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US rapped for statement on Palestinian state

PUTRAJAYA, Wed. - Malaysia, the chairman of the Non-Aligned Movement, today criticised the United States for saying that the 2005 target to establish a Palestinian state was no longer a "realistic goal".

Foreign Minister Datuk Seri Syed Hamid Albar said the US, as a prime mover of the international Quartet that drafted the peace road map for Palestine and Israel, should not make such statements as it would further inflame Palestinians and other Muslim nations.

The US should realise that the birth of a free and peaceful Palestinian state was the responsibility of the international community, Syed Hamid added.

US President George W. Bush in an interview with an Egypt news daily last week, said the US remains committed to the road map which calls for the establishment of a Palestinian state, but that the 2005 target was no longer realistic.

But Syed Hamid said Palestine remained a critical issue as the long-standing oppression of the Palestinians was one of the root causes of violence and terrorism.

"It is important that the US stop making statements that can create more tension. Already the current situation is attributed to dissatisfaction, injustice and oppression and marginalisation of the Palestinians."

He added that the 2005 commitment should be adhered to if the international community was sincere about seeing a Palestinian state and Israel living side by side.

"That should be the vision and the road map that was approved by the Quartet and endorsed by the United Nations must be put back on track," he said.

Syed Hamid was speaking after inspecting the Putrajaya Convention Centre, the venue for the one-day Ministerial Meeting of the Non-Aligned Movement (NAM) Committee on Palestine tomorrow.

The meeting is expected to issue a joint communique on the need for the road map to be put back on track and to urge Israel to end its occupation of Palestinian territories and other atrocities.

On the US economic sanctions on Syria, Syed Hamid said Washington must be cautious with such a move which would only aggravate the anger of Muslim nations.

"There must be a cogent reason to punish Syria. What about the continued occupation of Palestine? What action is US taking in respect of what is happening in the Palestine-Israel conflict?"

The US has imposed economic sanctions on Syria after accusing the Arab state of supporting terrorists and failing to stop militants entering Iraq, its continued occupation of Lebanon and alleged accumulation of weapons of mass destruction.

Bush ordered a freeze on certain Syrian assets in the US and a halt to all American exports apart from humanitarian items.

Flights between Syria and the US have been banned but exports of US food, medicines and aircraft parts are not affected, for safety reasons.

Meanwhile in Langkawi, former Prime Minister Tun Dr Mahathir Mohamad said NAM was unable to do anything significant in resolving the Israeli-Palestinian conflict as a solution to the problem was in the hands of superpowers such as the United States.

Expressing his doubts over what the movement could achieve to resolve

the problem, Dr Mahathir said NAM could only voice its protest against Israel's continued oppression because in the end it was up to superpowers to put a stop to it.

Citing the example of the US-led coalition's invasion of Iraq, Dr Mahathir added the US and its allies went ahead and attacked Iraq despite world-wide protests, including from NAM.

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