

PM calls for global green body
New Straits Times
October 13, 2011
By Rozanna Latiff

KUALA LUMPUR: Malaysia has called for the creation of a World Environment Organisation (WEO) to anchor global efforts to protect the environment.

Prime Minister Datuk Seri Najib Razak said yesterday existing systems to address the challenges of environmental sustainability had become too complicated, preventing countries, especially developing ones, from participating effectively.

"Between 1992 and 2007, the 18 major multilateral environmental agreements alone convened some 540 meetings, which produced more than 5,000 decisions that countries are supposed to act upon through national efforts.

"The only countries that can comply with the system are the richest countries, while developing nations have become disenfranchised," he said at the opening of the first preparatory meeting, world congress on justice, governance and law for environmental sustainability here.

His speech was read by Minister in the Prime Minister's Department Datuk Seri Mohamed Nazri Abdul Aziz.

Najib said a body like the WEO could facilitate the participation of developing countries in a more realistic and meaningful way.

"Unlike the World Trade Organisation, which is regulatory and sets standards, the proposed environmental body should be consultative and facilitative to assist countries to meet global commitments derived from mutual agreements."

The two-day meeting, organised by the United Nations Environment Programme, was attended by 34 judges and legal experts from 19 countries to discuss and exchange ideas on the world's law, justice and governance systems, and environmental sustainability.

The meeting serves as a lead-up to the world congress on justice, governance and law for environmental sustainability to be held from June 1- 3 next year in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, just before the United Nations conference on sustainable development (UNCSD 2012 -- the Rio+20 Conference).

Najib said the congress provided a timely opportunity to examine and decide on the implementation of contemporary norms and principles of justice, governance and law in the area of environmental sustainability.

"The congress is a unique opportunity to engage in the Rio+20 debates on governance and to become an active participant, especially for developing countries, with proposals matching our needs for development.

"This preparatory meeting is particularly important because it will give (us) the chance to lay the foundations for the deliberations that will be made."

UNEP environmental law and conventions division director Dr Bakary Kante said Najib's call for a WEO was a major statement of leadership.

"To my knowledge, this is the first time a leader has taken the advanced and progressive position in calling for a World Environment Organisation.

"The prime minister has understood how important environmental protection is for the future of this country and the world."

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