

**Interview: Ambassador Slimane Chikh, Permanent OIC Observer to the
United Nations in Geneva**

“Let us not fall in the trap set for us”

***“The representative of the Organization of Islamic Cooperation (OIC) to the
United Nations is a fierce supporter of dialogue”***

Alain Jourdan, Tribune de Genève

He represents the Organization of Islamic Cooperation (OIC) to the United Nations in Geneva. Slimane Chikh is an experienced diplomat. Former Rector of the University of Algiers, he served as minister many times in the 1980s. Although he speaks for Islamic countries, he refuses to pour oil on the fire of the issue of terrorism-generated tension. He prefers to bet on the intelligence of men.

What are the priorities of the OIC within the Human Rights Council?

First of all, there is a recurrent priority; that of the Palestinian cause. We will continue to fight for keeping the flagrant human rights violations perpetrated by Israel high on the agenda, under item 7. During the present session, we would also like to draw attention once again to the destiny of the Rohingya, the Muslim minority of Myanmar, and Muslims in the Central African Republic, both of whom are victims of blatant human rights violations. On other files, the OIC will continue to make its positive contribution to the debates and it is keen on openness.

Some Muslim countries seem to want to revive discussion on blasphemy. However, it seems that the majority of OIC countries favor conciliation; is that true?

We prefer to maintain consensus on resolution 16/18, which combats intolerance, negative stereotyping, discrimination and incitement to violence against people based on religion or belief.

This resolution includes an eight-point action plan and aims at combating extremism and exclusion as well as the violence associated with them. It also

aims to prepare future generations to a peaceful approach of their religion. I would like, however, to underscore that OIC Member States must denounce the confusing messages, which falsely associate Islam with terrorism.

What would you say to those who fear a clash of civilizations between the Muslim world and the West?

I would like to reaffirm the need to pursue dialogue and go beyond reductionist approaches. It is in this sense that the resolution adopted by the HRC addresses all religions. This also means that the OIC is not only concerned with defending Islam and fighting Islamophobia, it also advocates the fight against all religious intolerance. The OIC Secretary General, H.E. Iyad Ameen Madani, was among the first to denounce the crimes perpetrated by terrorist groups when they targeted Christians and Yezidis in Iraq, as well as Copts in Egypt and Libya. I would also like to underline that Muslims are the first of victims of these extremist and barbarian acts.

How do you manage to represent the interests of countries sharing one religion, but having neither the same traditions nor the same interests?

Cultural diversity within the OIC is an asset that helps us open up to the world. We have 57 Member States in four continents. This forces us to resort to constructive dialogue and to making a stride to modernity

Do you have an example?

Yes. We endeavor to advance the status of women in our societies, and we are combating all forms of violence they are subjected to, including female genital mutilation. As the pillar of the future, the youth occupy a central place on OIC's agenda.

How do Muslim countries plan to face the challenge posed by Islamic terrorism?

First of all, I would like to draw a distinction between the two terms '*terrorism*' and '*Islamic*', and to state that Islam is, rather, hijacked by terrorist groups. Real Islam is that being practiced peacefully in our societies for centuries. As for terrorism, the fight involves the international community as a whole and requires increased cooperation.

How would you explain the fact that we have come to such a level of misunderstanding by both parties?

Globalization should have reduced distances and brought peoples closer to each other, but we notice that it is the opposite. There is an inclination towards isolationism and exclusion. Internet certainly plays a positive role in the transmission of knowledge, but it is being misused as a means of propaganda, channeling hatred of the other. Post-modern era brought about -in this regard- deadly reflexes, which do not help humanity to flourish.

What needs to be done?

There is no other choice but to open the door for dialogue. But real dialogue does not consist of two monologues; each party should put itself in the other's shoes, and it is through this feeling of empathy that we can move forward.
