

SPEECH OF H.E. AMBASSADOR SAAD EDDINE TAIB, ADVISER TO THE SECRETARY GENERAL, ON THE OIC INTER-INSTITUTIONAL FORUM ON UNIVERSAL SHARED VALUES: CHALLENGES & NEW PARADIGMS TO COMMEMORATE THE 60TH ANNIVERSARY OF THE UNIVERSAL DECLARATION OF HUMAN RIGHTS, GENEVA: 19 DECEMBER 2008.

Mr. Moderator,
Excellencies,
Ladies and gentlemen,

I feel deeply honoured and privileged to address this first session of the “OIC Inter-institutional forum on universal shared values/Human Rights and cultural diversity challenges and perspective”. Human Rights and diversity claim a distinct importance in today’s public discourse, as the world goes through a defining moment of its effort aimed at the restoration of harmony, peace and security to international relations. The OIC is doing its full share in these efforts.

It is very much comforting that the Islamic Religion is distinguished from other previous religions and traditions by having an elaborate and clear code for Human Rights. Islam has provided these rights with legal divine framework, by bestowing on them binding and inviolable character, as a part of Islamic teaching.

The sources of Islamic Sharia are replete with texts which recall the equality of human beings regardless of their race, colour, gender, belief or economic or social position. Justice is the absolute standard and the basis of government. It calls for tolerance, compassion, mercy, and the respect of the dignity of human beings.

It is on this premise that the OIC has endeavored to promoting inter-cultural understanding between all peoples, on the ground that the Muslim Ummah itself is a multi-cultural one grouping a diversity of peoples with multiple origins, races and languages. The OIC always worked to consolidate, respect and support of human rights. It adopted many resolutions, throughout the years, intent on the full respect of human rights in their Islamic conception as well as on the grounds that these rights are universal

and global Human Rights occupy a center stage in Islamic teaching. The Islamic science and philosophy of the Kalam Ilamul Kalam and the viewpoints of Matazila stand witness to this position. They linked creed with reason while discarding all kinds of dogmatic fixation to emphasize the humane responsibility and reassert the principle of justice for all, as well the freedom in social behaviour.

Professor Marshall Hodgson in his book “rethinking world history” published in Cambridge in 1997, confirm that the Muslim world “has known its humanistic moment”, and referred to the fact that in the sixteen century “humanity” was almost on the brink of being dominated by Islam.

Excellencies, ladies & gentlemen,

Diversity and pluralism are the benchmark of Islam, they are respected as a part of the manifestation of diversity in nature, creature and the cosmos. They are a fact of today’s global village. They represent an integral part of this century’s prevalent core values. In today’s world of fast communication, incredible mobility, every thing is interconnected. They are becoming the dominant factor in all aspect of life and in all societies, no matter how far, remote or isolated. Today’s societies could only be built on mutual respect, among cultures, races and beliefs, with tolerance compassion and generosity. This peaceful coexistence is a result of real need and necessity brought about by the dynamics that govern and move the societies in the 21 century. The scope of this historic trend is destined to grow and increase resulting in a new landscape of the worlds population.

As diversity and plurality are deeply rooted in culture, religion, and values, there is a strong need to strengthen and fortify the power of moral and spiritual forces, to safeguard the values of goodness, virtue and high ethics.

Unfortunately the rift between material world and spiritual values grows deeper by the day, and many in the advanced countries find themselves in spiritual void as

western civilization seems to have left behind its religions, beliefs and sacred texts. The political sphere in the west has almost ceased to be linked to the religious sphere, and consequently the morality or spirituality in the west has experienced a sharp decline.

The contrary is taking place in the Muslim world, where religion is witnessing a rapid revival on many fronts varying between moderate tendencies and extremist ones. This revival covers most of the countries and lands of Islam, and is creeping to august Muslim minorities in the west.

The new presence of Muslims in the western courtyard has started to disturb many circles in Europe, and the phenomenon of Islamophobia has become an overwhelming wave of aversion and hatred targeting Muslims. It seems that Europe has started to forget about its core values of embracing diversity, tolerance and recognition of the other. The situation had a turn to the worse in the last few years when a section of officials started to join the media in using derogatory expressions against Islam, and when Muslim living in the west became victims of discriminating bigotry, harassment and mental and physical abuse.

But the negative stereotyping of Islam and Muslim took a wider scope, because Islamophobia is an indiscriminate prejudice that tarnishes everything and every where it touches. Moreover it does not respect the individual and tend to generalize its venom to hurt all Muslims. This generalization tantamount to collective punishment and Muslim, the world over, started to feel the brunt of this dehumanization of mass-destruction, which may result in incalculable consequences. It goes without saying that all the aforesaid is a blatant affront to human rights and should be outlawed. Despite all these mental and physical abuses, many circles in the west still cast doubt on the relationship between the concept of human rights and the notion of the defamation of religion. They argue that defamation of religion is flawed from the human right view point.

This assertion might have some degree of acceptance if the notion of defamation is limited to the realm of religion per se as an abstract idea, which can legally suffer

criticism or attack and even mockery. What is happening is an orchestrated assault of hate speech and incitement for discrimination.

The reality of today's practices of Islamophobia, represent a completely different story. The cunning, and deceitful methods used in this campaign of defamation of Islam demonstrate a dishonest intellectual slight of hand which marks the true objective and purpose of Islamophobia. The trickery tool which is being exploited to cover up and conceal the real aim is the freedom of expression, considered sacrosanct, albeit it is a right linked with responsibility.

Brushing aside this responsibility, through the connivance of the officials, and flouting the laws, the assault on Islam, or the defamation of Islam take the shape of hate mongering, negative stereotyping, mean campaign of discriminations which engulf Islam and all its adherents by their hundreds of millions. In so doing, the freedom of expression enjoyed by hate mongers, inflicts a deep psychological damage to Muslims, who are depicted as an outcast, dehumanized, and reduced to people coming from a "lesser" world, and therefore, cannot be assimilated to the values of the "greater world".

Islamophobia and the untenable prejudices and hatred, seek to destroy Islamic cultures, and civilization. Belonging to a culture and civilization is an essential component of self identity, self worth and self confidence. When you demonize one's culture, you deny his self identity and belittle his self worth and his self confidence.

All of us know that identity is very essential to human beings. It gives them anchor, root and sense of belonging. It help people in their present and lead them to the future when one scorn your identity and make a mockery of it he disdains your root, premise your sense of belonging self confidence, your honour, dignity and above all your essential human rights.

Sadly, we still hear voices claiming that defamation of religion or culture has nothing to do with human rights: as if human right has nothing to do with human

suffering or losing one's honour and dignity. Beside this side of moral considerations, we find that this demoralized victim stands to suffer from isolation and discrimination as a pariah. The victims of Islamophobia will be discriminated against in finding a job, in finding a place to live, even his physical safety is threaten as a result of what he suffered. Some argue that all these acts of dehumanization which tarnish his honour, reputation and demonize his identity have nothing to do with human rights, as if the thrust of human rights are limited to be able to vote. When we look at the universal declaration of human rights we see clearly in article 7 for example, a stipulation which says that: "all are entitled to equal protection against any discrimination – in violation of this declaration and against any incitement to such discrimination."

Article 12 stipulates: "No one shall be subjected in to attack upon his honour and reputation."

Article 18 stipulates: thatevery one has the right to manifest his religion or belief in teaching, practice, warship and observance.

Article 22 stipulates: Everyone has the right to "economic, social and cultural rights indispensable for his dignity and the free development of his personality."

Article 29 stipulates: In the exercise of his rights and freedom, every one shall be subject only to such limitation as are determined by law solely for the purpose of securing, due recognition and respect for the rights and freedom of others and of meeting the just requirement of morality, public order and the general welfare in a democratic society.

Article 30 stipulates that: "Nothing in this declaration may be interpreted as implying for any state, group or person, any right to engage in any activity or to perform any act aimed at the destruction of any of the rights and freedom set forth herein."