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***Report of the
Secretary General on Information Affair***

***Submitted to the
Fortieth Session of the Council of Foreign Ministers***

***Conakry, Republic of Guinea
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Fortieth Session of the Council of Foreign Ministers*

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The present report reviews the major issues related to information affairs at the General Secretariat of the Organization of Islamic Cooperation (OIC) and the efforts exerted and actions taken to implement the resolutions adopted by the 9th Session of the Islamic Conference of Information Ministers (ICIM) held in Libreville, Republic of Gabon, on 17-20 April 2012, while taking into consideration the resolutions adopted by the 8th ICIM which took place on 25-28 January 2009 in Rabat, kingdom of Morocco. These two sessions constituted a key link in the reform and modernization process in which the OIC is engaged in implementation of the resolutions of the 3rd Extraordinary Islamic Summit Conference held in Makkah Al-Mukarramah in December 2005. The report also underscores the pressing need for reinforcing cooperation with member states with a view to promoting the role of the OIC and its member states in supporting joint Islamic action, particularly in the field of information.

The 9th Session of the Islamic Conference of Information Ministers (ICIM), held in Libreville, Capital of Gabon, on 17 – 20 April 2012, adopted a cluster of new resolutions that were later ratified by the 39th Session of the Council of Foreign Ministers held on 15 -17 November 2012 in Djibouti. The OIC General Secretariat's department of information has started implementing these resolutions in coordination with the Member States. The Fourth Islamic Summit Conference held in Makkah Al Mukarramah on 14 – 15 August 2012, under the theme of "Enhancement of Islamic Solidarity" underscored in its final declaration the heavy responsibility shouldered by information in the achievement of Islamic Solidarity goals. The summit also laid stress on the need to boost responsible principles and tenets and urged the Member States to follow through with the implementation of earlier resolutions issued by the OIC Standing Committee on Information and Cultural Affairs (COMIAC) as well as those issued by the Islamic Conference of Information Ministers. In addition, the 39th session of the Council of Foreign Ministers, held in Djibouti on 15 – 17 November, 2012, and the Twelfth Session of the Islamic Summit Conference held in Cairo, Arab Republic of Egypt, on 6-7 February 2013, both endorsed the resolutions issued by the 9th Islamic Conference of Information Ministers. All of these stages constituted thus major stepping stones in the OIC General Secretariat's progress towards reform and modernization in

pursuance of the resolution of the Third Extraordinary Islamic Summit Conference, held in Makkah Al Mukarramah in December 2005.

The OIC General Secretariat, through its information department, held an expert-level open-ended meeting at the OIC headquarters in Jeddah on 25 – 26 February 2013, to consider external media action based on the request formulated by their Excellencies, the Information ministers, at the 9th session of ICIM, under resolution No.9/2-INF, on the elaboration of an integrated information plan with the contribution of the Member States and the OIC ambassadorial groups in the major world capitals, for the General Secretariat to set up mechanisms for the implementation of the said resolutions.

The meeting came out with many important resolutions, foremost of which an agreement on the paper presented by the General Secretariat's information department titled "Proposal for the creation of mechanisms to redress the Image of Islam in Europe and North America", and on a call for its early implementation. The meeting also agreed on a proposal mooted by the State of Kuwait in favour of setting up a Waqf Fund for the Defense of Islam, its values and its sanctities, with support from the OIC Member States and the private sector. This would be an investment Waqf whose proceeds would be dedicated to interaction with external media on issues relevant to confronting Islamophobia, dispelling the distorted image peddled by some on the Islamic faith, and defending Islam its sanctities and symbols, with the said endowment (Waqf) being seated in the State of Kuwait.

The 9th ICIM adopted Resolution No. 6/9-INF on the proposal of a special information plan for Africa to highlight the continent's role and its standing in the Islamic world. The program includes the organization of information seminars, a documentary film on investment opportunities in the OIC African Member States, the compilation of video, audio and printed information kits the launch of an information campaign on the Dakar/Port Sudan railway-line project, and the organization of field visits for a number of journalists in certain African States.

In implementation of the provisions of this Resolution, the OIC General Secretariat, represented by the Information Department, held an expert-level open-ended meeting at the OIC headquarters in Jeddah on 25–26 February, 2013, which recommended that a two-day information seminar be held in Tunisia, Morocco, the United Arab Emirates, or any other state that may wish to host it. The objective would be to spotlight the potential of the African continent and the investment opportunities there, so that this may be reflected in the media of the OIC Member States and the external world with the understanding that such an event should be held before the date fixed for the 10th ICIM.

The 9th ICIM welcomed the program submitted by ISESCO on “Approaches for the training of journalists and media to address the issue of the stereotypical images on Islam and Muslims in the Western media. It invited the Member States to follow through with the implementation of the approach, in coordination between the OIC General Secretariat and ISESCO. In this connection, the General Secretariat, represented in its information department, held a meeting on information coordination with some of the OIC institutions, on 14 May 2013, at the OIC headquarters in Jeddah, with the participation of the International Islamic News Agency (IINA) and the Islamic Development Bank (IDB). The remaining invited institutions were absent from the meeting which recommended that coordination be intensified between the OIC information department and these institutions, on the matter, and that a coordination meeting be held for these institutions at the Centre for Islamic History, Arts and Culture (IRCICA) in Istanbul, immediately after the conclusion of the International Islamic Conference on Islamophobia which will be held in Turkey, late in 2013.

Furthermore the OIC ambassadorial groups were invited to anchor relations with the civil society and to pay attention to information activities and to coordinated action, by inviting the OIC offices in Geneva, New York and Brussels to cater for these matters as to media activities and coordinating the moves of the OIC ambassadorial groups to clarify the importance of the OIC’s role at the level of all international information tribunals.

To energize the OIC Information and communications sector, The General Secretariat sent a Note Verbale to the Member States urging them to pay attention to the programs and activities of the OIC and its Secretary General, and to allocate larger spaces in their printed, audio and visual media for the purpose.

At the 9th ICIM agreement in principle was reached on the proposed launch of an OIC satellite channel and the establishment of an open-ended Member States Committee, entrusted to examine all aspects relevant to this project. The General Secretariat invited all Member States to a meeting that was held at the expert level, at the OIC headquarters in Jeddah on 23 – 24 February 2013, to consider the issue from its technical aspects. The meeting recommended the adoption of the paper submitted by the General Secretariat’s information Department on the project to launch an OIC Satellite Channel, after inclusion of the amendments suggested by the Member States’ delegates at the meeting. A consultative council was set up for the satellite channel, comprised of 15 states (representing the OIC three geographical groups, elected by rotation at each ICIM session) in addition to Palestine as a permanent member, the OIC General Secretariat, the Islamic Broadcasting Union (IBU) and the Islamic States Broadcasting Regulatory Authorities Forum (IBRAF). Also a private sector administrative board was set up for the channel, to assume its full supervision and to be answerable to the Consultative Council as to the general policy of the channel which is

meant to help achieve the goals of the OIC Charter. In order to follow up the implementation of the Channel's launch, a special committee was established whose membership is comprised on Afghanistan, Iran, Turkey, Saudi Arabia, Senegal, Gabon, Palestine, Qatar, Egypt and Mauritania, in addition to the OIC General Secretariat, and whose first meeting, held on 12th May 2013 at the OIC headquarters, paid tribute to the OIC General Secretariat for the important suggestions it had submitted on marketing the satellite channel to the private sector, and recommended that the Committee holds another meeting on the periphery of the next ICIM. In the course of this meeting, the participating delegations also attended a presentation made by the Turkish delegation on the Euronews experience that could be of benefit to the proposed OIC channel.

Also, a suggestion was made for information specialists to be appointed at the OIC offices abroad and for information offices to be opened in the Member States with a view to advancing cooperation and coordination on information affairs, between the OIC on the one hand and the Member States, on the other.

In parallel, it was decided to set up an "OIC Journalist Forum" whose mission will be to bring press people together, build relations among them and consolidate cooperation and partnership with other international journalist federations. This forum, which Turkey has officially offered to host and cater for, will be a significant mediatic support for Joint Islamic Action and contribute to streamlining information work, to the elaboration of beneficial perspectives in the Member States' information sector, and to the effective dissemination of news and data in the Islamic media. In this context, a technical meeting was held in Ankara, Republic of Turkey, to discuss the draft IBRAF's charter on 24-25 June 2013. An agreement was reached on the draft charter.

Also the Information Department has worked on a special information program that includes a wide range of projects one of which involves convening an international Islamic Conference on Information to be held in Turkey, to examine a host of issues such as Islamophobia from an information and legal point of view on 17-18 September 2013 in Istanbul.

The Information Department also organized an information workshop in harmony with the spirit of the relevant resolutions, under the title of "Media Misrepresentation of Islam and Muslims: A Quest for Solutions", which was held in Brussels, capital of Belgium on 15 – 16 February 2012. The workshop was widely echoed and had a tangible impact among Western and Islamic circles, as it addressed the issue of the rising Islamophobia in the Western media, and took up the issue of the impact of resorting to media misrepresentation and manipulation at the hands of many Western media, and the impact of the stereotypical image peddled by the Western media on Islam and Muslims in the West.

The Information Department is also following up the implementation of a campaign to correct the distorted image of Islam and Muslims in the West. In this vein, visits were made to Kuwait and Qatar to examine ways to support the campaign. In addition, notes were sent to member states and civil society organizations on this matter.

Within the framework of action to acquaint the Member States' citizens with the OIC, the General Secretariat has received gratifying news to the effect that certain Member States, such as the Republics of Maldives and Burkina Faso, have named certain main streets and squares after the OIC. In this respect, we renew our invitation to all Member States to carry through with the implementation of the resolution issued by the 38th and 39th CFM calling upon them to give the name of the OIC to some of their main thoroughfares and squares.

The Information Department wishes furthermore to remind the Member States of its request for them to provide it with their data bases on their media and press people serving in media institutions (news agencies, satellite channels, newspapers, magazines, radio stations, electronic media).

In terms of support for the Palestinian cause at the information level, the 9th ICIM as well as the 39th CFM, both called on the Member States to extend emergency assistance to the State of Palestine to build up, rehabilitate and develop the capacities of the Palestinian ministry of information, the Palestinian Radio and TV Broadcasting Authority, and the Palestinian News Agency (Wafa). They also called upon the Member States to continue their action in educating the world public opinion on the Palestinian cause through the media coverage of the Palestinian people's life in all its aspects.

Furthermore, renewed support was expressed for the OIC electronic Emergency Response Task Force, and the Member States were urged to make use of the services offered by the task force in terms of training programs for the transfer of experience in the area of information security, and to provide the necessary funding for the said task force to continue its activities and pursue its missions optimally.

Likewise, the 9th ICIM, held in Gabon, adopted a project for the establishment of an OIC Broadcasting Regulation Authorities Forum (IBRAF), which, as an autonomous institution, recently held its second meeting at the OIC headquarters in Jeddah, at the kind invitation of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia's Ministry of Information, on 2-3 October, 2012. The meeting adopted IBRAF's Charter of which a copy with the report of the meeting were circulated to all member states' broadcasting authorities, both founding and non-founding, as these authorities are considered as founding members unless they had expressed otherwise by 31 December 2012.

Member States were also urged to support the World Digital Solidarity Fund, to apply the principle of 1% in its favour, to make exceptional voluntary donations to it, and to see to it that five hundred computers are provided for the benefit of OIC's least developed Member States.

Regarding the Code of Ethics for the OIC Member State's media institutions, the General Secretariat has circulated, once again, a Note Verbale and a draft code to the Member States for the consideration of their legal and media experts and for them to provide it with their views and suggestions. However we are still awaiting receipt of all the required responses.

As for support to the institutions concerned with media joint Islamic action, a new emphasis was placed on support for the restructuring of IINA and IBU, as advocated by the 8th ICIM and by the General Assemblies of the two institutions in question. Member States were urged to settle their budgetary contributions to the two organs, to partake effectively in their action, and to make use of the services they offer.

The OIC General Secretariat, represented by its Information Department, looks forward to the finalization of the implementation of the resolutions issued in the area of information, in harmony with the recommendations of the Fourth Extraordinary Islamic Summit Conference.