

'Malaysia has a duty to help Palestinians'

NST — 21/5/2006



MUSTAPHA KAMIL

Reporting from

SHARM EL SHEIKH, EGYPT

MALAYSIA has a moral duty to assist the Palestinian people, who are currently facing an economic blockade and to help them achieve peace.

Taking questions at the Council of 100 Leaders session at the World Economic Forum on the Middle East here yesterday, Prime Minister Datuk Seri Abdullah Ahmad Badawi said that parties with vested interests had interfered too much in the affairs of the Palestinians.

Palestinians, he noted, made their choice in recent elections but there was external interference in the form of pressure on the Hamas-led Government.

He said the Palestinians must be given the chance to chart their own course.

Abdullah was scheduled to meet Palestinian Authority President Mahmoud Abbas later. Aides expected them to discuss the aid cutbacks and economic crisis faced by the PA.

At the forum yesterday, Abdullah outlined the direct relation between terrorism and poverty and a lack of education, arguing that these were the greatest threats facing the global ummah.

Displaced and deprived Muslims made easy terror recruits and were targets for exploitation by people with personal and political agendas.

As chairman of the Organisation of the Islamic Conference countries, Abdullah said one of his initiatives had been to push economic issues to the forefront.

"Education is the best solution for this (problems faced by Muslim nations)," Abdullah said.

In the past, he said there was too much emphasis on political issues in the OIC.

Earlier, Abdullah said the gulf between Islam and the West had widened, as indicated by events in Iraq, Palestine, the unstable situation in Afghanistan and the potential showdown between the US and Iran over the latter's nuclear ambitions.

The rift was widening despite dialogues between Islam and the West.

He suggested that the time was ripe for both parties to move beyond the dialogue phase.

"The whole point of a dialogue is to create a framework for action that can be implemented to address the real problems causing the rift," Abdullah said.

A rabbi in the audience suggested that Malaysia take the lead in initiating a dialogue between the West and the Muslim world.



Abdullah taking a question from the floor at the OIC dialogue yesterday. — Bernama picture