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German funds available for Iraq reconstruction, says envoy

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KUALA LUMPUR, Thurs. - Germany has set aside funds for the reconstruction of Iraq with other nations including the United States under the aegis of the United Nations, its Ambassador to Malaysia Juergen A.R. Staks said today.

Indicating that this was a sign of rapprochement with the US and the UK, he said his country was confident that the US would allow a mandate for the UN to oversee the reconstruction process.

"The German Government wants the rebuilding to be based on a blueprint determined by the United Nations and is positive that the US will make way for a UN mandate on the reconstruction.

"We have earmarked sums of money for the job (reconstruction). Germany is ready to contribute considerably, but we want to have a master plan developed by the United Nations," Staks said in an interview.

The assistance, he said, would be channelled through the German Ministry of Economic Co-operation and Development, which focused on contributing humanitarian aid to conflict-stricken countries.

Aid would include training for the re-establishment of Iraq's administrative and education systems, he added.

"During the war, we made available our institutions and non-governmental organisations for humanitarian and technical aid. Now, we are hopeful for a master plan from the UN to help us effectively start in the reconstruction process."

Acknowledging that Germany and the US had differed over the need to go to war in Iraq, Staks believed the "slightly disturbed communications" between the two countries could be repaired over time.

"The war is more or less over. I'm optimistic that the irritations earlier will be overcome in due time. We must come to grips with the fact that the Iraqis need a lot of help now."

Asked about reports that the US may prohibit countries that had opposed the war from joining in the reconstruction effort, Staks was confident that the US would accept assistance from all interested parties, including Germany.

"I'm convinced that our American friends will accept assistance under the umbrella of the UN. We have got signals from the US that they will accept aid."

Staks added that Germany, as a permanent member of the UN Security Council, would do its part to ensure that the role of the UN was maintained so that the other individual members could also join in the reconstruction.

"Chancellor Gerhard Schroeder has always emphasised that it is imperative reconstruction be done under the umbrella of the UN and the international community should contribute to it."

Staks said international participation in the rebuilding of Iraq would send a message that the world was willing to help resolve Middle East tensions, which stemmed from the Israel-Palestine conflict.

Peace between Israel and Palestine, which Germany felt should be an independent state, was the key to peace and security in the entire Arab world, he said.

Asked about the role of the Non-Aligned Movement and the Organisation of Islamic Conference in the matter, he said such groupings were closely observed by Germany for their views on world events.

On whether Malaysia, which is currently chairman of NAM, could help in conflict resolution in the Middle East, Staks said Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir was the model of a moderate Muslim leader.