

بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمَنِ الرَّحِيمِ



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**SPEECH OF
H.E. PROF. EKMELEDDIN IHSANOGLU
OIC SECRETARY GENERAL AT
THE FIFTH OIC MINISTERIAL CONFERENCE ON
FOOD SECURITY AND AGRICULTURAL DEVELOPMENT**

**KHARTOUM, REPUBLIC OF SUDAN
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Bismillahi Arrahmani Rahim

**Your Excellency, President Omar Hassan Ahmad El-Bashir,
Honourable Ministers and Heads of Delegation,
Distinguished Delegates,
Ladies and Gentlemen,**

Assalamu Alaykun wa-Rahmatullahi wa-Barakatuhu

I am extremely delighted to address this august gathering of eminent policy makers and stakeholders on food security and agricultural development in OIC countries. Let me first and foremost express my sincere appreciation to His Excellency, President Omar Hassan Ahmad El-Bashir for his gracious support and patronage, which have greatly facilitated the excellent arrangements made for the convening of this very important meeting.

This Conference is the second economic gathering to be organized, under the high patronage of Sudan within the last one year. Last December, the Ministers of Transportation of the thirteen member- states of the OIC met here in Khartoum and agreed on modalities for the implementation of the Dakar-Port Sudan Railway project, which holds the promise of reactivating the traditional East-West African transit link to the other parts of the Arab and Asian sub-regions of the Islamic world. Sudan's support for these OIC activities indicates clearly the resolve of the President, Government and people of the Sudan to encourage the current measures towards active economic cooperation and regional integration among the OIC Member States.

Allow me also to express my sincere appreciation to the Government of the Islamic Republic of Iran, the outgoing Chairman of the Fourth OIC Ministerial Conference, for its noble effort in drawing up the agenda on agriculture and food security in the OIC Member States.

I am happy to emphasize that, since the adoption of the Ten Year Programme of Action at the 3rd Extra-Ordinary Summit Conference in Makkah

EI-Mukarammah in 2005, the issue of poverty alleviation and the improvement of the living standards of low-income segments of the population in OIC countries have assumed primacy of place on the OIC economic cooperation agenda. In light of the global mobilization to cope with the devastating effects arising out of the increasing numbers of hungry and deprived persons, the OIC leadership resolved to redouble efforts with a view to catering to the needs and requirements of the peoples of OIC Member States. The Resolution adopted by the 35th Islamic Council of Foreign Ministers held in Kampala, Uganda in 2008 called for the convening of a special Ministerial session to discuss the impact of the various global crises on food security in the OIC Member States.

Your Excellencies

Honourable Ministers

Distinguished Delegates

Agricultural development and food security are the backbone of the OIC activities in the area of poverty alleviation, capacity building and socio-economic expansion.

Agriculture provides employment opportunities for over 573 million people, that is to say 40.8% of the total OIC population. Given the fact that more than 771 million persons in the OIC countries live in rural areas, and that agriculture accounts for 11.5% of the Gross Domestic Product of OIC countries, the objective of achieving rapid economic growth can best be achieved through increased emphasis on sustainable agricultural development.

Most OIC Member States, including those with extensive agricultural activity, are still considered as net food-deficient countries. 27 OIC countries recorded an agricultural index lower than the world average. The total value of OIC food imports in 2007 was US\$96.7 billion, representing 10.8% of world imports, while statistics also show that an average annual increase of US\$10 billion is recorded as food import deficit in OIC countries.

**Your Excellencies,
Honourable Ministers**

This Conference would need to examine the various consequences of the food deficit on the economies of OIC countries, in the light of the peculiar socio-economic challenges connected to this global phenomenon.

We must also find urgent solutions to the burden of mounting food import bills aggravated by international price volatility; the inadequate funding for crucial socio-economic infrastructures and services; water scarcity and soil degradation due to climate change; and food crises arising from political conflicts.

I am firmly convinced that the task before this Conference is of utmost urgency. I am glad to note that a series of activities have taken place at both experts and senior officials levels to elaborate the way forward on addressing the chronic problem of food and nutrition insecurity in OIC countries.

The three recent meetings held on Food Security in Jeddah, Saudi Arabia, in May 2010, and in Antalya and Izmir, Turkey in last September respectively have set the tone for the proceedings of this important session. Equally setting the stage were the recommendations of the two brainstorming sessions held at the IDB Board of Governors meeting in Baku in June 2010 and the one held at the 26th Session of the COMCEC in Istanbul in October 2010.

Most significantly, all of the above mentioned events underscored among others the need for a comprehensive framework for agriculture, rural development and food security for OIC Member States, such that would embody identified programmes and projects in the critical sectors with time-lines and benchmarks and accompanied by lead countries, multilateral development institutions, and relevant regional and international organizations.

In the same vein, COMCEC, in cooperation with FAO, has established the Task Force on Food Security for mobilizing funding for implementing food security programmes in its member countries. The IDB in June 2008 launched a US\$1.5 billion Jeddah Declaration aimed at assisting the Least Developed Countries of the OIC to increase their agricultural production and create adequate stock of grains.

I must, therefore, submit that this Conference would need to give effect to the recommendations of these various events on food security and agricultural development as it adopts practical measures to address the consequences of food insecurity in OIC countries.

To achieve quick results, we must encourage national ownership of the food security processes, while we concert efforts in harmonizing trade and tariff policies in the interest of collective economic growth and development in our countries. Similarly, we need to work out a partnership arrangement between countries with natural agricultural endowments and fertile and arable land on the one hand and countries capable of providing necessary funding on the other, in order to address the chronic dearth of agricultural investment. Furthermore, our decision makers would need to consider scaling up their public expenditure in agriculture and rural development to stimulate investment. This meeting would need to address the issue of political will as we strive to translate the various resolutions to be taken at this meeting to concrete actions within the agreed timeframes.

I am glad to observe the overwhelming presence and active involvement of many OIC economic agencies at this Conference. While I wish to express our sincere thanks to them for their steadfast support for the recent meetings on agricultural development and food security, I wish to underscore the importance of adopting a multi-stakeholder approach to the elaboration, implementation and monitoring of our food security programmes.

To this end, I also wish to express our appreciation to those international organisations, which have been partnering with OIC on this issue. There is no doubt that the COMCEC Task Force on Food Security, with

active participation of FAO, IFAD and other OIC agencies can lend the much needed technical support for the realisation of our objectives.

**Your Excellency,
Honourable Ministers
Distinguished delegates**

As we chart this new course of dedicated action of promoting agriculture, rural development and food security, let me salute the tremendous effort of our senior officials and experts who have been working over the past two days to harmonize the various viewpoints and proposals on the theme of this Conference. I also salute our Honourable Ministers for their keen interest in ensuring that the outcome of our deliberations today would create a new momentum of action-oriented food security blueprint for the over-all interest of the Muslim Ummah.

I thank you all for your kind attention.