

'Pressure your gov't to halt violence against Rohingyas'

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By Aidila Razak

Former prime minister Dr Mahathir Mohamad today urged Burmese opposition leader and human rights activist Aung San Suu Kyi to pressure the Rangoon government to stop violence against the ethnic Rohingyas.

"She says she does not know much about it as she's new, but she has a lot of influence so I hope she'll say something to stop this," Mahathir said.

He added that he had earlier this week written to Suu Kyi, who in May was elected into Parliament after close to 15 years under house arrest.

The former Organisation of Islamic Conference chairperson also urged all Islamic countries to record their protest against the violence so as to pressure the United Nations to intervene.

"I hope all Islamic countries can speak up, as Malaysia alone cannot stop this. If all Islamic countries do so, I am certain the United Nations will take action to save the Rohingyas," Mahathir said.

He added that the Burmese government, which prides itself with its new democracy, should also live up to this by considering what it was doing to the Muslim ethnic minority, which it refused to recognise as Burmese.

The Burmese government considers the Rohingyas to be illegal migrants from Bangladesh, but even Bangladesh has refused to accept the Rohingya people, who are fleeing Burma as a result of the violence against them.

Al Jazeera reported that human rights groups say that Burmese security forces had killed, raped or carried out mass arrests of the Rohingya people in the northeast of the country in June.

The news network also reported a crackdown on aid workers, while arson and machete attacks on both Buddhists and Rohingyas were reported in the state of Rakhine.

Yesterday, PKR de facto leader Anwar Ibrahim said Pakatan Rakyat wants the Malaysian government to file an official protest against the violence.

Several demonstrations by NGOs and PAS have taken place in Kuala Lumpur over the matter.

Water sent to Gaza

Mahathir spoke today at an event to commemorate the sending of half a million 1.5-litre bottles of drinking water to Gaza, Palestine, through the Perdana Global Peace Foundation's Waqaf Water4Gaza programme.

According to the foundation chairperson Norian Mai, the water is not sent from Malaysia but from the surrounding areas, with the foundation footing the costs of US\$0.30 a bottle.

"It was our initial plan to send a team from Malaysia for this mission. However, we were advised not to proceed with our plan after a recent attack at the Rafah border, which took place two days before the team was supposed to leave," Norian said.

As such, he said, the water would be distributed by 30 trucks to 50 outlets, including mosques, hospitals, orphanages and churches, by the foundation's partners in Gaza.

Also present today was Gaza grand imam Omar MA Fora, who said that the water situation in Gaza has reached dire levels.

"Israel is stealing Gaza's underground water. Now the water in Gaza is as salty as sea water, and there is a real need for clean, potable water," Omar said in recording his appreciation for the assistance.

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