



Organisation of The Islamic Conference



*Statement of His Excellency Prof. Ekmeleddin Ihsanoglu,
Secretary General of the OIC,
at the
Lisbon Forum 2009*

*Read Out by Ambassador Hemayetuddin, Director General of the
Department of Culture & Social Affairs*

November 13-14, 2009

Excellencies,

H.E. Prof. Ekmeleddin Ihsanoglu, Secretary General of the OIC sends his best wishes to this event. His prior commitments have not made it possible for him to participate in the important Forum personally. He has therefore designated me to represent him and to read out the following statement on his behalf:

Quote:

**Mr. Chairman,
Excellencies,
Ladies and Gentleman,**

I would at the outset like to express my thanks and gratitude to the High Representative of the Alliance of Civilization (AoC) President Jorge Sampaio for the kind invitation extended for participation in this prestigious forum. We have benefited from his wisdom and experience during the OIC's ongoing engagement with the AoC and look forward to building on this relationship.

I am happy that the Lisbon Forum 2009 being organized under the theme "*Creating a Culture of Human Rights through Education*". While congratulating the AoC for selecting this appropriate theme, I would also wish to congratulate the North-South Centre of the Council of Europe and the Agha Khan Foundation for their partnership towards organizing this event which has gathered human rights experts, promoters and practitioners as well as legislators, educationists and local administrators not only from Europe but from around the world in this beautiful city and this congenial setting.

I am particularly impressed by the approach at this Forum which aims at promoting the creation of a culture of human rights through "quadrilogue"

action involving governments, parliamentarians, local and business authorities and civil society. I hope that the exchange of views, experiences and best practices during the next two days would help the participants benefit from the different approaches towards improving the promotion and protection of human rights in their respective constituencies. It would also be useful towards promoting a better understanding of each other's perspective on this important theme. It needs to be appreciated that creating a culture of human rights in a world characterized by cultural diversity would be essentially dependent on respect for and attention to such diversity.

Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen,

OIC is the second largest international organization after the UN with 57 Member States. Celebrating its 40th anniversary, the Organisation is currently engaged in a vigorous pursuit of a heavy reform and restructuring agenda envisaged by the leadership in the *Ten-Year Programme of Action* and embodied in the new Charter adopted at the Eleventh Summit in Dakar last year. Evolving a culture of respect for human rights in the Member States has been established as a priority in both these documents that defined the culture of moderation and modernization being evolved at the OIC.

It is most important to note that the new Charter mandates the establishment of an Independent Permanent Commission on Human Rights which, in terms of a progressive approach, would ensure a confluence of Islamic values and fundamental freedoms aimed at creating and sustaining a culture of human rights promotion and protection in the Member States. I believe that in terms of the sub-themes selected for this Forum, the establishment of this Commission could fall under the category of regional approaches. I, however, could not help noticing that the concept paper prepared for this Forum, while taking note of the relevant developments in the League of Arab States and the ASEAN, did not take cognizance of this important development within the OIC framework. It only highlights the importance of events like this Forum from the standpoint of ensuring exchange and dissemination of updated information and better understanding of developments within the respective frameworks of multilateral settings like the EU and the OIC.

At the critical juncture of finalizing the Statute of the Independent Permanent Commission on Human Rights, the OIC stands to gain a lot from participation in this prestigious Forum. Being held in a year that has been declared by the UN General Assembly as the International Year of Human Rights Learning, this Forum would contribute significantly toward identifying approaches to human rights education that could help enhance and promote the common understanding of the basic principles of universality, indivisibility, interdependency, impartiality, objectivity, non-selectivity as well as constructive dialogue and cooperation.

The OIC in coordination with the Government of the Arab Republic of Egypt will organize a conference on *The 20th Anniversary of the Convention on the Rights of Child in Cairo* on November 24-25, 2009.

Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen,

Allow me to avail this opportunity to underscore a major concern of the OIC that could form part of deliberations at this Forum with particular reference to the need to educate ourselves as well as the next generation on the increasing importance of respect for the whole range of civil and political as well as economic, social and cultural rights towards maintaining global peace and security. I am referring to the ominous trend of Islamophobia emanating from and fuelled in some parts of the West aimed at distorting the image of Islam in the Western mind and media. This surely is a contemporary form of racism and must be viewed and addressed in that context. The OIC has shown its readiness to engage constructively in multilateral settings, including the UNGA and the Human Rights Council, with a view to removing misperceptions and evolving common strategies based on shared ideals to deal with this trend. We strongly believe in the need to create more spaces that could catalyze inter-civilizational and interfaith dialogue geared towards sustainable international peace, security and stability. It is events like this Forum that afford such space for free and frank discourse on identifying solutions to issues of global concern. Accordingly, we believe that multi-stakeholder gatherings like the Lisbon Forum need to be replicated in other parts of the world. On our part OIC is also considering similar initiatives with a view to reaching out to all the important stakeholders in seeking solutions to issues of global import and impact.

To conclude, let me assure you, Mr. Chairman and other participants of this prestigious Forum, of OIC's support and active engagement towards the commendable endeavour for sharing experiences, expertise and good practices signified by this Forum. We have noted, with keen interest, the subjects selected for the Forum in future aimed at increasing public awareness of global interdependence issues. It is indeed a most interesting and engaging menu and OIC looks forward to featuring regularly in subsequent editions of the Lisbon Forum.

I thank you all.

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