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OIC strongly condemns Israeli regime's persecution of Arafat and

THE Organisation of the Islamic Conference yesterday strongly condemned the Israeli regime's unwarranted threats against Palestinian leader Yasser Arafat and continued persecution of the Palestinian people.

The world's largest grouping of Muslim nations, in reaffirming its denunciation of the Jewish state's expansionary policy, called on the international community to force Israel to stop the construction and remove the apartheid wall encroaching on Palestinian land.

In a 20-page communique issued at the end of the two-day Putrajaya Summit, the organisation also urged the United Nations to help remove Israeli settlements in accordance with UN Security Council resolution 465 of 1980. It also called for the restoration of the committee established by the UN Security Council to monitor the settlements in Arab territories occupied since 1967.

"The Israel Government should also fully withdraw from the occupied Syrian Golan Heights," it stated.

Arafat was unable to attend the summit due to internal bickering and threats to his safety by the Israeli Government. On Israeli aggression against Syria, the conference, in support of the Arab republic, condemned the act as a violation of international law and the UN Charter.

It commended Syria for exercising restraint over the Israeli attacks and demanded that the UN avoid a recurrence of the aggression.

The 106-point document also urged the international Quartet to work on a comprehensive peace plan in the Middle East to implement the relevant resolutions, including the Madrid Principles, the Arab Peace Initiative and the Road Map.

The conference stressed the 57-member grouping's commitment to boycott Israel and urged all members to strengthen their co-operation in the endeavour.

The OIC, chaired by Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad, also welcomed the presence of Russian President Vladimir Putin, who is keen to have stronger ties with the OIC. The leaders also reiterated the need for the international community to respect Iraq's sovereignty and the right of the Iraqis to chart their own future.

They also supported the constitution of the Transitional Governing Council and described it as a step towards self-rule.

While reiterating its non-interference policy on Iraqi internal affairs, the conference urged the UN to play a greater role in post-war Iraq.

It urged Iraq to forge good relations with its neighbours.

The conference condemned the terrorist bombings on the Jordanian and Turkish embassies, the UN headquarters in Baghdad and the holy places in Al-Najaf and the killing of Dr Aqila Al-Hashimi, a member of the governing council.

It called for the prosecution of the former Iraqi regime's officials who committed crimes against their own people.

On Afghanistan, the conference commended efforts by the transitional government in rebuilding the country and asked OIC members to lend support.

The conference declared all states had the right to develop nuclear energy for peaceful purposes. In this context, the Muslim leaders welcomed Iran's close co-operation with the International Atomic Energy Agency. Iran has until Oct 31 to submit full disclosure of its nuclear programme

to the agency, considering the US and its allies had alleged the country was making atomic bombs.

The conference expressed its commitment to promote and preserve human rights and called for transparency, co-operation, tolerance and respect for other cultures and religions.

It is also committed to combating terrorism in all forms and manifestation, including state terrorism and contributing to multilateral efforts to counter the scourge.

It called on the international community to sign a convention on international terrorism to distinguish between terrorism and the legitimate struggle by people living under foreign occupation.

Considering the failure in last month's World Trade Organisation's ministerial conference in Mexico, the conference appealed for multilateral trade pacts through a wide range of measures.