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SPEECH OF
HIS EXCELLENCY PROF. EKMELEDDIN IHSANOGLU,
SECRETARY GENERAL OF THE
ORGANISATION OF THE ISLAMIC CONFERENCE,

AT THE
THIRTY-FIFTH SESSION OF THE
COUNCIL OF FOREIGN MINISTERS OF THE
ORGANISATION OF THE ISLAMIC CONFERENCE

KAMPALA – REPUBLIC OF UGANDA
18-20 JUNE 2008

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Honourable Ministers,
Excellencies,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

I am deeply honoured to welcome you at the opening of this important 35th Session of the OIC Council of Foreign Ministers (CFM), and to address your august Council in this beautiful and charming city of Kampala, the capital city of Uganda.

I would like to avail myself of this opportunity to salute the people of Uganda and the honourable leader of this great country, H.E. Yoweri Kaguta Museveni. I would also like to thank him for patroning this important meeting and for his inspiring and stimulating inaugural speech. I would also like to extend to him a special word of gratitude for the enormous efforts he deployed to ensure the adequate and smooth running of the proceedings of this meeting of the CFM. My deep thanks and gratitude also go to the Islamic Republic of Pakistan, Chairman of the last Session of the Islamic Conference of Foreign Ministers for its sincere and dedicated efforts throughout the past year in assuming its Chairmanship of the ICFM and for its positive contributions to the promotion of joint Islamic action, particularly with regard to the review of the OIC Charter.

At this point, I would like to congratulate the Republic of Senegal on the resounding success which marked the 11th Session of the Islamic Summit Conference held in Dakar, and the major achievements accomplished during that Summit.

I would also like to thank the Senegalese people and officials, most particularly H.E. President Abdoulaye WADE, for the great efforts which they have exerted at all levels.

Honourable Ministers,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

The Kampala CFM meeting is all the more important as it is the first CFM held under the new Charter unanimously adopted in Dakar. The adoption of the Charter represented a historic achievement in the annals of the OIC. It marks a new starting

point in joint Islamic action, and ushers the Organisation to a new era of invigorating endeavours in the service of the Muslim masses the world over.

We praise God Almighty for having guided and united us to adopt the new Charter after considerable efforts and relentless dedication to which all of you have fully contributed over more than two years. Your devotion and sense of commitment have made it possible to work out compromise formulations in a unique consensual manner reflecting the spirit of genuine Islamic solidarity and a high degree of responsibility. You were also very conscious of the major challenges facing us warranting that new goals, visions, and objectives should be enshrined in the new Charter in order to better serve our interests and facilitate the implementation of the slogan adopted by the OIC Third Extraordinary Summit “Solidarity in action” in all vital spheres.

Proceeding from this premise, we look forward to new approaches in undertaking joint collective action, taking on board the Charter’s new perspectives and in full awareness of the critical and historic responsibility to implement its provisions with full vigor and confident reliance on your kind support. We, therefore, look for your precious help and assistance in this endeavor as much diligent work of vital importance is still awaiting us. We are also comforted by the fact that many Member States have already signed and ratified the Charter, and that some of its provisions have already been implemented.

Honourable Ministers and Heads of Delegations,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

Three and a half years have elapsed since you bestowed upon me the distinct honour and responsibility to shoulder the duties of the Secretary General of the OIC. Allow me today, to confide to you my sense of the satisfaction at the efforts I have tirelessly devoted to enhancing and furthering our common causes, thanks mainly to your unfailing support and encouragement. I am equally pleased with the achievements realized by our Organisation in dealing with these concerns, and in its relations with the outside world.

After your humbling and unanimous decision to entrust me to stay the course at the helm of this Organisation, I can only commit myself to summon all my energy and resources and those of my colleagues in the General Secretariat, to do our utmost in order to continue to earn your trust and approval in the service of realizing our common objectives. We all have tremendous duties to undertake in earnest, as we still have many hurdles to overcome, amidst daunting challenges with immense bearing on our future. The Ummah is facing a critical situation that does not allow for any complacency and we have to work diligently and with the firm conviction that the Muslim world is duty-bound to become one of the leading pioneers of our age.

As I mentioned during the Summit of Dakar, just a few months ago, we have made it possible for the standards of the Organisation to expand and broaden in scope and magnitude during the last few years. The long awaited reforms of the Organisation have already taken root. We have diversified the activities of the General Secretariat and introduced innovative approaches to better conduct our work. As a result, OIC performance has witnessed instant progress in defending our shared concerns and in

the services rendered to the Member States which have been enhanced qualitatively to match international standards.

We have started our work to establish an independent permanent commission for human rights as envisioned in the Ten-Year Programme of Action and the new Charter, which will satisfy a need that was absent, and long overdue in this vital domain.

In one word, we have managed to affirm our presence and draw attention to the fact that the OIC is considered an international organisation worthy of representing the collective will and concerns of the Ummah on the global level.

The OIC has become an indispensable player at the international level, in many domains, notably in the realms of dialogue among civilizations, defending the image of Islam, and combating the phenomenon of Islamophobia.

We have established working relationships with think-tank centers in Europe and the United States to expose our views and defend our causes. We have managed to draw on the resources of the representatives of the OIC Member States abroad to coordinate and unify their efforts in support of our just causes, and succeeded in consolidating their voting pattern in the international fora, thus ensuring the formation of a strong Muslim voting block on issues of crucial importance to us.

We have enhanced our presence in Europe by obtaining the green light to open an OIC Mission in Brussels, the headquarters of the European Union.

We have established an OIC Group in Washington D.C., with the aim of playing a more active role in engaging American policy makers.

Sensing the mounting importance of the Muslim world through the intense OIC activities, numerous Western officials are seeking to enter into working relations with the OIC General Secretariat and OIC Offices abroad. Regional groups at international fora have started to consult and seek the cooperation of the OIC Group on various issues under discussion.

Excellencies,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

There is no better means to strengthen the status of the Muslim world on the international scene than consolidating the various links of unity among them, starting by economic ties, which will serve as a catalyst to stimulate the various forms of unison. This method has proven to be very efficient in the making of other economic groupings across the globe and should work very successfully in the Muslim world.

Economic ties are known to be the strongest foundation of unity and solidarity among States, because of the shared interests generated by those ties.

We are very fortunate to have two major factors which help to facilitate our endeavour in this direction.

We have the Ten-Year Programme of Action which defines, among other things, the objectives, guidelines, and framework for such an undertaking on the one hand, and the Standing Committee on Economic and Commercial Cooperation (COMCEC) which provides the mechanism and the technique needed to achieve our goals, on the other hand. The Ten-Year Programme of Action is seen as a major and unique benchmark in the history of the Organisation, thus building up a meaningful and workable economic rapprochement between the Member States of the Muslim world.

In addition to the above, we are fortunate to be endowed with vast natural and financial resources, active and young manpower, a strategic location at the cross-roads of continents, as well as a deeply-seated faith which provide us with a strong incentive to help each other and to close ranks within the context of solid and unique bonds of Islamic solidarity.

As the real decision makers of this Organisation, you are kindly invited to give serious consideration to the enforcement and accession to the instruments and agreements worked out by the COMCEC, and to the implementation of the provisions of the Ten-Year Programme of Action with full confidence and determination.

Inaction with regard to these two factors is not an option. We simply cannot afford it in the face of the dire consequences awaiting us, if we fail to act diligently. Regrettably, the pace of progress in this direction has so far proven to be very slow.

A new driving force and momentum are desperately needed to keep the spirit of our joint Islamic action alive and progressing.

COMCEC has been able to achieve a concrete success through the mechanism it has established with a view to accomplishing its coordination and planning mission, mainly through the Trade Preferential System (TPS) and the Protocol on the Preferential Tariff Schemes. When TPS enters into force, the OIC will be economically and commercially transported into a new era, conducive to creating a free trade zone and a new preferential Tariff Scheme.

To that end, a ceremony for signing these instruments will be held during the proceedings of this CFM, whereby willing Member States can do that.

The issue of alleviating poverty in Member States is one of the most important provisions of the OIC Ten-Year Programme of Action advocating the creation of a Special Fund to alleviate poverty which has, in fact, been created at IDB, under the name of the Islamic Solidarity Fund for Development (ISFD). Out of the USD 10 billion prescribed as its capital, USD 2.6 billion have already been pledged and we hope that more pledges will follow suit by Member States, thus enabling ISFD to fulfill the noble mission for which it was created.

Today, the world is going through a new crisis of food security, which has driven the prices of basic commodities sky rocketing. This concern unites all peoples and governments of the world due to its economic, social, political, and humanitarian circumstances.

The OIC Member States are all developing countries with a large majority of them having agro-based economies. The rise in domestic food production in most of them has not kept pace with the rapid population growth. Many of them also suffer from cyclical ravages of natural disasters, such as droughts, floods, and cyclones. As a result, very few are self-sufficient in food production and most of them are net importers of food products.

The OIC has identified food and agriculture as one of its top priorities for collective action and has set a number of objectives and established programmes of action with a view to ensuring food security for the populations of our countries.

Food security will not be attained without developing the agricultural sector. As we, and the countries of the world, are actively seeking adequate solutions to the food security crisis, we know that the solutions are not easy to find instantly. Nevertheless, we know that this goal is unquestionably attainable, and one to which the OIC is deeply committed. I would like to refer to our efforts in the programme for the African Sahel region as well as the OIC Five-Year Special Programme for the Development of Africa and the OIC Poverty Alleviation Fund set up at the Islamic Development Bank. I would like to seize this opportunity to thank IDB for all the positive efforts it is exerting in favour of the socio-economic development of Member States at various levels. My gratitude, in this regard, goes to the other Specialized and Subsidiary Organs of the Organisation, particularly COMCEC, the Islamic Centre for Development of Trade (ICDT), the Islamic Chamber of Commerce and Industry (ICCI).

Honourable Ministers,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

We meet in troubled times as we go through a difficult era in the history of our nation. We are facing daunting external and internal challenges. We are forced to deal with chronic issues, which continue to top our agenda in Palestine, Iraq, Lebanon, Afghanistan, Jammu and Kashmir, Darfour, Cyprus, Western Thrace, Nagorno Karabakh, Somalia, and Cote d'Ivoire. All these crises require urgent remedies and concrete action beyond mere rhetorics.

The Israeli aggression against the Palestinians continues unabated, engulfing all aspects of their lives. All these practices are being perpetrated on a daily basis in defiance and in gross violation of the tenets of international law while meeting with total silence by the international community.

The list of these violations are too numerous to list. They range from extra-judicial killings to confiscating Palestinian land, constructing segregation/separation walls, detaining high officials of the Palestinian Authority, besieging and suffocating the whole of the Gaza Strip, illegal collective punishments that are making a mockery of the international legitimacy, and flouting international agreements from Oslo—to the Road Map, to Annapolis understandings. The illusion of conducting negotiations to reach a peaceful settlement has always proven to be an exercise in futility with no light at the end of the tunnel.

What makes the horizon even more gloomy is the regrettable division among the Palestinian factions, which affect international sympathy towards their plight. As we totally condemn all these practices, we reiterate our support to the 'Arab Peace Initiative' and call on our Palestinian brothers to settle their differences and unify their ranks.

In Iraq, despite the present lull in acts of violence, the situation there still calls for concern and preoccupation. We hope that the current negotiations on the future status of Iraq will be conducted in a manner that safeguards Iraq's higher interests, namely genuine sovereignty and independence, territorial integrity, and national unity.

I have taken measures to visit Iraq as soon as our Office in Baghdad starts to function in the near future.

As we support the initiative for rapprochement between Pakistan and India, we hope that the new climate prevailing in relations between the two countries will be conducive to reaching a solution for this old conflict in a manner that safeguards the inalienable rights of the Kashmiri people in accordance with the relevant UN Security Council resolutions.

In Somalia, we have stepped up our direct engagement with the different Somali factions with a view to stopping their internal strife and reaching a national reconciliation. We thank the Government of Djibouti for the commendable efforts exerted in that direction and hope that the United Nations peace-keeping forces will soon move into place to pave the way for the evacuation of foreign troops from there.

In Cyprus, we are encouraged by the new prevailing climate between the two communities there, after the late elections. We hope that the new overtures will yield better results conducive to facilitating the attainment of an equitable solution to this chronic conflict. We also welcome the establishment of various official contacts between the Turkish Cypriot representatives and many OIC Member States.

In Azerbaijan, we were quick to reject the so-called Presidential elections held in Nagorno-Karabakh in grave violation of the relevant norms and principles of international law. We also expressed our appreciation to the OIC Member States that have provided humanitarian assistance to the refugees and displaced persons in Azerbaijan.

Muslim minorities and communities across the world represent a third of the world Muslim population. The General Secretariat is developing certain means of engagement with them despite their wide geographical spread from Asia to Europe, to Africa, and the Americas.

Regrettably, some of these Muslim communities face a great deal of pressure and violation of their human rights. Many of them suffer from poverty and difficult economic conditions. We have been involved in negotiations with some host countries in a bid to alleviate the suffering of the members of these communities, and to guarantee the respect of their fundamental human rights. We scored some success in countries like the Philippines and Thailand, where we are actively engaging the officials of these two countries. We have also undertaken similar missions in the

region of the Balkans and East Europe, concerning the situation of Muslim communities in countries like Slovenia, Kosovo, and other Balkan States.

Honourable Ministers,
Excellencies,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

In face of the adverse and mounting phenomenon of Islamophobia in the West, we placed this issue at the top of our priorities and preoccupations, while conducting a large-scale world-wide effort to confront it at four levels:

First: The official level of countries and governments of the West, where this phenomenon is rampant and wide-spread. We have exhorted the officials in these countries to assume their inherent legal responsibilities in order to stem this illegal trend in conformity with international and domestic laws which prohibit discrimination based on incitement to hatred towards individuals or groups because of their religion, race, or other grounds.

Second: The level of major international organizations, such as the United Nations General Assembly in New York or the UN Human Rights Council in Geneva, as well as organisations concerned with Dialogue among Civilizations, or inter-religious and interfaith dialogue.

Third: Renowned academic institutions, intellectual and research centers, and think-tank circles.

Fourth: The level of the OIC Islamophobia Observatory, which we have established in order to monitor and document all manifestation of this scourge, and to deal with them in an interactive manner.

Taken together, this plan has proven its merit and we have been able to achieve convincing progress at all these levels mainly the UN Human Rights Council in Geneva, and the UN General Assembly.

The United Nations General Assembly adopted similar resolutions against the defamation of Islam.

In confronting the Danish cartoons and the Dutch film “Fitna”, we sent a clear message to the West regarding the red lines that should not be crossed. As we speak, the official West and its public opinion are all now well-aware of the sensitivities of these issues. They have also started to look seriously into the question of freedom of expression from the perspective of its inherent responsibility, which should not be overlooked.

Honourable Ministers,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

Culture is considered one of the strongest ties that bind the one nation or Ummah with the sense of belonging, in addition to providing the building blocks of shared identity

and unity. Muslim culture has withstood the test of time and it stands up today to the serious threats of globalization, which drives the hegemony of one culture at the expense of other cultures. The OIC General Secretariat and other OIC Organs are pursuing issues concerning development of Muslim women, youth and children. We have developed a Plan of Action for the Advancement of Women which is expected to be adopted by the Second Ministerial of Women Affairs in Cairo in November this year. This document will be a milestone for the development of the women of the OIC Member States. We also participate actively in various events organized in cooperation with Member States and concerned Subsidiary Organs, Specialized Organizations and Affiliated Institutions in the cultural domain as well as in the domain of Dialogue among Civilizations. I would like to pay tribute, in this context, to the Islamic Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation (ISESCO) and the Research Centre for Islamic History, Art and Culture (IRCICA) for their commendable efforts in promoting Islamic culture in various fields.

In the last three years, the domain of science and technology has witnessed a qualitative development, when the General Secretariat acknowledged the potential of science and technology in advancing the Muslim world and the need to bridge the gap within Member States and between them and the industrialized world. This prospect was confirmed by the 3rd OIC Extraordinary Summit which gave a new impetus to its evolution. The OIC Dakar Summit also reiterated this necessity while its Final Declaration focused attention on the most important sectors of higher education, science and technology, health, and the environment.

The OIC Eleventh Summit also recognized that in the knowledge-based society, Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs) are powerful and indispensable tools for the political, economic, and social advancement of nations and peoples. This matter was the subject of the resolutions adopted by the Tenth OIC Summit, the 3rd OIC Extraordinary Summit, and its Ten-Year Programme of Action. For the purpose of implementing the decisions of the two Summits, we have set up a task force entrusted with realizing the OIC Vision 1441 on Science and Technology. A new concept called Mega Projects was launched, where four major domains were identified: manufacturing affordable cars, small and medium size planes, satellites, and bio-pharmaceutical products. This concept relies on business-to-business interaction of interested private sectors.

We have also prepared an Atlas of Innovation for the OIC Member States with the cooperation of the prestigious science journal "Nature" to be completed by 2010.

We have also started the process of OIC University ranking, based on criteria, procedures, and mechanisms specifically developed for the OIC. This will be used to identify 20 Universities from the OIC Member States to be strengthened and elevated to the ranks of the top 500 World universities.

In this regard, I would like to pay tribute to the contributions of the Standing Committee on Scientific and Technological Cooperation (COMSTECH).

Honourable Ministers,
Excellencies,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

I have started my address today by referring to the economic sector, which is the cardinal foundation for any meaningful intergovernmental cooperation and coordination. It is the sector on the bases of which we should measure the level of our solidarity and unity.

Day before yesterday we held here in Kampala a Business Forum in collaboration with 'Uganda National Chamber of Commerce and Industry', which brings to the fore the primordial importance of the private sector in enhancing the prospects of development. Besides, the OIC is continuing to pay great attention and exerting much effort to our economic concerns' with a view to further consolidating our economic ties. With 'COMCEC' mechanisms and the 'Ten-Year Programme of Action' we have had a good and promising start. We have to maintain this momentum, and dedicate more importance and devotion to this vital and indispensable sector of our common and shared endeavours, leading to a better and prosperous future to all our Member States.

Thank you for your attention.