



Organisation Of The Islamic Conference

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Statement by the OIC Secretary General Ekmeleddin Ihsanoglu at the UNESCO General Conference, Paris

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Mr. Chairman,
Hon'ble Ministers
Director General of the UNESCO
Distinguished Delegates,

It a matter of great pleasure for me to address this esteemed General Conference and share some of my thoughts and ideas with you.

At the outset, I would like to pay tribute to Mr. Matsuura and wish him all the best in his future life. Let me also take this opportunity to congratulate and welcome Madam Irina Bokova as the Director General-elect. We witnessed a democratic and transparent election process and the race is now over. Now we have a new Director General and we should all give our utmost support to her to enable her to lead the UNESCO to achieve its lofty and challenging objectives and tasks. I am confident that the wisdom and experience she brings would enrich and enhance the performance, as well as the image of the UNESCO. She can count on our cooperation.

Mr. Chairman
Excellencies,

When it celebrates its 40th Anniversary, the OIC, inspired and mandated by its new Charter and its The Year Program of Action, firmly stands for promotion of moderation and tolerance. Engagement and partnership for the entrenchment of a worldwide culture of peace is our new language. We condemn all forms of fanaticism, extremism and bigotry and reject all attempts to justify the abhorrent phenomenon of terrorism. Our new vision emphasizes the importance of inter-civilizational and interfaith dialogue based on mutual respect and equality among the interlocutors. We are committed to upholding cultural and religious diversity through engagement and dialogue. The OIC also stands to defend the respect for human rights, endeavors to promote good governance, to widen political participation, to establish the rule of law and to ensure transparency and accountability. A great deal of the efforts of the OIC is directed towards human development in the socio-economic spheres through concrete and practical programmes, including poverty alleviation, education, science and technology, and empowering woman and elevating her status. We established a new Department to providing humanitarian assistance to natural and man made disaster affected countries. Building capacity for and networking with civil society is now an important aspect for us. Fighting polio and malaria has become our flagship projects in fighting pandemic diseases. We are working towards raising the quality and standards of the universities and scientific institutions in the OIC member states.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

We have recently been endeavoring hard for reconciliation at two levels, between the Muslim World and the West and between Islam and Christianity. We are trying to contribute to fostering an objective understanding regarding the role of Islam and Muslims in the formation of European identity. In all these efforts, we believe that today's human civilization is one civilization with a multitude of tributaries and branches. We are extending our hand of cooperation to all in order to overcome the prejudices that divide us, and eradicate the stereotypes which stoke the enmity among nations and peoples. We look forward to the day when we could together build a world free from hostilities and bigotries, a world where peace, concord and friendship prevail, where cooperation, progress and prosperity thrive, and where humanity will become the driving force which inspires our minds and deeds. UNESCO has enormous potential to make a visible contribution in all these efforts and now it is time to utilize this potential.

Excellencies ,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

We believe that the rising and unfortunate trend of intolerance, discrimination, xenophobia and stereotyping targeting Muslims must be recognized and arrested. We are concerned with this trend and having difficulty in understanding the positions of some quarters who are negating even the very existence of this phenomenon. We have proved our good will and sincerity in upholding the freedom of speech last week at the UN Human Rights Council. We exhibited our goodwill also by contributing to the attainment of consensus at Durban II Review Conference. Now we are looking forward to the deepening of the mutual understanding regarding our mutual concerns. As a matter of fact, our concerted efforts and commitment to raising global awareness against Islamophobia and its related implications appear to have made an impact. We see encouraging responses from our partners in the west to combat this common threat to all cultures and civilizations.

Contributing to the creation of the necessary conditions, by identifying and tackling the root causes of acts of incitement to racial and religious hatred, including Islamophobia, Christianophobia and Anti-Semitism should be one of the main objectives of the General Conference. Otherwise we all know that intolerance, hatred and discrimination on racial or religious grounds might lead the humanity to a point where global peace, security and stability would be seriously undermined. We have chilling examples of the danger in the recent history.

Mr. Chairman,
Excellencies ,
Distinguished participants,

One of the most important developments at the OIC that I would like to share with this august gathering is the establishment of an independent Permanent Commission on Human Rights. Under the new Charter of the OIC and in terms of the relevant resolution of the Council of Foreign Minister, the statute of the Commission will be finalized soon.

We accord high priority to development and empowerment of women and to strengthen the family institution. The OIC Plan of Action for Advancement of Women (OPAW) was adopted in Cairo last year at the second OIC Ministerial meeting on Women. The Plan constitutes a comprehensive strategy for improving the situation of women in Member States in the political, economic, social and cultural spheres. Its implementation will be monitored by a Women Centre to be established in Cairo.

Excellencies,
Distinguished participants,

I would like to avail this opportunity to underscore our serious concerns over the grave threats posed to centuries old cultural and archeological heritage sites in many parts of the world. Preservation Islamic cultural heritage all around the world is particularly an important priority for the OIC. However, the threat caused by excavation works being carried out around the Holy Al-Aqsa Mosque in Jerusalem constitutes a very special and sensitive issue for the OIC member states and 1.5 billion Muslims of the world.

The occupying power continues its illegal acts in the Palestinian occupied territories, particularly in East Jerusalem, altering the historical and cultural character aiming at judaizing the old city. This General Conference must take concrete steps to ensure protection of the Islamic and Christian holy places in particularly the Al-Aqsa Mosque. I strongly feel that the UN and UNESCO must adopt a binding resolution that would guarantee against any excavation in the Al Aqsa Mosque area. The destruction of cultural heritage as a result of the excavations would be disastrous and irreparable loss for all humankind.

While appreciating the role of UNESCO, we believe there is need to use more pressure on Israel-the occupying power-to stop all provocative and illegal measures which bear harmful consequences in terms of protection of important heritage sites in the holy land.

The situation of the Palestinian education institutions in the Occupied East Jerusalem is also a great concern for us. Deprivation from education because of the illegal practices of the occupying force is unacceptable and should not be allowed.

I also take this opportunity for reiterating OIC's full support to the admission of the State of Palestine in UNESCO.

Mr. Chairman
Excellencies,

The world we live in is one of gross and unequal discrepancies. Only a part of the global population lives in relative comfort with access to social amenities and privileges. An overwhelmingly large portion numbering well over a billion languish in conditions of abject poverty. They simply lack adequate access to basic education, health care, nutrition and recreational facilities. We have to take a holistic approach to address the issue. We must put more emphasis on pooling resources to ensure that none are deprived of what is needed to lead a decent human life. The scope and quality of education must be non-discriminatory. It should cover all aspects of cultural diversity and harmonious coexistence. In this so called global village, we cannot allow a neglect of rights to the children, the youths and the women

who constitute the fabric of a healthy society. Such neglect would lend space to the very threats we want to address.

Mr. Chairman,

The issue of environment is intimately interlinked with sustainable development and our overall welfare. The wealthier countries have so long remained shy of the concerns of the environmentalists of global warming and climate changes. The effects of this indifference are now being felt. The melting of the ice cap and the rise of the sea level if allowed to go unhindered will wipe away many nations from the face of the earth. We can easily visualize the horrendous effect of displacement of millions people as a result of the rise of the sea level and the destabilizing consequences globally. I hope the upcoming meeting of world leaders in Copenhagen in December this year will demonstrate a strong political will to deal with the issue with all seriousness and adopt pragmatic measures to stem global warming.

Mr. Chairman

At no time in human history has cultural diversity been in closer proximity as in the present days when distances have been minimized through an explosion of feats in information and communication technology. It offers to us our best opportunity to use it to our advantage in forging greater understanding and appreciation of diversity. Let us not squander it. Let us pull our common resources and our common efforts to give the UNESCO a human face to serve the mankind better in terms of bequeathing a heritage of peace, prosperity and security to the future generations.

It has been a matter of great satisfaction and inspiration for us to have the support of the UNESCO in our efforts and activities. This support has been particularly valuable with regard to a number of projects conducted by IRCICA and ISESCO- two institutions working as a part of the OIC system. These institutions and the OIC General Secretariat wish to deepen ties of cooperation and partnership with UNESCO in all relevant areas.

Let me conclude by wishing this General Conference successful deliberations under your wise stewardship.

I thank you.

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