

25/02/2003

NAM first ladies speak out for peace

THE first ladies of the Non-Aligned Movement yesterday appealed to governments to prevent armed conflicts and to devote more resources to building and sustaining peace.

They felt that more efforts should be made to rid the world of social and economic inequalities which were identified as the most imminent threat to global peace as they give rise to poverty, inadequate healthcare and education, under-nutrition and unemployment.

In a summary statement made available to the Press after a roundtable dialogue on "Invest in Peace: Say NO TO WAR" hosted by Datuk Seri Dr Siti Hasmah Mohd Ali, the wife of Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad, the first ladies resolved that all solutions to conflicts should be made through the United Nations' system.

The first ladies called upon the UN to take a lead in the global war against terrorism by addressing the root causes of disputes that gave rise to violence.

They also agreed to call on all governments to embrace a universal non-discriminatory, time-bound compliance regime to eliminate nuclear weapons, other weapons of mass destruction and excessively injurious weapons as well as to totally ban the development, production and sale of land mines.

At a Press conference after the dialogue, Dr Siti Hasmah said the participants had agreed to adopt the nine-point summary and it would be presented to the Prime Minister who is the new NAM chairman.

"We hope he would be able to include a line or two or a paragraph in his closing remarks," she said.

The dialogue at Shangri-la Putrajaya, attended by 100 women including 20 first ladies, spouses of Foreign Ministers and heads of delegation, The Association of Wives of Ministers, Deputy Ministers and Parliamentary Secretaries (Bakti) and non-governmental organisation members, was the brainchild of Dr Siti Hasmah. It was also attended by Datin Seri Endon Mahmood, the wife of the Deputy Prime Minister, Women and Family Development Minister Datuk Seri Shahrizat Jalil and Datin Seri Sharifah Aziah Syed Zainal Abidin, wife of the Foreign Minister.

The dialogue organised by the Women and Family Development Ministry was held in conjunction with the 13th NAM Summit.

Dr Siti Hasmah said despite it being held for the first time, the response from the first ladies was very encouraging.

She said there was even a suggestion that the NAM first ladies initiate a group to the United States to talk to the American women in relation to the threat of war against Iraq.

Asked whether she would initiate that visit, Dr Siti Hasmah said: "The suggestion is going to be of help at the eleventh hour to change what President Bush has in his mind."

She also said that there was group of American Congress members sympathetic to the Iraqis' sufferings.

"Soon after our humanitarian visit to Iraq in 2001, there was a group of Congress women from America who also visited Iraq. So there is already a move in a certain quarters in the Congress who are very sympathetic to the Iraqis," she said.

Earlier in her keynote address, Dr Siti Hasmah said women must speak out for peace and collectively say no to war.

She said women as mothers have a major role in sowing the seeds of peace

among children who will be the guardian of long lasting peace in the world.

Dr Siti Hasmah later hosted a luncheon at Seri Perdana. The first ladies later visited the Kuala Lumpur Craft Complex in Jalan Conlay.