

**SPEECH OF
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ORGANIZATION OF THE ISLAMIC
CONFERENCE,**

**BEFORE
THE SIXTY-FIRST SESSION OF THE
UNITED NATIONS COMMISSION ON
HUMAN RIGHTS**

**GENEVA – SWITZERLAND
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Mr. Chairman,

**Your Excellency Madam Louise ARBOUR
Human Rights High Commissioner,**

Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen,

May I first extend to you Mr. Chairman, my heartfelt congratulations on your unanimous election to the Chairmanship of the present session of the Human Rights Commission.

Your qualities as an experienced and seasoned diplomat, hailing from a great country, Indonesia, give us all full confidence that you will steer the present session's deliberations with particular success.

I should like to avail myself of this opportunity, to renew my warm congratulations to Madam Louise ARBOUR, Human Rights High Commissioner. As an entrepreneurial lady whose dynamism and commitment have been put to the test and so highly appreciated during her service at the international tribunal for Yugoslavia, we have great hopes and anticipation that she will lead the High Commission's activities with distinct efficiency, objectivity and responsibility.

As I am taking the floor for the first time before the Human Rights Commission, since I took office on 1st January 2005 as Secretary General of the OIC, it pleases me to reaffirm here the full readiness of our Organization with its 57 Member States, to pursue its action in favour of sturdier instruments and enhanced worldwide action for the protection of human rights wherever they may be at risk.

We remain fully convinced that the preservation of world peace and the promotion of economic and social development call, by necessity, for a firm and renewed commitment to guarantee the scrupulous respect for the fundamental principles and treaties in the defense of human rights across the world.

Our effort, in this respect, should be a collective and well-coordinated one. It needs to be founded on objectivity and non-selectivity. Its principal goal should be the human person in all its political, economic, cultural and social dimensions. It must be driven by universal values shared by all humanity.

We believe that human rights promotion and protection imply, by and large, an effective and sustained process in dealing with all scourges which continue to undermine human society's evolution and progress. We need to take on, in a more resolute manner, the economic and social problems that continue to impede human development. Famine, malnutrition, endemic diseases and illiteracy are steadily

gaining grounds despite the multiple commitments undertaken under the Millennium Declaration and at more than one summit, particularly on economic, social development and food supplies.

Through its pioneering action in the elaboration and adoption of the Universal Declaration on Human Rights as well as of the many other attendant international conventions, the UN Commission had laid down, over 50 years ago, the foundations for a colossal enterprise of building a world that is governed by a code of conduct and a set of common values for the defense of human dignity.

Mr. Chairman,

In praising this great achievement, as I should, I am, nevertheless, inclined to deplore the setbacks suffered by human rights defenders in the last few years, when their effort to sustain and uphold human rights was met with arduous challenges. A great number of those who fell victim to human rights abuses around the world were Muslims. The fallout of the outrageous terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001 was a turning point which exacerbated emotions of hate against Muslims, and allowed the stereotypes to become entrenched in so many minds especially in the West. The noble values of Islam, a religion of peace, mercy and compassion were demonized, and the way of life of one fifth of the humanity was subverted. This wave of prejudice is, unfortunately, not fading away and that is what prompts me to dwell on this disturbing issue.

Islam places an unllateral obligation on all Muslims towards the welfare of their fellow human beings, induce them to work for the common good for all, and to protect and preserve social order.

In a bid to instill awareness of human rights in its member states populations, OIC had adopted since 1990 a covenant on human rights which was incorporated in "OIC Declaration on Human Rights in Islam" which was based on Islamic values and, mainly, inspired from the provision of the Universal Declaration on Human Rights and similar instruments.

Human rights in its modern connotation is a part of many rights which Islam provides for individuals, regardless of their social rank, the colour of their skin, faith, creed .. etc. Human rights in Islam have a very larger dimension, which comprises human dignity, and the right to social welfare, i.e. the satisfaction of one's basic needs, to mention but a few.

Islam, a religion for all humanity, was founded on the principles of peace, compassion and acknowledging the other. It is moreover established on a foundation of good governance, justice, strict equality among people, respect of basic rights, social justice, accountability and transparency and the recognition of cultural diversity. Islam abhors and prohibits all manifestations of discrimination, racism, corruption, and the disruption of public order or terrorism.

All these principles are rooted and documented in myriad literatures on Islamic Jurisprudence since more than a thousand years ago. These principles are still the pillars of modern society and democracy, and indeed the core and the essence of the lofty human values of modern days.

I would like to hasten to admit that a gap exists between Islamic teachings as rooted in the creed, and between the practical application of them in some Muslim countries. But whenever there is a departure from these teachings, the reasons are to be found in wrong application. As the wind of reforms is sweeping over vast areas of the Islamic world, and taking shape in different forms of corrections and rectifications, I am confident that by the passage of time the gap which I referred to will be bridged.

Mr. Chairman,

Islamophobia, which is a new name to an old phenomenon, has been recently brought to the forth after the criminal, evil and tragic events of September 11, 2001. Although these horrendous atrocities received a swift and unanimous condemnation by OIC, Muslim leaders and scholars throughout the world, the irrational voices of hatred and bigotry were quick to demonize Islam and Muslims. Some Western media fueled the fear of Islam linking it with terrorism. Stereotypes and disrespectful comments about Islam were allowed to circulate and be published with the outcome that hatred and prejudice against Islam gained credibility, and the stereotyping in media coverage became a global sport.

The venomous falsehood comes also from a circle of writers and academics. I think it would be a travesty of justice and an outright affront to fairness and honesty for the action of one man to be blamed on his religion or creed, even if he does proffer his faith as the excuse. And is it sensible to hold the Islamic world, one fifth of the humanity, accountable because of a handful of suspected fanatic terrorists?

The war on terrorism, and the draconian measures which accompanied it contributed to make the plights of many Muslims around the world profoundly disturbing. In certain cases this war had no frontiers, no rules, no laws, no binding international conventions. New harsh measures were introduced that allow people to be held, detained, or even tortured without any need for any evidence, let alone proof, of guilt been shown.

While some Governments in the West and elsewhere have been keen to ascertain that the war on terrorism is not directed against Islam or Muslims, the measures that were taken by them, have almost solely targeted Islam and Muslims who bore the brunt of harassment and the denial of their rights and civil liberties.

This is the situation which moved the UN Secretary General to say in one of his speeches: "many Muslims around the world were left feeling aggrieved and

misunderstood, concerned about the erosion of their rights and even fearing for their own physical safety”.

I would like, in this context, to draw your attention to a disturbing recent report issued a week ago, on March 7, 2005, by the International Helsinki Federation for Human Rights which comprises 44 human rights organizations in Europe. This report covers human rights abuses in 11 countries of Western Europe. The report expresses concerns about the rise of Islamophobia there. It indicates that “pre-existing patterns of prejudice and discrimination have been reinforced and Muslims have increasingly felt that they are stigmatized because of their beliefs”. The report of 180 pages describes problems ranging from: “widespread and stereotypical media reports, verbal and physical attacks on Muslims and Muslim institutions and properties, discrimination in employment to aggressive political rhetoric targeting Muslims” etc.

I think that is about time that concrete actions be taken to reverse this worrying trend which warns, if left unattended, of dire consequences. In my intervention at the International Conference on Combating Terrorism held in Riyadh, Saudi Arabia last February I exhorted the UN General Assembly to adopt a draft resolution that bans the use of any inflammatory terms arbitrarily associating the word “terrorism” with any religion, including Islam.

As we praise the commendable efforts being exerted by the UN Special Rapporteur on Racism, Racial Discrimination and Xenophobia, at the office of the High Commission of Human Rights, we think that more practical measures should be sought with regard to Islamophobia. In some Western countries, like Britain and elsewhere, there are laws and acts which protect minorities like Sikhs or Jews against discrimination on religious grounds, not only in the case of employment, social services, health, but also in other areas. Muslims have none. I put this idea to be reflected upon.

In this respect, I would also like to salute the positive action undertaken by the Organization on Security and Cooperation in Europe, in taking a keen interest in tackling the issue of Islamophobia, and in reiterating its commitment to combat all manifestation of intolerance, including Islamophobia in the OSCE area.

To this end the OIC expresses its full readiness to cooperate with the United Nations or any of its organs or specialized agencies, as well as with concerned European organizations with a view to address this phenomenon and stem its destructive tide.

We firmly believe that the current social climate facing Muslims living in the West risks creating a widespread anti-western sentiments in the Islamic world, and will, certainly, result in instilling a sense of alienation within the Muslim communities in the West. If this happens, God forbid, then we are for a more troubled world.

Mr. Chairman,

Your Commission, under the terms of reference drawn up for it since its inception, has been following up one of the most tragic issues of human rights violations – namely the question of Palestine, where the Palestinian people's right to self-determination has been denied and where the Palestinian people are still enduring the ordeal of the occupation of their territories and of the illegitimate practices that go against all international norms and humanitarian law, some of which are classified in the category of war crimes and state terrorism. It is unanimously agreed – among the members of your august commission – that the coercive occupation of one's territories represents the most vicious forms of human rights denial. And everyone is aware of the hundreds of resolutions issued by international fora which form the international legal foundations that call for the Palestinian people to be granted their right to exercise self-determination. But the Israeli persistence in flouting these resolutions continues to impede the implementation of international legitimacy, prolongs the suffering of the Palestinian people, and creates an atmosphere of turmoil, tension and violence that jeopardizes peace and security in the entire region of the Middle East and beyond.

All the exactions perpetrated by the Israeli army in terms of assassinations, extra-judiciary killings, the demolition of homes, the blockades, and continued building of settlements in the Occupied Palestinian territories; the confiscation of land, the building of the segregation wall and the deliberate exacerbation of the Palestinian people's suffering, etc. – all of these are issues that fall within the real scope of your Commission's mandate and cry out for your conscience in the first place.

In Iraq, despite the progress achieved at the political level, culminated in the organization of elections, the humanitarian and security situation remains a matter of great concern, and calls for increased cooperation to help the Iraqi people regain peace and stability. To realize this objective we believe that national reconciliation is a fundamental pre-requisite for any lasting settlement. We are also of the opinion that the exclusion of any section of the society from the current political process should be, at all costs, avoided.

The same preoccupation is on our minds regarding the Muslim communities living in many regions of the world, where they suffer from the denials of their legitimate rights, or exclusion and different exactions, particularly in the Southern Philippines and Myanmar. The recent abuses of human rights against a section of Muslim Thai citizens in Southern Thailand are another source of concern. The situation in Chechnya, and the suffering of its people remain a cause of preoccupation for us in the OIC. We pray that a peaceful solution to this tragedy be found so as to relieve the people of Chechnya from their long anguish and grief.

The situation of the Turkish Muslim Community in Western Thrace remains preoccupying for OIC which, in its last ministerial meeting resolution, stressed that

the interest, rights and identity of that Muslim minority should be respected and upheld.

In Jammu and Kashmir, we continue to be encouraged by the prospects of political reconciliation between Pakistan and India, and while we remain greatly concerned by the frequent human rights violation in Kashmir, we hope that the current peace-process become a genuine and comprehensive exercise leading to the emergence of peaceful solution, which takes into consideration the legitimate rights to self-determination of the people of Kashmir.

As we rejoice at the conclusion of the final peace agreement in Southern Sudan, which put an end to two decades of conflict and suffering, we cannot but look with great concern to the current crises in Darfour region. The OIC is coordinating its efforts, in this regard, with the African Union and other concerned parties to put an end to the plight of refugees and displaced population, and pave the way to reaching a political solution to this crisis.

We also hope that the recent developments in Somalia, culminating in the election of Parliament and President, as well as the nomination of new government will lead to an atmosphere of reconciliation and stability.

In the region of South East Asia, and in the aftermath of the Tsunami tidal wave disaster, I would like to inform you that the OIC, in collaboration with a number of OIC Member States, have established "the OIC Coalition to Rescue Children Victims of Tsunami". Currently, over thirty thousand children orphans/victims of tsunami tragedy in the region are enlisted to be taken care of by "the Coalition" which project to keep them under its care and protection till the age of adulthood.

I would like to conclude, Mr. Chairman, by reiterating OIC's firm stand on supporting the efforts being exerted to defend the human rights causes. We strongly believe that enforcing respect for human rights, anywhere in the world, is a great gain for humanity that would help guarantee respect of public liberties, establish justice, and reinforce quietude and social peace. It would lead humanity toward promising horizons of prosperity, progress and decent life. We, therefore, look forward to see your session's deliberation crowned with success in order to continue its endeavour with a view to achieving its noble goals in the service of humanity.

I thank you for your kind attention.