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NAM-UN

WAR IS AVOIDABLE BUT IRAQ MUST COMPLY WITH RESOLUTION 1441, SAYS UN
SEC-GEN

KUALA LUMPUR, Feb 24 (Bernama) -- As Iraq stares at war in the face, United Nations (UN) Secretary-General Kofi Annan today reminded the Iraqi leadership to cooperate fully with weapons inspectors to spare its people from sufferings.

He said it was imperative that the Iraqi leadership understand the gravity and urgency of the situation.

The UN chief said he believed that a United States-led war on Iraq was avoidable, even at this stage.

"For the sake of its own people, and for the sake of the world security and world order, I urge the Iraqi leadership to choose full transparency and cooperation with the inspectors to help avoid conflict," Annan said at the opening of the 13th Non-Aligned Movement (NAM) Summit, here.

His speech was delivered by his special representative for Afghanistan, Lakhdar Brahimi.

Annan told the NAM leaders attending the two-day summit presided by the movement's new chairman, Malaysian Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad, that weapons inspections in Iraq were beginning to yield results and should be allowed to continue until all weapons of mass destruction were destroyed or accounted for.

He called on the international community, including NAM, to encourage Iraq to comply fully with the Security Council's Resolution 1441 to disarm.

If the international community failed to agree on a common stance and action was taken without the authority of the Security Council, the legitimacy of, and support for, any action would be seriously impaired, he said.

Annan warned that whatever happened in Iraq would have serious implications for other issues for many years to come, including international terrorism and the situation in the occupied Palestinian territory and Afghanistan.

He said a war in Iraq would have serious humanitarian implications as the country's one million children under five years old were chronically malnourished and five million of its people lacked access to safe water and sanitation.

He, however, told the NAM leaders that the current focus on Iraq should not distract them from effectively confronting the myriad of political, economic, social, environmental and other challenges in every region.

"Whether it is the concern about North Korea's decision to withdraw from the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty, or the crisis of governance now engulfing Latin America, it is clear that the world needs urgent and concerted action to address common threats through multilateral action," he said.

-- BERNAMA

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