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# PM: Give priority to resolving Palestinian issue

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**KUALA LUMPUR:** Malaysia believes the Israeli-Palestinian conflict remains the core issue that perpetuates tensions between the West and the Muslim world.

Prime Minister Datuk Seri Abdullah Ahmad Badawi said as such, any effort to bridge the gap between the West and the Islamic world must give priority to the resolution of the Palestinian problem.

"Ignoring the hard facts in the Palestine issue will be clearly denying the truth and bring with it the failure in finding a solution to the clash of civilisations facing us," he said in his message in conjunction with the International Day of Solidarity with the Palestinian People.

Abdullah's message was delivered by Deputy Foreign Minister Datuk Joseph Salang at the event organised by the Institute of Diplomacy and Foreign Relations.

The Solidarity Day was designated by the United Nations General Assembly in 1977 as an occasion to remember the sufferings of the Palestinians and to stress the necessity of achieving a just solution to their cause based on the principle of the right to self-determination and to end the Israeli occupation leading to the establishment of an independent Palestinian state with East Jerusalem as its capital.

In his message, Abdullah also emphasised that much of the violence and militancy in the Middle East as well as terrorism would begin to subside if the central issue of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict was resolved.

Due to lack of honest brokers towards peace, the Palestine issue had manifested through the past 40 years into the single most important factor fuelling Muslim anger towards Israel and the West,

he said.

Abdullah said it was imperative that Tel Aviv abide by all the United Nations resolutions and withdraw to its pre-1967 borders.

"There must be sincerity on both sides to find a comprehensive, just and durable solution to the crisis. The window of opportunity available (for peace) should not be missed as it would have serious implications not only for the Middle East, but also the world at large, if it continues to be kept in abeyance," said Abdullah who is also chairman of the 57-member Organisation of the Islamic Conference.

The prime minister, however, said that even in the midst of trying to get both sides to negotiate with each other, Israel continued with its aggression in the West Bank and Gaza.

"We believe any form of violence, even on the pretext of en-

suring security, will not contribute towards positive developments of the peace process, but rather result in additional violence as reprisals."

The prime minister said Kuala Lumpur was also concerned with the deteriorating humanitarian situation among Palestinians, particularly the people in Gaza.

"Although the decision by the West to resume aid to the Palestinians was welcomed, the decision to resume aid should not be discriminatory and based on political affiliation, but rather out of humanity and concern for human dignity."

Abdullah also stressed the importance of the return of Palestinian refugees to both Israel and the new Palestinian state to be established.

"In this connection, Palestinians unable to return should then be fairly compensated."