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NAM-Arafat

TALK TO US FOR ARAFAT'S ATTENDANCE AT KL NAM SUMMIT, M'SIA TOLD

By: R. Ravichandran

KUALA LUMPUR, Jan 21 (Bernama) -- The Palestinian ambassador to Malaysia, Ahmad Al-Farra, has requested Malaysia to talk to the United States to pressure Israel to allow President Yasser Arafat to travel to Malaysia to attend the forthcoming 13th Non-Aligned Movement (NAM) Summit.

Ahmad said that he hoped that Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad would take the initiative to talk to Washington on the matter.

He said that the US, as a close ally of Israel in West Asia, was in a position to pressure Tel Aviv to ensure that Arafat could travel here safely and return to Palestine.

Israel, which has occupied several towns and cities in the West Bank and Gaza, has also imposed various levels of travel restrictions on Arafat and other Palestinians.

"We hope Malaysia will do it. The prime minister should do it...to talk with the US to allow Arafat (to travel)," he told Bernama when asked on the possibility of Arafat attending the six-day meeting scheduled from Feb 20-25 at the Putra World Trade Centre here.

Ahmad said that the US, as the main player in the West Asia peace process, should also guarantee that Arafat could return safely to Palestine after attending the summit.

The ambassdor said this when asked on the possibility of Israel not allowing Arafat back, thus forcing him into exile.

"Israel can betray anybody," he said.

Ahmad said that he spoke to Arafat last week and the Palestinian leader had confirmed that he would head the Palestinian delegation to the KL NAM Summit if there was no problem in travelling to Malaysia.

"We presume that Arafat is leading our Palestinian delegation and this is the normal situation. But to be realistic, Arafat is not a free man now. We would try and we hope NAM will exert pressure to tell Israel and the US that Arafat will be able to lead the Palestinian delegation," he said.

Ahmad said that Arafat's attendance would enable the Palestinian leader to provide NAM members and leaders with the latest developments of the peace process as well as Israel's atrocities against the Palestinians.

The 74-year-old leader, who has dedicated his whole life to the Palestinian cause, is the symbol of its people in their struggle to end more than 50 years of Israeli occupation of Arab and Palestinian land.

Arafat's headquarters in the West Bank City of Ramallah was besieged by Israel forces from March 29 to May 2, last year, which drew strong condemnation from the international community.

Again, in September, his headquarters was under siege for more than 10 days. At that time, Arafat also requested for Dr Mahathir's help to end the siege and Dr Mahathir subsequently wrote to key world leaders such as France's President Jacques Chirac on the matter.

Malaysia has been a strong supporter of the Palestinian cause, providing the leadership and the people moral and diplomatic support as well as humanitarian aid.

More than 2,000 Palestinians and more than 700 Israelis have died in clashes in the ongoing Intifada, which was triggered by Israel Prime Minister Ariel Sharon's visit to a disputed site in East Jerusalem on Sept 28, 2000.

-- BERNAMA

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