

16/02/2003

Mobilise support for peace, says PM

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PUTRAJAYA, Sat. - Peace-loving non-governmental organisations throughout the world should mobilise public support and convince their respective governments that war is not a solution to conflicts, Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said today.

"There are NGOs against war," Dr Mahathir said here today after a 90-minute dialogue with a group of Palestinian doctors, teachers and students.

The group, led by teacher Munthaha Jarra, also included Palestinian Christian community representative Father Constantine Basil Salameh.

"You must remember that during the Vietnam War, the first protest was small but gathered momentum until millions of people were demonstrating against war and that was only in the United States.

"Today there appears to be an anti-war movement throughout the world. I understand that today people are going to demonstrate against war in London," he said.

Dr Mahathir stressed that although he had always been against demonstrations, the issue of war required every peace-loving human being to show solidarity with other protesters around the world.

During their meeting with Dr Mahathir, almost every member of the Palestinian group related their experience under the Zionist regime and how the soldiers were getting away with mass murders.

Four students who were part of the group told the Prime Minister how they lost their friends, relatives and loved ones to bullets and bombs, and how their studies had been disrupted.

One of the students, Mohammad Al-Bilawi, related how his house was demolished by Israeli soldiers.

"When I returned from school, my house was not there, it was demolished. I could only identify the site where my house stood by recognising a strawberry plant which was planted in front of my house."

Responding to Dr Mahathir's question on how many Christians there were in Palestine, Father Basil Salameh stood up and praised the Prime Minister before answering.

"I'm very proud talking to you because we cannot hear such strong words (against Israeli atrocities and against war) from any of our Arab leaders."

He added that the number of Christians in Palestinians had dwindled from 30 per cent to a mere three per cent.

In his concluding remarks at the dialogue, Dr Mahathir said Malaysia would try its best to highlight the sufferings and killings in Palestine to the world.

"We understand the sufferings you have gone through and you can be rest assured that we will do whatever we can to help. We are proud of the bravery of the Palestinian people."

Dr Mahathir said the world community was now against any war and said that if the world could reject war, it could also understand the Palestinian plight and reject the Israeli occupation of their land.

"We need to raise the conscience of the world on this problem. Leaders should know that unless they solve the Palestinian problem, they cannot solve terrorism or get rid of terrorist attacks."

It must be made very clear to the international community that the Palestinian issue was not about religion or race but was one of illegal

occupation, he said.

Dr Mahathir said that due to the fear of terrorist attacks, "they are afraid to travel, afraid to do business, they are actually afraid of their own shadows and this will not stop until we find an end to the Palestinian problem."

Referring to the Sept 11, 2001, attacks he said, "Actually the number of those killed in Palestine is far higher than those who perished in the WTC tragedy, but do we get the same level of concern, sympathy and action?"

"So we must and will strive to highlight the plight of the Palestinians through whatever means possible."