

“Make War a Crime”: Bring these war criminals to trial

The Kuala Lumpur initiative to criminalize war

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KUALA LUMPUR: The international community has failed to charge leaders who went to war to solve problems.

“The criminals have not been questioned or tried,” said former prime minister Tun Dr Mahathir Mohamad ahead of the War Criminal Conference and Exhibition from Wednesday to Saturday at the Putra World Trade Centre here.

The conference is hosted by Perdana Global Peace Organisation and the Kuala Lumpur Foundation to Criminalise War.

Dr Mahathir will deliver a keynote address on the opening day. Other speakers are British member of parliament George Galloway, former US congresswoman Cynthia McKinney, former United Nations assistant secretaries-general Hans Von Sponeck and Dennis Halliday and anti-war economist Professor Michel Chossudovsky.

Dr Mahathir, the founder of the organisation, said: “This conference is part of efforts to make war a crime.”

The US-led war on terror eight years ago resulted in the invasion of Iraq and Afghanistan. More than 100,000 people have died in Iraq, and the death toll in Afghanistan is estimated to be more than 50,000.

A War Crimes Commission and Tribunal will convene on Friday and Saturday to hear the testimonies of victims of torture following the invasion of Iraq.

The leaders and principle players behind the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan will be on trial.

“We will hear (testimonies) of seven people who have been affected by the war in Iraq. Some have been tortured and had suffered in prison. They will be with us to tell their stories. Their stories must be told.”

Dr Mahathir said the people responsible for these wars would be tried in absentia.

“Governments have done this before. This is not something unheard of.”

In some countries, said Dr Mahathir, prominent citizens had set up such tribunals because governments had no interest in doing it.

“In England, they are bringing up a case against (former British prime minister) Tony Blair.”

The exhibition, being held concurrently with the conference, will be on the carnage of war and the torture committed by the forces that invaded Iraq. “The exhibition will show the brutality and inhumanity of war.”

Dr Mahathir said people had fought wars to solve their problems for thousands of years, even to the extent of committing genocide.

“(Now) we claim that we are civilised. So civilised that in some countries, the death penalty has been abolished.

“A lot of people have been pressing Malaysia to abolish the death penalty as well. Their belief is that everybody has a right to life. They claim to be humane, yet at the same time, they have no compunction about going to war.”

Dr Mahathir said that if two parties had a problem, they could sit down to solve it, or refer the problem to a third party.

One suggestion which Perdana Global Peace Organisation had made was to make all prospective people’s representatives — be they congressmen, presidents, members of parliament or prime ministers — to take an oath that they would not use war as a way to settle disputes.

He said that just like slavery, people would one day come to their senses and realise that war was wrong.

“In the past, slavery was accepted. But when public opinion shifted, things began to change.”

Dr Mahathir said that one could look at history, and the struggle of British politician William Wilberforce, one of the leaders of the movement to abolish the slave trade in the 19th century.

“He struggled to stop the slave trade over 20 years. In the end, it wasn’t just the slave trade that had been abolished, but people’s conscience, the small voice inside everyone’s heart changed.

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