

Greater unity 'a real challenge'

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PUTRAJAYA: The Non-Aligned Movement could do more for the reform of the United Nations if there were more unity among members, its outgoing chairman said yesterday.

"We are sometimes unable to use our numerical strength to its best advantage.

"This poses a real challenge to the chair of the movement," said Prime Minister Datuk Seri Abdullah Ahmad Badawi.

He said it was crucial for members to learn how to balance national and collective interests.

"We now have to contend with a plethora of differing interests and conflicting loyalties among ourselves. This is because we also belong to other international, regional and sub-regional organisations.

"All this has an impact on the unity, cohesion and solidarity within the movement," he said in his keynote address at the opening of the NAM Co-ordinating Bureau Ministerial Meeting yesterday. Over 70 foreign ministers and deputy ministers of NAM countries are attending the preparatory meeting to set the agenda for the upcoming NAM Summit for Heads of State and Government in Havana, Cuba.

Abdullah said while it was commendable that NAM was generally united on "broad matters of principle", it had not always been able to leverage on its numerical strength because of different interests.

"This poses a real challenge to the chair of the movement. We could have made a better impact on the reform and restructuring of the United Nations... but we did less than we could have."

NAM comprises the majority of the world's poor and developing countries, and is the largest grouping of countries within the United Nations' General Assembly. Among the movement's goals are the reform and restructuring of the United Nations to be an equitable platform for poorer countries to voice their concerns and seek solutions from the international community, and to protect and promote multilateral decision-making as the way to solve global issues.

In his speech, Abdullah also outlined NAM's position on various issues:

- On Iraq, he said a complete ceasefire was necessary and all the factions and ethnic groups in the country must be helped to form a united government. Only this would pave the way for foreign forces to leave Iraq.
- On Palestine, the new Hamas-led Government must be engaged diplomatically to respect the democratic right of Palestinians who voted the party in. The Palestinian people must also not be deprived of aid and financial assistance to give legitimacy to their Government.
- On nuclear research and Iran, NAM wants to see the issue settled through diplomacy even while it recognised Iran's right to develop such technology for peaceful purposes.

"Allowing Israel to develop nuclear weapons with impunity — which it does not deny — while

others in the region are prohibited from doing so, is a blatant case of double standards," he said.

Earlier, Abdullah asked all present in the hall to observe a moment of silence and prayer for the more than 5,000 people who died in Yogyakarta's earthquake on Saturday.

He conveyed the movement's condolences to Indonesian Foreign Minister Dr Hassan Wirayuda, who was among the delegates.

Source: www.nst.com.my