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Dr Mahathir pays tribute to Chirac

PRIME Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad yesterday paid tribute to French President Jacques Chirac, saying that if all the world leaders were like Chirac, peace would have a better chance.

"We have given our first Kuala Lumpur Peace Award to the most deserving person in our times," Dr Mahathir said in his keynote address at the opening of the Kuala Lumpur World Peace Conference at the Mandarin Oriental Kuala Lumpur.

Award Selection Committee chairman Tan Sri Razali Ismail, later read the award citation which described Chirac as a man of courage and vision.

"In a world torn by conflict and confrontation, he mirrors the best of his country by holding to principles of multilateralism and consultation in resolving disputes that assail humanity.

"Through recent times, during which the world was driven by the global war against terrorism, he sought common ground to advance and sustain peace in our world."

Razali, Malaysia's former permanent representative to the United Nations, said Chirac, 71, spoke unequivocally against the use of violence and courageously defended the principle that conflicts must be resolved through mediation and international cooperation based on international law, respect for human rights and economic development.

"He has pressed other wealthy members of the Group of Eight to increase their contributions for education, health care, water and farming in the poorer regions of the world.

"He repeatedly underscores the point that prosperity in the industrialised West hinges on the economic success of developing countries."

"He truly embodies the noble qualities of a world statesman."

Earlier, Dr Mahathir said Chirac was the only First World leader who remained in close contact with the condemned leaders of the Third World and tried to reason with them.

Dr Mahathir said peace had to be fought for, not on the battlefields but in the conference rooms.

"There is no such thing as a war to end all wars, a war for permanent peace."

He said the Malaysia World Peace Foundation had created the Kuala Lumpur Peace Award, adding that it was appropriate that a Muslim country should initiate the award.

"Many may not believe it but Islam, the religion of the Muslims, means peace. If there seems to be no peace in the Islamic world, especially between Muslims and Jews, it is not because of religion," said Dr Mahathir.

Referring to the violence in Christendom as it expanded, Dr Mahathir said the Christians were very intolerant of their own heretics where there were fake trials and burnings at the stake during the Spanish Inquisition.

"But we all know that there was nothing Christian in all these things that they had done. Christianity was a convenient excuse for doing unChristian things.

"Similarly, many Muslims invoke Islam when they commit un-Islamic things. The Quran is very clear. Muslims can only fight in self-defence and when the enemy sues for peace Muslims must respond positively."