

# War is a crime

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by Juana Jaafar

THE famous picture of the hooded guy tortured in Abu Ghraib has been appearing in print advertisements promoting a war crimes conference and exhibition to be organised by the Perdana Global Peace Organisation (PGPO). The torture victim is reportedly in town and will be addressing the conference in Kuala Lumpur next month, along with numerous other speakers from all over the world.

Like their previous forums, which also showcased internationally renowned personalities, the organisation can expect a good response for the event. There are many of us who are genuinely interested in international affairs, particularly the Middle East crisis and nuclear proliferation. They include academics, activists, government personnel as well as regular members of society who simply want to learn more about current issues from experts in the field.

University students, especially in related disciplines, should look forward to the event because it is not often that we have public conferences featuring international speakers. These students should take the opportunity to participate and gain exposure on the different perspectives offered by say, a former UN Secretary-General, an American Congresswoman or indeed, an Abu Ghraib detainee.

Some believe it would be unlike Malaysian students to take the initiative to participate individually, rather would be more comfortable going in groups. Here, the onus is on the respective colleges and universities to encourage, in fact organise, their students to attend such conferences. Naturally, it is very expensive to invite international speakers to present on campus,

but here is an opportunity to see a whole line-up of them in one sitting without charge.

The press too must be excited about the upcoming event. However, one wonders if they would be interested in the substance of the conference or just the Chairman of the event - Tun Dr Mahathir Mohamad. One cannot help but to anticipate the local press trying to *cucuk* (instigate) Dr M for sizzling statements concerning local politics. Foreign media on the other hand, may prefer to fish for statements that can be generalised as anti-West.

Looking at the conference agenda, one can easily assume that it will be an America-bashing session. Then again, in discussing war, invasion, and occupation in the post-colonial age, it is inevitable that the role of the US, Israel and the "coalition of the willing" are critiqued.

However, let us not be so preoccupied with these states that we downplay other threats such as the rift between the nuclear states India and Pakistan. We should also be concerned about the destabilisation of Africa due to civil wars as well as totalitarian and military governments. And while we object to the discriminatory Euro-American policy on Iran and North Korea, we should be cautious not to suggest support for latter's nuclear ambitions.

Developing nuclear energy is dangerous and history has shown us the devastating consequences of nuclear radiation in Chernobyl. It does not matter whether it is developed by so-called "civilised"

states, nor does it matter if it is developed for military or civilian use. Even the slightest accident can cause nuclear radiation to devastate entire communities for generations. One wonders then why any society would encourage their government to pursue development of nuclear energy.

Nevertheless, one must acknowledge that the effort by

Perdana Global Peace Organisation in initiating an international movement to criminalise war is timely and urgent. We live in a time of the "pre-emptive strike" and where military technology is advanced enough to destruct whole countries within minutes.

One can imagine sceptics doubting the United Nations would respond to this

movement. Here is where we, the world civil society, come in. Collectively, we can play an active role in urging our governments to push for a United Nations resolution to criminalise war. But it is equally important that we also endorse the international call for reform of the Security Council, which is currently dominated by five states with veto power.

The call of the people, by right, should resonate in the United Nations through the elected governments that represent us there. The support of world governments for a UN resolution to criminalise war, following the democratisation of the Security Council, will allow for legitimate international effort of regulation and enforcement.

Is this really an impossible cause? Well, that was probably what many once thought of the women's suffrage and Gay peace movements. But see how far they have progressed.



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