summit included Mozambique President Joaquim Alberto Chissano, who is chairman of the African Union.

United Nations Secretary-General Kofi Annan's speech was delivered by his special representative, Lakhdar Brahimi.

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