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Speech
- SSS with Indonesian women and children -
ictims of brutalities and atrocities,
including organised mass gang-rapes"
***by* Lim Kit Siang**

(Penang, *Wednesday*): *Tonight is a historic meeting, because it is the first meeting of Malaysians whether in Penang or throughout the country to show their concern, care and support for the Indonesian women and children who are victims of brutalities and atrocities, including organised mass gang-rapes, during the Indonesian turmoils in May this year and to express their outrage and condemnation of such bestiality and crimes against humanity.

Penang prides itself in the motto "Penang Leads", but we in Penang must lead not just in shouting slogans but in action and deed. Let Penang Lead not only being the first in the country to hold a "Sympathy, Support and Solidarity (SSS) with Indonesian women and children - victims of brutalities and atrocities, including organised mass gang-rapes" forum but in forming a Penang Support Group for the Indonesian children and victims to demand justice for them

Asiaweek (July 24, 1998) estimated that the atrocities and brutalities committed in Indonesia in May caused "1,188 people dead, as many as 468 women raped, and 40 malls, 2,470 shophouses and 1,119 cars looted or destroyed".

The issue of the atrocities and brutalities in Indonesia transcends race, religion, political beliefs or even nationalities as they violate the fundamental rights of human beings to be treated as human beings - with respect and dignity.

This forum of "SSS with Indonesian women and children" is not a forum against the Malaysian Government and the Prime Minister, Datuk Seri Dr. Mahthir Mohamad or even a forum against the Indonesian Government and President Habibie. It is a forum to help the Indonesian President and Government to take firm action against beasts in human form who are prepared to perpetrate the most unspeakable atrocities and brutalities against innocent women and children.

Yesterday, Mahathir named the DAP and the Chinese press and said that they should not use Malaysia to attack Indonesia on their internal problems.

Mahathir has been most unfair to the Chinese Press and the DAP, as neither the Chinese Press nor the DAP had condemned the Indonesian Government or the Indonesian nation for the atrocities and brutalities in Indonesia.

What was condemned, and rightly so, are the atrocities, brutalities and crimes against humanity, like the organised mass gang-rape of women and children - which have no place in a civilized society whether in Indonesia or in any other country.

Mahathir is wrong when he said that the brutalities and atrocities against women and children in Indonesia are "internal affairs" of Indonesia. Mahathir had rightly rejected such a similar argument when he led an international chorus to condemn brutalities, atrocities and genocide by Serbs against the Bosnians, for in the global civil society, no country has the sovereign right to claim that it must be allowed undisturbed in its "internal affairs" to commit crimes against humanity whether against its own people or foreigners.

The Malaysian Government had been one of the loudest voices in the international community against the genocide and crimes against humanity in Bosnia, which had been strongly supported by the DAP.

Just as Malaysia became the custodian of world conscience in the crimes against humanity perpetrated by the Serbs against the Bosnians, because it was a human rights issue and not because it affected the Muslims, similarly Malaysia must be the custodian of world conscience in the atrocities and organised mass gang rapes perpetrated against innocent women and children in Indonesia because they are human beings and not because they are mostly ethnic Chinese.

In speaking up against the atrocities and brutalities in Indonesia, nobody is suggesting that Malaysia adopt unfriendly and hostile attitude towards Indonesia. In fact, DAP wants Malaysia and Indonesia to maintain and even enhance the best of neighbourly relations as both are ASEAN members. Good neighbourly policy, however, does not mean we should close the eyes, shut our ears and stifle our conscience to the gross brutalities and atrocities committed against women and children in Indonesia, especially when they are organised mass gang-rapes.

The DAP had fully supported the Malaysian Government when it spoke loud and clear and started a campaign in the international community against the genocide and crimes against humanity in Bosnia, and the DAP will give equally strong support to the government in an international campaign against the brutalities, atrocities and crimes against humanity in Indonesia so that we can be consistent in our international positions.

The ASEAN Foreign Ministers are meeting in Manila later this week and I call on the ASEAN Ministerial Meeting to place the subject of brutalities and atrocities against women and children in Indonesia top on its agenda. We must not allow the United States and Europe the monopoly of concern about the atrocities and brutalities perpetrated against women and children in Indonesia. Asians must show the United States and the West that our concern about fundamental human rights and human dignity are no less than theirs.

Malaysia has declared full support for the establishment of the International Criminal Court last week which turned a 50-year dream for a permanent war crimes tribunal into reality although the United States Government had expressed its opposition.

The ICC, which will sit in The Hague, is complementary to national legal jurisdictions. It will have jurisdiction over four crimes - crime of genocide; crime against humanity; war crimes; and crime of aggression.

A crime against humanity implies "part of a widespread or systematic attack directed against any civilian population, with knowledge of the attack." Among these crimes are enslavement, torture, rape, forced pregnancy and forced sterilisation.

What happened in Indonesia in May, the gang rapes and mass slaughters, were clearly crimes against humanity.

It would make a mockery of Malaysia's support for the establishment of the ICC if Malaysia is not prepared to condemn crimes against humanity such as the organised mass gang rapes in Indonesia - which will yield the moral high ground to the United States in giving it a strong reason to justify its opposition to the establishment of the ICC, viz. the double-standards of Asian countries in condemning crimes against humanity involving the West but refusing to do so when they happen in Asian countries, as in Indonesia.

I therefore call on the ASEAN Ministerial Meeting in Manila to send a signal to the world that ASEAN is responsible and mature enough to address issues like the atrocities, brutalities and crimes against humanity perpetrated against women and children in Indonesia.

(22/7/98)

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