

بِسْمِ اللّٰهِ الرَّحْمٰنِ الرَّحِیْمِ



SPEECH OF
HIS EXCELLENCY PROF. EKMELEDDIN IHSANOGLU
SECRETARY GENERAL OF THE ORGANIZATION OF THE
ISLAMIC CONFERENCE
AT THE
HIGH LEVEL MEETING OF THE GENERAL ASSEMBLY
ON INTER-FAITH DIALOGUE
U.N. HEADQUARTERS – NEW YORK
12-13 NOVEMBER 2008

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Mr. President,
Your Majesty, Your Excellencies,
Distinguished Ladies and Gentlemen,

It is a distinct honour for me to participate in this High-Level meeting of the United Nations General Assembly proposed by the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia. I would like to thank His Excellency Mr. Miguel D'Escoto Brockmann, the President of the General Assembly, for convening this important meeting under the agenda item "Culture of Peace".

I would like, at the outset, to thank the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia for this very important initiative to discuss a matter of great relevance which portends potential challenges for world peace and security if left unchallenged.

Over the last two decades, the focus of world politics has shifted from political and ideological conflicts between the world's superpowers, to the so-called clash of cultures and religions.

It is in this atmosphere of disquieting uncertainty that we welcome wholeheartedly the timely and wise initiative of His Majesty, the Custodian of the Two Holy Mosques, King Abdullah of Saudi Arabia, which we regard as an affluent tributary to the global efforts being presently exerted to restore peace, harmony and congeniality. By the same token, we endorse this initiative and its related mechanism, which we believe will meet with the instant acceptance of all those who are keen to champion the prevalence of peaceful coexistence and cordial relations between the adherents of all religions of the world.

The prime objectives of this initiative is not to preach theological unity, but rather, to exchange knowledge and raise awareness of the common attributes of all religions and correct misconceptions in a quest to bring about peace, security and stability globally. It also calls for a focus on the commonalities among faiths and the promotion of global ethics. Its aim is not to make religions similar or identical, but to acknowledge the differences as serving the needs of peoples of different beliefs.

This initiative exhorts the international community to focus on the common denominators of religions, namely, "deep faith in God, lofty principles and moral and noble values." It seeks to vanquish hatred through love, bigotry through tolerance and vice and evil through virtue.

The OIC, in its quest to safeguard the spirit of dialogue among cultures proposed the initiative of dialogue among civilizations in 1998, as a civilizational response to the theories of the clash among civilizations. This idea was endorsed by the UN General Assembly, which set it in motion in 2001, resulting in a deep impact on global peace and security.

To date, the failure of the dialogue can be attributed to the lack of political will on the part of the stakeholders. We have had many meetings and declarations without any real implementation of our decisions. Likewise, we did not succeed in reaching out to the grassroots of society to convey to them the message of tolerance, compassion and peaceful coexistence.

The well-known theories of the clash of civilizations and its self-fulfilling prophesy seem to have been legitimized. The powerful tools of media are mobilized to invent a conceptual link between Islam and terror. Phrases like Muslim terrorists or Muslim terror have become common place. This portrayal, frequently propagated by the media and the misrepresentation of Islam and Muslims became the most persistent and virulent sources of the phenomenon of Islamophobia, resulting in prejudicial practices and incitement against all Muslims without any distinction. The result is that Islam, an Abrahamic religion, and one whose name means peace is being frequently associated with violence.

This state of affairs does not bode well for the concord and stability in international relations. It calls for immediate and concrete measures to be taken, in earnest, to stem these unfounded claims and tendencies.

I would like to stress at this juncture that tolerance was and still is the benchmark of Islam. Tolerance is borne out of the very nature of this global faith. Islam is not an exclusive or novel religion, but a part of the entire history of religion. It continues and confirms the previous scriptures. It has been tested through 1400 years and has proven to be the religion of peace, pluralism, and the acknowledgement of the other.

We in the OIC firmly believe that all religions have common core values and objectives. Over the last four decades, the OIC has worked to disseminate the imperative of the notion of dialogue among different cultures and civilizations. Based on this premise, we are of the view that that this initiative is the most important among previous initiatives. The Muslim World and the OIC fully endorse it and pin great hopes on its success.

The OIC and its specialized agencies are putting relentless efforts to disseminate tolerance, mercy, compassion and concord among Muslim populations throughout the world. In so doing, we are drawing on the ethical and moral resources embedded in the provisions of the OIC Charter and the OIC Ten Year Program of Action which was endorsed by the 3rd OIC Extraordinary Summit held under the initiative of the King Abdullah of Saudi Arabia in 2005. This program calls on Member States to spread correct ideas about Islam as a religion of moderation and tolerance. It also condemns extremism in all its forms and manifestations, while emphasizing inter-civilizational dialogue and inter-religious dialogue. It also underlines common values and denominators of religions.

As the sole official intergovernmental organization representing the Muslim world, the OIC firmly believes that the diversity of cultures and religions is an acknowledged and essential part of the world in which we live. This fact should be considered a source of major wealth on which to build a more human, just and harmonious world.

We believe that it is incumbent upon us all to do our utmost to educate ordinary people to conceive culture and civilization as a universal human heritage, to which all people have contributed, and which all people should help to share and enlarge. This conception is most relevant to our time, and its relevance is a condition for a worthwhile interfaith dialogue and inter-relationship leading to greater understanding, concord and harmony among all nations and ushering an era of reliable peace.

Thank You.