

UN okays Malaysian troops for Lebanon

The Sun - 21/9/2006

NEW YORK: The United Nations has approved the deployment of 360 Malaysian peacekeepers to Lebanon, Prime Minister Datuk Seri Abdullah Ahmad Badawi said here yesterday.

He said this was conveyed to him by UN Secretary-General Kofi Annan at a meeting on Tuesday.

Malaysia, the chairman of the Organisation of the Islamic Conference, had earlier planned to deploy 1,000 soldiers for the UN Interim Force in Lebanon (Unifil).

"They can be sent at any time. The Defence Ministry has been informed of the UN's decision," Abdullah said at a press conference on the sidelines of a working visit to New York where he delivered a speech at the 61st session of the UN General Assembly yesterday.

"We have said from the beginning that we are ready to send 1,000 peacekeepers under the UN banner. If there is a request for more troops, then we will deploy them," he said.

Israel had earlier resisted any plan by countries which do not recognise it, to send peacekeepers to Lebanon

to oversee a UN-brokered ceasefire, following a 34-day conflict between Israel and Hizbollah militants in southern Lebanon.

Unifil was created by the UN Security Council in 1978 to confirm Israeli withdrawal from Lebanon, restore international peace and security, and help the Lebanese government restore its effective authority in the area.

Following the July-August conflict, the Council decided that in addition to the original mandate, Unifil would, among other things, monitor the cessation of hostilities; accompany and support the Lebanese armed forces as they deploy throughout the south of Lebanon; and extend its assistance to help ensure civilians' access to humanitarian relief and the voluntary and safe return of displaced persons.

Abdullah thanked the UN, especially Annan for accepting Malaysia's request to send troops to Lebanon, where more than 1,000 people died during the hostilities.

"Annan expressed his gratitude to

Malaysia as we have never turned down the UN's requests for help in terms of deploying our soldiers to any part of the world," he said.

Abdullah also met with a group of American community leaders and non-governmental organisations to discuss the gap between Islam and the West.

The prime minister highlighted steps by Malaysia to forge understanding between people of different races and religions against the backdrop of tensions among societies in many other countries.

"They said Malaysia's experience could be studied and useful aspects adopted to suit the needs of countries wishing to resolve problems relating to race and religion," he said.

The prime minister also met former US President Bill Clinton.

Abdullah, who is also finance minister, said negotiations on the proposed Malaysia-US free trade agreement were ongoing although a third round of talks had been postponed. - Bernama