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Huhtala - Jewish

US AMBASSADOR SURPRISED OVER CALL TO BOYCOTT MALAYSIA BY JEWISH LOBBY

MELAKA, Oct 23 (Bernama) -- The United States Ambassador to Malaysia, Marie T. Huhtala, said here today that she was surprised over the call to boycott tourism and investment in Malaysia by a leading US-based Jewish lobby group which had condemned Malaysian Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad.

" I think that is an extreme step, but it is taken in reaction to the comment made by Dr Mahathir during last week's Summit of the Organisation of the Islamic Conference," she said.

Huhtala earlier gave a RM76,000 grant from the US Ambassador's Fund for Cultural Preservation to Badan Warisan, a heritage centre, to carry out the restoration of a Dutch era shophouse in Jalan Tun Tan Cheng Lock which was completed in May this year.

She was asked to comment on a foreign media report that the influential Simon Weisenthal Centre had launched a scathing attack on Dr Mahathir after he branded Jews "arrogant" and accused them of controlling the world by proxy.

According to the report, the Centre called on investors and tourists to avoid Malaysia until it became clear that the leaders who would succeed him after he retires do not share his views.

"I think it may be hard for Malaysia to understand how sensitive such comments like that (by Dr Mahathir) is in the United States and (resulting in) the outcry in newspapers and television all over my country.

" Hopefully we can move beyond it and, hopefully, you my friends in Malaysia will begin to understand how deeply sensitive it is for all Americans of every religion when your Prime Minister makes statements like that," Huhtala said, adding that it was a little unfortunate that this thing had happened.

She added that she was at the Summit and heard the statement being delivered but the fact that Dr Mahathir called for an end to suicide bombing and think about the situation was very positive.

" But Jews ruling the world by proxy and Jews getting people to fight and die for them, I'm sorry that was going too far," she said.

She hoped that this controversy would not have a lasting impact on the ties between the two countries.

"But I think it is important for both sides to really understand why the statement that Dr Mahathir made was so offensive to us.

"If we can do that, I think we can make a lot of progress and I'm working very hard to mend our ties," she said.

On the new Prime Minister, Datuk Seri Abdullah Ahmad Badawi, taking office at the end of the month, she said he "was a very distinguished man and we have known him for a long time.

"And I think he would do a wonderful job," Huhtala said.

-- BERNAMA

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