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PM: Malaysia will only play a role in Iraq with UN nod

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MALAYSIA will not send peacekeepers to Iraq or take part in any official activity there without the sanction of the United Nations, Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said yesterday.

Responding to a question on the US request for peace-keeping forces from Muslim and Arab countries, Dr Mahathir firmly ruled it out as far as Malaysia was concerned.

"I can't speak for other Islamic countries but Malaysia will have nothing to do with anything that is being done in Iraq that is not sanctioned or initiated by the UN," he said at a joint Press conference with Syrian Prime Minister Mustapha Mero on Sunday.

He said the US and Britain were being undemocratic for installing a governing council in Iraq instead of allowing Iraqis to elect their own government.

He said at another Press conference yesterday that most Muslim countries felt that the present method of setting up a government in Iraq was not correct.

He added that if powerful nations believed in democracy, they should allow Iraqis to set up a government in any way they choose.

Asked how he would like to contribute to the Muslim ummah after his retirement, he said every Muslim could contribute to the betterment of the ummah without having to hold any position.

"I don't see a problem, whatever I can do, I will try to do."

He had earlier held a meeting with Mero following a morning meeting with President Dr Bashar Al-Assad.

Asked to comment on the situation in the Middle East, he said: "We are very unhappy about the situation in this part of the world and believe that the root cause is the creation of the Israeli state on Palestinian land."

He said that peace could only be achieved if Israel withdrew completely from occupied areas and allow Palestinian refugees to return home. After that, there should be no more attacks against civilians by Arab forces or the Israeli Government.

He said he had spoken briefly to Dr Bashar on the Middle East peace process. The US-engineered road map to peace was incomplete as it concerned Palestine in isolation, he said.

"It should also take into account countries around it, including Syria and Lebanon," he said.

Asked if Malaysia would comply with a request by the US for the extradition of the Malaysian wife of captured Jemaah Islamiyah leader Hambali Riduan Isamuddin, Dr Mahathir said it would decide if a request was made and that there had not been any such request so far.

To a question on Malaysia's role in uniting the Muslim world, Mero said Malaysia could play a significant role as it would be the chairman of the Organisation of the Islamic Conference for three years from October.

"Its stand is one that safeguards the higher common interest of the whole Islamic world," he said.

Mero said during his meeting with Dr Mahathir, he realised both of them had identical opinions on many international issues.

He said Syria wanted the Iraq problem to be resolved according to the UN charter, and with the UN having a role that would help the Iraqis choose their own political system and government.

The Non-Aligned Movement and OIC, he said, should also "confront the lies" against Arabs and Muslims, and interference in their affairs on the pretext of fighting terrorism by some quarters.