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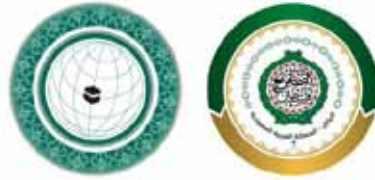
# Journal



OIC Secretary-General: Palestinians are Facing Unprecedented Brutal Israeli Aggression



**Gazans are Being Crushed by the Weight of Killing, Starvation, and Displacement**



القمة العربية الإسلامية المشتركة غير العادية  
Joint Arab Islamic Extraordinary Summit  
Sommet arabo-islamique conjoint extraordinaire

Riyadh, Saudi Arabia  
November 11, 2023

The Extraordinary Joint Arab-Islamic Summit was held in Riyadh, Kingdom of Saudi Arabia on November 11, 2023, to discuss the Israeli aggression on the Palestinian people. The Summit was inaugurated by His Royal Highness the Crown Prince and Prime Minister, Prince Mohammad bin Salman Bin Abdulaziz Al Saud, with the participation of leaders, heads of government and heads of delegations of Member States of the OIC and the League of Arab States (LAS).



# OUR MESSAGE

## The Palestinian Cause: A Key Pillar of Our Work for the Islamic Ummah

Since the beginning of last October, the Palestinians have been subjected to one of the most horrific campaigns of genocide in human history, manifested through a barbaric Israeli aggression against the Gaza Strip that has spared no one, claiming the lives of tens of thousands of Palestinians, and injuring hundreds of thousands more, while paying no heed to any laws, morals, or humanitarian considerations. As a result of this aggression, thousands of buildings have been destroyed, dozens of neighborhoods have been wiped out, the health system has been put out of action, schools and hospitals have been turned into shelters and are themselves subject to repeated attacks, and places of worship, residential areas, and vital facilities have been demolished. Consequently, the inhabitants of Gaza are now facing life without even the most necessities.

In the face of this disastrous situation, I reaffirm the unified position of the OIC Member States with regard to the Palestinian Cause, which is to work toward putting an end to the tragedy of the Palestinians in the Gaza Strip and throughout the Palestinian Territory. This is a firm and resolute stance, given that the Cause of Palestine was the impetus for the establishment of the Organization of Islamic Cooperation, and has always been a central pillar of its work.

Amid this inhumane situation suffered by Palestine, and in view of all the tragedies endured by the Palestinian people over the past three months, the OIC has been quick to harness all its mechanisms and capabilities in order to put an end to the aggression and work to resolve the crisis as urgently as possible. To that end, and at the kind invitation of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, the OIC held, on November 11, 2023, in Riyadh, a Joint Arab-Islamic Extraordinary Summit to discuss the brutal Israeli aggression against the Palestinian people. I take this opportunity to reiterate my sincere thanks and appreciation to the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, under the leadership of the Custodian of the Two Holy Mosques, King Salman bin Abdulaziz Al Saud, King of Saudi Arabia, and his Crown Prince, Prime Minister, HRH Prince Mohammed bin Salman Al Saud, may Allah protect them, for the initiative to convene this Summit, and for all the arrangements made to ensure its success.

The Summit came out with significant recommendations to address the harsh conditions in Palestine and the extremely serious developments resulting from the continued Israeli aggression on the Gaza Strip.

We have all been following, with profound pain, the appalling massacres and horrific scenes of killing, destruction, and ethnic cleansing perpetrated by the occupation army against Palestinians in Gaza, which constitute a crime against humanity and an egregious example of organized terrorism and brutal violence committed by the Israeli army with no political, religious, humanitarian or legal deterrent. This makes it imperative to resort to the existing international legal and judicial mechanisms in order to seek accountability.

The OIC General Secretariat has already embarked on this path and has requested the Prosecutor of the International Criminal Court to start an investigation into the war crimes committed by Israel and prosecute the perpetrators of such crimes through all judicial and legal means.

As part of the OIC's efforts in the face of the Israeli aggression, the Joint Arab-Islamic Extraordinary Summit mandated HH Prince Faisal bin Farhan bin Abdullah, Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, Chair of the Arab and Islamic Summits, and a number of Foreign Ministers of OIC Member States, along with the Secretary-General of the Organization of Islamic Cooperation and the Secretary-General of the League of Arab States, to immediately start an international action on behalf of all Member States of the OIC and the League, with the aim of mobilizing international efforts to halt the aggression against Gaza and to press for launching a serious and genuine political process conducive to lasting and comprehensive peace, in accordance with the adopted international terms of reference.

The Extraordinary Summit also mandated the General Secretariat to establish two monitoring units: a legal monitoring unit to document the Israeli crimes committed in the Gaza Strip since October 7, 2023, with the aim of preparing legal pleadings on all the violations of international law and international humanitarian law committed by Israel; and a media monitoring unit to document all the occupation authorities' crimes against the Palestinian people on media platforms, in order to expose and publicize these crimes and illegal and inhumane practices.

We reiterate our call for activating the international judicial mechanisms and the international criminal justice process in order to deter the Israeli occupation, prevent it from committing more crimes, and hold it accountable for its continuing violations. We underline that the policy of aggression will never bring about security and stability; on the contrary, it will only feed the spiral of violence and hatred. The only way to avoid this is for Israel to comply with international law, international humanitarian law, and the United Nations resolutions, and the international community must compel it to do so.



**Hissein Brahim Taha**

*Secretary-General of the Organization of Islamic Cooperation*

*We have all been following, with profound pain, the appalling massacres and horrific scenes of killing, destruction, and ethnic cleansing perpetrated by the occupation army against Palestinians in Gaza*

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## Joint Arab-Islamic Extraordinary Summit to Counter Aggression on Gaza

In his speech before the Joint Arab-Islamic Extraordinary Summit, convened in Riyadh to discuss the Israeli aggression against the Palestinian people in the Gaza Strip, H.E. Mr. Hissein Brahim Taha, OIC Secretary-General, indicated that as part of the General Secretariat's follow-up of the outcomes of the Executive Committee's Ministerial-level meeting regarding recent developments in the Occupied Palestinian Territory, the Secretary-General made contacts with, and wrote letters to, key international actors to convey the OIC's position regarding the need to put an end to the Israeli aggression and to deliver humanitarian aid to the Gaza Strip.

The Saudi capital, Riyadh, hosted, on November 11, 2023, the Joint Arab-Islamic Extraordinary Summit, under the chairmanship of HRH Prince Mohammed bin Salman bin Abdulaziz Al Saud, Crown Prince and Prime Minister, with the participation of the Leaders, Heads of Government and Heads of Delegation of Member States of the OIC and the League of Arab States.

The Secretary-General indicated that efforts and contacts with influential countries and international organizations would be pursued to convey the OIC's position and demands regarding the necessity for an immediate halt to the Israeli military aggression against the Palestinian people, and the

need to launch an internationally-sponsored political process that would end the Israeli occupation and lead to the establishment of the independent State of Palestine on the borders of June 4, 1967, with Al-Quds Al-Sharif as its capital.

The Secretary-General expressed his sincere thanks and appreciation to the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, under the leadership of the Custodian of the Two Holy Mosques, His Majesty King Salman bin Abdulaziz Al Saud, and Crown Prince, Prime Minister HRH Prince Mohammed bin Salman, for the invitation to convene this Summit as well as for the generous hospitality and for providing all conditions of success for this event.

The Secretary-General noted that this Summit "is being held at a time when the Palestinian people are being subjected to a brutal, unprecedented military aggression". He renewed the joint commitment to supporting the Cause of Palestine and Al-Quds Al-Sharif where extremely serious developments are taking place as a result of the continuing Israeli aggression against the Gaza Strip.

The Secretary-General indicated that the OIC has been following, with profound pain, the horrific scenes of massacres, which are emblematic of the organized terrorism and brutal violence perpetrated by the Israeli occupation forces, with no political, religious,

humanitarian or legal deterrent. He stressed the pressing need to resort to the existing international legal and judicial mechanisms to prosecute the Israeli occupation and hold it accountable.

The Secretary-General commended the positions of the OIC countries that have condemned the Israeli aggression, and the efforts they have exerted to sponsor and have the UN General Assembly adopt an important resolution calling for a durable humanitarian truce leading to the cessation of aggression, and for opening humanitarian corridors for the delivery of aid and essential needs to the Gaza Strip. He stressed the need to intensify efforts on the international scene in order to ensure the implementation of this resolution and to compel Israel, the occupying power, to abide by its obligations under international humanitarian law and all relevant UN resolutions.

The Secretary-General concluded by calling on Member States to promptly provide urgent financial and humanitarian assistance to the State of Palestine, so that it can provide the essential needs of the Palestinian people in the Occupied Palestinian Territory, especially in view of the magnitude of the humanitarian tragedy suffered by Palestinian civilians in the Gaza Strip.



## Riyadh Summit: The Region Will Not Enjoy Security and Peace Unless Palestinians Enjoy Them

The Joint Arab-Islamic Extraordinary Summit reaffirmed, in its Resolution, the centrality of the Palestinian Cause as well as its support, with all its capabilities, for the legitimate struggle of the Palestinian people to liberate all their occupied territories. It stressed the need to halt the Israeli aggression against the Palestinian people, and its absolute rejection of attempts to forcibly displace or deport the Palestinian people, and any plans to separate Gaza from the West Bank, including Al-Quds Al-Sharif.

The Resolution affirmed that Israel and all the States in the region would never enjoy security and peace unless Palestinians enjoy them and regain all their usurped rights.

The Summit called for convening an International Peace Conference as soon as possible. It stressed that just, durable, and comprehensive peace is the only path toward achieving this, based on international legitimacy resolutions and the Arab Peace Initiative as key terms of reference, and reaffirmed adherence to all the provisions included therein.

The Resolution issued by the Extraordinary Summit involved political, legal, and humanitarian actions, including breaking the siege on Gaza, ensuring the entry of Arab, Islamic, and international humanitarian aid convoys,

and supporting Egypt's efforts to deliver aid to the Strip in an immediate, sustainable, and sufficient manner.

The Resolution called on international organizations to participate in this process. It also urged the Security Council to adopt a resolution that would condemn the destruction, displacement, and prevention of delivery of essential services and supplies, impose immediate cessation of the Israeli military aggression, lift the Israeli illegal siege, ensure delivery of humanitarian aid to the Gaza Strip, and compel the colonial occupation to abide by international law. It described the ongoing Israeli aggression as a retaliatory war crime that cannot be justified under any pretext whatsoever.

The Resolution involved the activation of the Arab-Islamic Financial Safety Net to provide financial, economic, and humanitarian support to the Government of the State of Palestine and to UNRWA, and emphasized the need to mobilize international partners to reconstruct Gaza and mitigate the effects of the massive destruction caused by the Israeli aggression as soon as it stops.

The Resolution mandated the General Secretariats of the OIC and of the League of Arab States to establish two specialized monitoring units to document all the Israeli

crimes in the Gaza Strip since 7 October 2023 and to prepare pleadings on the Israeli violations. It affirmed support for the legal and political initiatives of the State of Palestine at the International Court of Justice (ICJ), the International Criminal Court (ICC), and the Human Rights Council (HRC). It also called on the Prosecutor of the ICC to continue the investigation into the war crimes and crimes against humanity perpetrated by Israel against the Palestinian people.

The Resolution also mandated the Foreign Ministers of Saudi Arabia, Jordan, Egypt, Qatar, Türkiye, Indonesia, Nigeria, Palestine, and any other interested country, along with the Secretaries-General of the OIC and the League of Arab States, to immediately start an international action on behalf of all Member States of the two Organizations with the aim to formulate an international move to halt the war on Gaza.

The Resolution called on all countries to stop exporting weapons and ammunition to the occupation authorities that are used by their army and terrorist settlers to kill the Palestinian people and destroy their homes, hospitals, schools, mosques, churches, and all their properties.

## Ministerial Committee Begins a Round of Visits to Stop Aggression on Gaza



In implementation of the mandate assigned by the Joint Arab-Islamic Extraordinary Summit, held in Riyadh, Saudi Arabia, on November 11, 2023, HH Prince Faisal bin Farhan bin Abdullah, Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, Chair of the Arab and Islamic Summits, led an Arab-Islamic delegation that included a number of Member States of the Organization of Islamic Cooperation and the League of Arab States to undertake a round of official visits to permanent Member States of the Security Council and other countries and international organizations, in order to reach a ceasefire in the Gaza Strip.

The Arab-Islamic Committee included: H.E. Sheikh Mohammed bin Abdulrahman Al Thani, Prime Minister, Minister of Foreign Affairs of the State of Qatar, H.E. Mr. Ayman Al-Safadi, Deputy Prime Minister, Minister of Foreign Affairs and Expatriates of the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan, H.E. Mr. Sameh Shoukry, Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Arab Republic of Egypt, H.E. Mr. Riyad Al-Maliki, Minister of Foreign Affairs of the State of Palestine, H.E. Mr. Hakan Fidan, Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Türkiye, H.E. Ms. Retno Marsudi, Minister

of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Indonesia, H.E. Yusuf Maitama Tuggar, Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Federal Republic of Nigeria, H.E. Mr. Ahmed Aboul Gheit, Secretary-General of the League of Arab States, and H.E. Mr. Hissein Brahim Taha, Secretary-General of the Organization of Islamic Cooperation.

This Arab-Islamic action is undertaken on behalf of all Member States of the League of Arab States and the Organization of Islamic Cooperation in order to reach an immediate ceasefire in the Gaza Strip. It also aims to pressure for launching a serious and genuine political process that would lead to the achievement of lasting and comprehensive peace, in accordance with the established international terms of reference, as well as for taking deterrent measures to halt the crimes of the colonial occupation authorities against humanity, while ensuring urgent relief corridors to avoid a humanitarian catastrophe in the besieged Gaza Strip.

The Ministerial Committee first met, in the Chinese capital, Beijing, with Mr. Han Zheng, Vice-President of the People's Republic of China, who appreciated the sig-

nificant efforts of the Arab-Islamic Summit and the resolutions it adopted with the aim of reducing escalation, protecting civilians, and resuming peace efforts. He emphasized China's support for the joint Ministerial Committee emanating from the Summit. He stressed that China has been working, since the outbreak of the crisis in Gaza, to strongly push for a ceasefire as well as for protecting civilians, allowing delivery of humanitarian relief, and reaching a just solution to the Palestinian issue. He affirmed that China is keen to coordinate and work jointly with Arab and Islamic countries to reach a ceasefire.

For their part, the members of the Ministerial Committee commended the positions taken by China with regard to the crisis in Gaza, which are aligned with the Arab and Islamic positions. They also underlined the positive role played by China in the Security Council to push for a ceasefire in Gaza.

The Committee underscored the need to immediately put an end to the military escalation and the forced displacement of Palestinians from the Gaza Strip.

## International Consultations with the French President and the UN S.G.



The Ministerial Committee mandated by the Joint Arab-Islamic Extraordinary Summit, led by HH Prince Faisal bin Farhan bin Abdullah, Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, held an official meeting with H.E. President Emmanuel Macron, President of the French Republic, on 22 November 2023 in the French capital, Paris.

The meeting was attended by Members of the Ministerial Committee, namely H.E. Mr. Ayman Al-Safadi, Deputy Prime Minister, Minister of Foreign Affairs and Expatriates of the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan; H.E. Mr. Sameh Shoukry, Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Arab Republic of Egypt; H.E. Mr. Riyadh Al-Maliki, Minister of Foreign Affairs of the State of Palestine; H.E. Mr. Hakan Fidan, Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Türkiye; H.E. Ms. Retno Marsudi, Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Indonesia; H.E. Yusuf Maitama Tuggar, Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Federal Republic of Nigeria; and H.E. Mr. Ahmed About Gheit, Secretary-General of the League of Arab States. H.E. Ms. Catherine Colonna, French Foreign Minister, was also present in the meeting.

The meeting welcomed the joint mediation

efforts undertaken by Egypt, Qatar, and the United States.

The Committee urged the French Republic to play a balanced role consistent with international law and international humanitarian law, in order to reach an immediate and complete ceasefire and implement all relevant international resolutions.

The Committee urged the international community to fulfill its responsibility and reject all forms of selectivity in the application of international legal and moral standards, and to protect the Palestinian people from the crimes committed by the occupation forces and settler militias in the Gaza Strip and the occupied West Bank, including East Al-Quds.

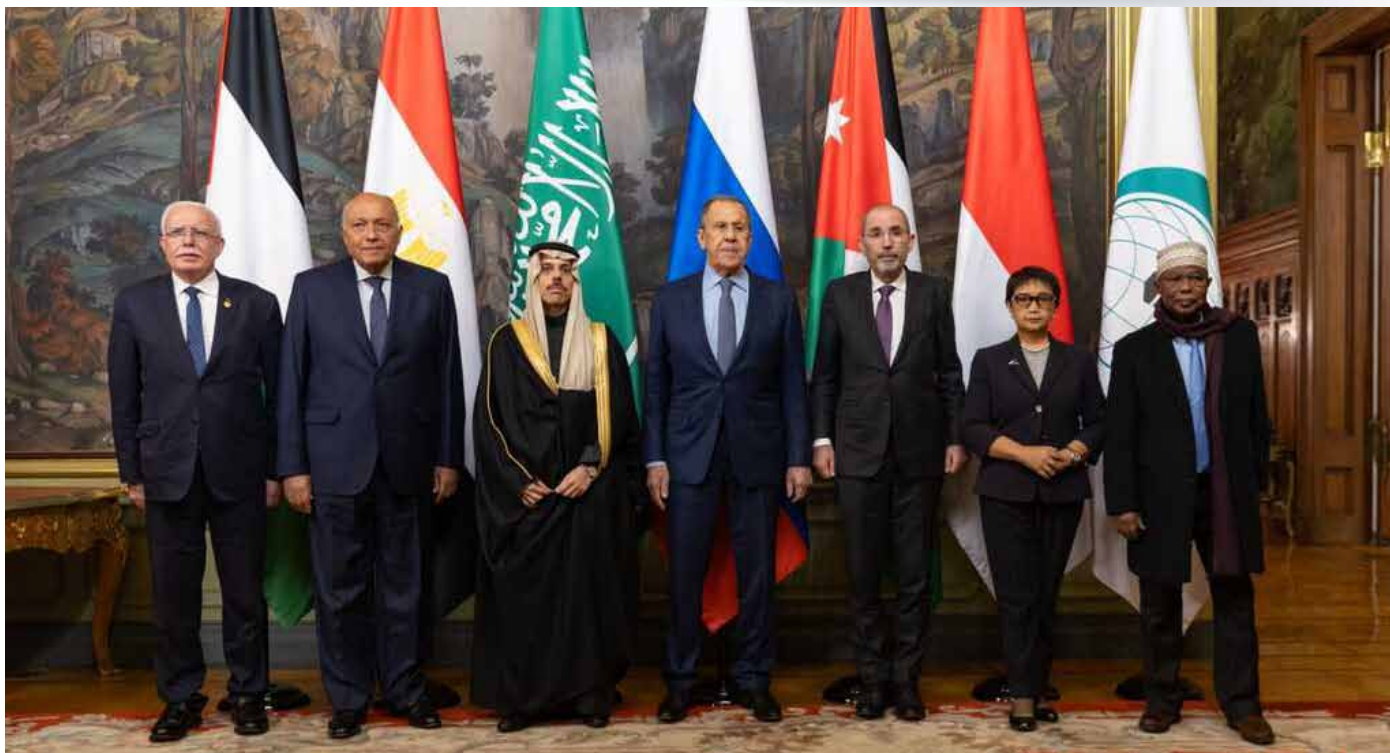
The meeting addressed the need to revive the peace process. In this regard, the Committee highlighted the importance of ensuring a just, lasting and comprehensive peace, by implementing international resolutions related to the two-state solution, and enabling the Palestinian people to gain their legitimate right to establish the independent and sovereign Palestinian State along the borders of June 4, 1967, with East Al-Quds as its capital.

The Joint Ministerial Committee also met with the Secretary-General of the United Nations, Mr. António Guterres, at the UN Headquarters in New York, with the participation of the Foreign Ministers of Saudi Arabia, Qatar, Jordan, Egypt, Palestine, Türkiye, Indonesia, the UAE and Malaysia, in addition to the Secretary-General of the League of Arab States, Mr. Ahmed About Gheit.

The meeting discussed developments of the situation in the Gaza Strip and its surroundings, including the humanitarian truce and the release of some prisoners and their return to their families. It also addressed efforts to reach an immediate ceasefire and the need for the international community to fulfill its responsibility for protecting civilians and ensuring the application of the rules of international law and international humanitarian law.

The meeting highlighted the importance of implementing the resolutions issued by the United Nations regarding the protection and security of the Palestinian people against the violations committed by the Israeli occupation forces.

## Foreign Ministers of OIC Countries Meet with Russia's Foreign Minister



The Ministerial Committee mandated by the Joint Arab-Islamic Extraordinary Summit, led by HH Prince Faisal bin Farhan bin Abdullah, Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, held an official meeting with Mr. Sergei Lavrov, Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation, on November 21, 2023, in Moscow, Russia.

The meeting was attended by members of the Ministerial Committee, namely H.E. Mr. Ayman Al-Safadi, Deputy Prime Minister, Minister of Foreign Affairs and Expatriates of the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan; H.E. Mr. Sameh Shoukry, Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Arab Republic of Egypt; H.E. Mr. Riyad Al-Maliki, Minister of Foreign Affairs of the State of Palestine; H.E. Ms. Retno Marsudi, Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Indonesia; and H.E. Mr. Hissein Brahim Taha, Secretary-General of the Organization of Islamic Cooperation.

The Russian Foreign Minister commended the Ministerial Committee's efforts towards achieving a long-awaited ceasefire in the Gaza Strip. He affirmed Russia's support for ceasefire efforts, in accordance with the resolutions of the UN Security Council and General Assembly, and in line with the reso-

lutions of the Peace Summit in Cairo and the Joint Arab-Islamic Extraordinary Summit in Riyadh.

The Minister expressed his country's condemnation of the collective punishment imposed on civilians in the Gaza Strip, which he considered as a blatant violation of international humanitarian law. He underlined the need for action to put an end to all violations of international laws and international humanitarian law, and to get more humanitarian aid into Gaza in order to avoid an unprecedented humanitarian catastrophe. He stressed Russia's support for providing adequate conditions to launch a comprehensive peace process in accordance with the relevant UN resolutions and the 2002 Arab Peace Initiative, and on the basis of the two-state solution.

For their part, the members of the Ministerial Committee stressed the need for the members of the UN Security Council and for the international community to take effective and urgent measures for an immediate ceasefire in Gaza, which is a priority for all Arab and Islamic countries. They also emphasized the need to immediately lift the blockade imposed on the Gaza Strip,

release prisoners and hostages, and reactivate a serious and just peace process based on the terms of reference of international legitimacy.

The Committee members urged the international community to fulfill its responsibility and reject all forms of selectivity in the application of international legal and moral standards, and not to turn a blind eye to the heinous crimes committed by the Israeli occupation forces against defenseless Palestinian civilians, as well as to the occupation's violations against the Gaza Strip, the West Bank, and East Al-Quds.

The Committee members pointed out that the Israeli occupation's continued violations of the rules of international law, and its non-compliance with international legitimacy resolutions, including the recent Security Council resolution adopted the week before, can only weaken the legitimacy of the international system, the credibility of its defenders, and its ability to maintain regional peace, security, and stability in the future, which would further fuel extremism and violence.

## Ministerial Committee Discusses Ceasefire Efforts with Blinken



The Ministerial Committee mandated by the Joint Arab-Islamic Extraordinary Summit, led by HH Prince Faisal bin Farhan bin Abdullah, Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, held an official meeting, on December 8, 2023, with the Secretary of State of the United States of America, Mr. Antony Blinken.

The meeting was attended by H.E. Sheikh Mohammed bin Abdulrahman Al Thani, Prime Minister, Minister of Foreign Affairs of the State of Qatar, H.E. Mr. Ayman Al-Safadi, Deputy Prime Minister, Minister of Foreign Affairs and Expatriates of the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan; H.E. Mr. Sameh Shoukry, Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Arab Republic of Egypt; H.E. Mr. Riyad Al-Maliki, Minister of Foreign Affairs of the State of Palestine; and H.E. Mr. Hakan Fidan, Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Türkiye.

The members of the Ministerial Committee reiterated their call on the United States to assume its responsibilities and take the needed actions to pressure the Israeli occupation for an immediate ceasefire. They expressed their resentment at the United States' use of its veto power, which pre-

vented the adoption of a UNSC resolution calling, for the second time, for an immediate humanitarian ceasefire in the Gaza Strip. The Committee members reaffirmed their unified position rejecting the continued military operations by the Israeli occupation forces in the Gaza Strip, and renewed their call for the necessity to implement an immediate and complete ceasefire and to ensure the protection of civilians, in line with international humanitarian law, as well as to put an end to the ever-deepening humanitarian tragedy in Gaza, and to lift all restrictions that hinder the entry of humanitarian aid into the Strip.

The Committee members expressed their full rejection of the Occupation's attempts to forcibly displace the Palestinian people from Gaza. They stressed the necessity to comply with international law and international humanitarian law, and that they will stand against these attempts at all levels.

The Committee members reiterated the need for creating a political climate conducive to the two-state solution and the establishment of the Palestinian state along the borders of June 4, 1967, in accordance with the relevant international resolutions, and

expressed their rejection of fragmenting the Palestinian issue and discussing the future of the Gaza Strip separately from the overall Cause of Palestine.

On December 12, 2023, the Ministerial Committee met in Geneva with the Director-General of the World Health Organization (WHO), Mr. Tedros Adhanom. The Committee was chaired by HH Prince Faisal Bin Farhan Bin Abdullah, Minister for Foreign Affairs of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, and included H.E. Mr. Riyad al-Maliki Minister of Foreign Affairs of the State of Palestine, H.E. Ms. Retno Marsudi, Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Indonesia, and H.E. Mr. Hissein Brahim Taha, Secretary-General of the Organization of Islamic Cooperation (OIC).

The meeting discussed the rapid and grave developments in the Gaza Strip, and the increased targeting of defenseless civilians and civilian facilities, and stressed the need for an immediate ceasefire in order to guarantee the return of security and stability to the Gaza Strip.



## Ministerial Committee Meets with Canadian P.M. and UK Foreign Secretary

The Ministerial Committee mandated by the Joint Arab-Islamic Extraordinary Summit met, on December 9, 2023, with H.E. Mr. Justin Trudeau, Prime Minister of Canada. The Committee was led by HH Prince Faisal bin Farhan bin Abdullah, Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, and included H.E. Mr. Riyad Al-Maliki, Minister of Foreign Affairs of the State of Palestine, and H.E. Mr. Hakan Fidan, Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Türkiye.

The meeting discussed the rapid and serious developments in the Gaza Strip and their repercussions, the military escalation against defenseless civilians, and the need for an immediate ceasefire to ensure the return of security and stability to the Gaza Strip.

The Committee stressed the need for the international community to act immediately in order to put an end to the Israeli occupation's continuous violations of international law and international humanitarian law, and to ensure full protection for civilians in Gaza. The Ministerial Committee, chaired by HRH Prince Faisal bin Farhan bin Abdullah, Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, also met with H.E. Mr. David Cameron, Foreign Secretary of the United

Kingdom, in the British capital, London, in the presence of H.E. Lord Tariq Ahmad, Minister of State for the Middle East, North Africa, South Asia, Commonwealth and United Nations at the British Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office.

The meeting was attended by Members of the Ministerial Committee, namely H.E. Mr. Ayman Al-Safadi, Deputy Prime Minister, Minister of Foreign Affairs and Expatriates of the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan; H.E. Mr. Sameh Shoukry, Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Arab Republic of Egypt; H.E. Mr. Riyad Al-Maliki, Minister of Foreign Affairs of the State of Palestine; H.E. Mr. Hakan Fidan, Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Türkiye; H.E. Ms. Retno Marsudi, Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Indonesia; H.E. Yusuf Maitama Tuggar, Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Federal Republic of Nigeria; and H.E. Mr. Ahmed Aboul Gheit, Secretary-General of the League of Arab States.

The Committee called on Britain to play a balanced role consistent with international law and international humanitarian law, in order to reach an immediate ceasefire and implement all relevant international resolu-

tions.

The meeting discussed the need to provide secure corridors for the delivery of humanitarian aid, food, water, fuel and electricity to Gaza, in addition to allowing international organizations to carry out their tasks in the Gaza Strip and its surroundings.

The Committee urged the international community to fulfill its responsibility and reject all forms of selectivity in the application of international legal and moral standards, and not to turn a blind eye to the heinous crimes committed by the occupation forces and settler militias against the Palestinian people in the Gaza Strip and the occupied West Bank, including East Al-Quds.

The Ministerial Committee also met in Geneva, Switzerland, with the United Nations High Commissioner on Human Rights, Mr. Volker Türk. The meeting discussed the rapid and grave developments in the Gaza Strip, the military escalation against defenseless civilians, and the need for an immediate ceasefire in order to guarantee the return of security and stability to the Gaza Strip.



## Ministerial Committee Rejects Fragmentation of the Palestinian Cause

The Ministerial Committee mandated by the Joint Arab-Islamic Extraordinary Summit, headed by HH Prince Faisal bin Farhan bin Abdullah, Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, held an official meeting, on December 15, 2023, in the Norwegian capital, Oslo, with the Prime Minister of the Kingdom of Norway, Mr. Jonas Gahr Større, and the Foreign Ministers of the Nordic countries (Norway - Denmark - Sweden - Finland - Iceland) and the Benelux Union countries (Netherlands - Belgium - Luxembourg).

The Committee included H.E. Sheikh Mohammed bin Abdulrahman Al Thani, Prime Minister and Minister of Foreign Affairs of the State of Qatar, H.E. Mr. Ayman Al-Safadi, Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Foreign Affairs and Expatriates of the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan, H.E. Mr. Riyad Al-Maliki, Minister of Foreign Affairs and Expatriates of the State of Palestine, H.E. Mr. Hakan Fidan, Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Türkiye, H.E. Mr. Hissein Brahim Taha, Secretary-General of the Organization of Islamic Cooperation.

The meeting discussed the serious developments in the Gaza Strip and the Israeli

occupation's continued military escalation against defenseless civilians.

The Committee Members reiterated their unified position rejecting the Israeli occupation forces' continued aggression against the Palestinian people in the Gaza Strip, and their call for the need to reach an immediate and complete ceasefire and ensure the protection of civilians, in line with the provisions of international humanitarian law.

The Committee Members also called for standing against all the flagrant violations committed by the Israeli occupation forces against the Palestinian people, which exacerbate the humanitarian tragedy and impede the entry of urgent humanitarian aid into the besieged Gaza Strip. They underlined the importance of holding the occupation authorities accountable for their continued violations in the Gaza Strip and the occupied West Bank, including East Al-Quds, in contravention of international law and international humanitarian law.

The Committee Members stressed the need to take serious and urgent steps to provide secure relief corridors for the delivery of urgent humanitarian, food, and medical aid to the Gaza Strip, expressing their rejection

of any measures restricting the entry of humanitarian aid quickly and safely.

The Committee Members highlighted the necessity of providing proper political conditions for the establishment of the Palestinian State along the borders of June 4, 1967, in accordance with the relevant international resolutions, expressing their rejection of fragmenting the Palestinian issue and discussing the future of Gaza in isolation from the Palestinian Cause.

On December 12, 2023, the Ministerial Committee met, in Geneva, with the President of the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC), Mrs. Mirjana Spoljarić Iger.

The meeting discussed the rapid and serious developments in the Gaza Strip, the aggression targeting defenseless populations and civilian facilities, and the need to provide protection for civilians. Emphasis was laid on the need for an immediate ceasefire, which would make it possible to provide humanitarian relief and essential needs to the inhabitants of Gaza and ensure the return of security and stability to the Strip.



## OIC Secretary-General Strongly Condemns Israeli State Terrorism

The Organization of Islamic Cooperation (OIC) held, on October 18, 2023, at its headquarters in Jeddah, an Extraordinary Open-ended Meeting of the Executive Committee to discuss the Israeli aggression against the Palestinian people.

Addressing the meeting, H.E. Mr. Hissein Brahim Taha, OIC Secretary-General, strongly condemned the horrific massacres perpetrated by the Israeli occupation in the Gaza Strip, claiming the lives of thousands of innocent civilians and injuring thousands more. He considered these massacres as a war crime that contravenes all humane values, and a state terrorism whose perpetrators must be held accountable and punished. He paid homage to all those who lost their lives as a result of this heinous aggression.

The Secretary-General expressed full solidarity with the Palestinian people and unwavering support for their just struggle to gain their right to self-determination and establish their sovereign independent State. He underscored the need for concerted efforts to stop the unprecedented Israeli aggression and to provide humanitarian corridors to facilitate the delivery of medicine, food, and

other essential needs to the Gaza Strip.

The Secretary-General asserted that the OIC had, on more than one occasion, warned against the serious consequences of the continued war waged against the Palestinian people. He noted that the war is only being repeated because of the absence of legal and political deterrence on the international scene, the disrespect for international law, and the impunity enjoyed by Israel, the occupying power, for its policies of settlement, forced displacement, ethnic cleansing, killing, organized terrorism, attacks on holy sites, and other practices committed against the Palestinian people.

The Secretary-General pointed out that the continued aggression on Gaza constitutes a transgression of all principles and values, with the killing and injuring of thousands of Palestinians, including children, women, and elderly people, in addition to the forced displacement of families, the indiscriminate destruction of residential, educational, health and media facilities, including UNRWA facilities, and civilian infrastructure, all in flagrant violation of international humanitarian law.

The Secretary-General stressed that the continued policy of aggression against the Pal-

estinian people will not bring security and stability to the region, but rather will further fuel violence and hatred. He reiterated his call on the international community to compel Israel, the occupying power, to abide by international law, international humanitarian law, and the relevant UN resolutions.

The Secretary-General reasserted that no peace or stability could be achieved in the region without finding a just and comprehensive solution to the Palestinian issue. This solution would end the Israeli colonial occupation and embody the right of the Palestinian people to establish their independent, sovereign state on the borders of June 4, 1967, with East Al-Quds as its capital, in line with the relevant UN resolutions and the Arab Peace Initiative.

The Secretary-General started his speech by expressing his sincere gratitude and appreciation to the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia for its invitation to convene the extraordinary meeting. This initiative, he added, reflects Saudi Arabia's firm positions in support of the issues of the Islamic Ummah, particularly the Cause of Palestine.



## OIC Executive Committee Rejects Displacement of Gaza's Population

The Executive Committee of the Organization of Islamic Cooperation categorically rejected, in its Extraordinary Open-ended Meeting held on October 18, 2023, to discuss the Israeli aggression against the Gaza Strip, the calls for the displacement of the inhabitants of Gaza, and reaffirmed its support for the steadfastness of the Palestinian people on their land. It stressed the need for the international community to assume its role in preventing any attempt to forcibly displace the Palestinians from their land, to export the crisis to the neighboring countries, and to exacerbate the problem of Palestinian refugees. It insisted that the refugees' right to return and compensation must be secured as part of a comprehensive solution to the conflict that addresses the final status issues, in line with the relevant UN resolutions and the Arab Peace Initiative. The meeting also underscored the need to put an end to the military escalation, lift the siege imposed on the Gaza Strip, and urgently contribute to the entry of humanitarian aid and relief for civilians. The Final Communiqué issued by the meeting called on all countries, and the international community, to promptly supply ur-

gent humanitarian, medical and relief aid, to provide water and electricity, to immediately open humanitarian corridors in order to safely deliver urgent aid to Gaza through the United Nations institutions, particularly UNRWA, and to support efforts in this regard.

The Communiqué warned against the danger posed by the continued policy of deliberate targeting of civilians and collective punishment, accompanied by policies of starvation and water deprivation, in addition to the shutting down of Gaza's only power plant as fuel entry to Gaza was blocked. This portends a real catastrophe for all health and humanitarian services, in contravention of international humanitarian law, which amounts to an international crime and a crime against humanity. The Communiqué strongly condemned the blatant targeting by Israel's brutal occupation forces of Al-Ahli Baptist Hospital in Gaza, which killed and injured hundreds of innocent sick, wounded, and displaced innocent civilians, an act that amounted to a war crime and a crime of genocide, in flagrant violation of international humanitarian law, ethics, and international hu-

manitarian instruments. It called on the international community to act promptly and hold the Israeli occupation accountable for these heinous war crimes against the Palestinian people and against all humanity and urged immediate intervention to halt these massacres.

The Communiqué stressed that Israel, the occupying power, bears full responsibility for the fate of civilians in Gaza who are enduring a real tragedy under bombardment, siege, and starvation, without electricity, food, or clean water, while being forced to abandon their homes. It also held Israel fully responsible for its policy of indiscriminate collective punishment, in flagrant contravention of international law and international humanitarian law, and in violation of its legal responsibilities as an occupying power, as stipulated in the Geneva Conventions.

The Communiqué underlined the need to preserve the lives of all civilians, and not to target them in any way, as targeting civilians is inconsistent with international law and international humanitarian law, as well as with divine laws.



## OIC Countries Warn against Settler Terrorism

The Final Communiqué issued by the OIC Executive Committee, in its Extraordinary Open-ended Meeting held on October 18, 2023, warned against the escalating attacks by the Israeli occupation army and settler terrorism supported and protected by the occupation forces in Al-Quds and the West Bank. It also warned against the continuing aggression against the civilian population and their properties, including acts of killing, destruction, displacement, and the building and expansion of settlements, as part of a brutal colonial campaign aimed at annexing the occupied Palestinian territory.

The Communiqué underlined the need to preserve the sanctity of holy sites in Al-Quds, to provide full protection to Al-Aqsa Mosque, as well as to prevent violations against the status and sanctity of holy places in Al-Quds.

The Communiqué reaffirmed support to the Government of the State of Palestine at all political, economic and financial levels, as well as to its international and legal endeavors to halt the heinous crimes committed by the Israeli occupation, including the crime of genocide against the Palestinian people.

The Communiqué deplored the international positions that support the brutal aggression against the Palestinian people and that grant Israel immunity and impunity, taking advantage of the double standards

that provide cover for the occupying power, which will only fuel the conflict and lead to increased violence and destruction, while seeking to impose collective punishment on the Palestinian people, including through cutting off humanitarian aid.

The Communiqué called on key international actors to engage in sponsoring a serious political process to achieve peace based on ending the illegal occupation that had begun in 1967 and implementing the two-state solution, within a clear time frame. It also called on the missions of the OIC Member States and Islamic Groups in capitals and international organizations to take immediate action to convey the OIC's position to the capitals of the countries and organizations to which they are accredited and to promptly act to condemn and stop the aggression and ensure delivery of the needed humanitarian supplies to the Palestinian people.

The Communiqué called on Member States to adopt all possible and effective diplomatic, legal and deterrent measures to stop the crimes against humanity committed by Israel, the occupying power. It requested the Secretary-General to identify the set of effective and concrete measures as soon as possible and submit it to the Extraordinary CFM Meeting.

The Communiqué stressed the need to pro-

vide international protection for the Palestinian people, in conformity with the standards of international humanitarian law, as has been repeatedly called for by the UN General Assembly, including in resolution ES-10/20 of 13 June 2018, and in line with the Final Communiqué of the 7th Extraordinary Islamic Summit, by dispatching an international protection force to protect innocent lives from the continuing attacks committed by the Israeli occupation forces and the settlers.

The Communiqué mandated the Secretary-General to contact the five permanent members of the Security Council, the Secretary-General of the United Nations, the High Commissioner for Human Rights, and the President of the European Union, and to continue coordination with regional and international organizations, including the League of Arab States, the Gulf Cooperation Council, the African Union and the Non-Aligned Movement, in order to take the necessary steps that would compel Israel to stop all its violations, attacks and crimes, and to work to provide international protection for the Palestinian people. It also mandated the Secretary-General to follow up on the implementation of the Final Communiqué and to report thereon to the next meeting of the Council of Foreign Ministers.



## OIC and the United Nations Discuss Israeli Aggression on Gaza

The OIC Secretary-General, H.E. Mr. Hissein Brahim Taha, received, on November 5, 2023, at the General Secretariat headquarters in Jeddah, Ms. Amina J. Mohammed, Deputy Secretary-General of the United Nations.

The meeting discussed the serious situation in Gaza and the repercussions of the ongoing Israeli attacks on the Palestinian people and on peace and security in the region and around the world. It also addressed joint efforts related to Afghanistan as well as to combating Islamophobia and the incidents of Holy Qur'an desecration in some European countries.

In a statement issued during the past months, the OIC called on key international actors to assume their responsibilities towards stopping the ongoing Israeli military aggression against the Palestinian people in the Gaza Strip. It also called for the necessity of supplying urgent humanitarian relief and essential needs and providing international protection for the Palestinian people who are being exposed to a war crime through the unprecedented Israeli aggression.

This call was included in written letters addressed by the OIC Secretary-General to key international actors, including the permanent members of the UN Security Council, the Secretary-General of the United Nations, the EU Foreign Policy Chief, the President of

the International Red Cross, and the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights.

In this same context, the OIC welcomed the UN General Assembly Resolution, adopted on December 12, 2023, demanding an immediate humanitarian ceasefire to ensure the delivery of humanitarian aid to the Gaza Strip. This resolution reflects the international consensus and the political will of the overwhelming majority of the world's countries regarding the need to stop the Israeli occupation's crimes of displacement, destruction and genocide committed against the Palestinian people throughout the Palestinian territory.

The OIC called on the international community to compel Israel, the occupying power, to fully and immediately comply with the terms of this resolution, to put an end to the threat of the collapse of the humanitarian system in the Gaza Strip, and to take decisive measures to end the military aggression and the occupation of the Palestinian land.

On the other hand, the OIC condemned, in the strongest terms, the unethical and illegal attack by Israel, the occupying power, against the United Nations Secretary-General Antonio Guterres, considering this an act of political blackmail against the UN and its Secretary-General.

The OIC considered the Secretary-General's

speech to the Security Council to be in line with his obligations and responsibilities derived from international law, international humanitarian law, as well as from the Charter and resolutions of the United Nations.

The OIC expressed its profound respect to the Secretary-General and its deep appreciation for the UN agencies' significant role and tireless efforts at all levels to stop the war crimes being perpetrated by the Israeli occupation against the Palestinian people and against their land and holy sites.

The OIC also welcomed the UN General Assembly's Resolution calling for an immediate and sustained humanitarian truce leading to a cessation of hostilities, as well as for delivering humanitarian aid to the Gaza Strip and providing international protection to the Palestinian people. The OIC commended the positions of the States that supported the resolution, which reflects the international consensus and the political will of the overwhelming majority of the world's countries that call for an end to Israel's war against the Palestinian people.

The OIC called for the implementation of this resolution and emphasized the need to compel Israel to fully and immediately abide by its obligations under international law, international humanitarian law, and the relevant UN resolutions.

## OIC and EU Discuss Ongoing Israeli Aggression on Gaza

In a telephone conversation held on October 31, 2023, the OIC Secretary-General, H.E. Mr. Hissein Brahim Taha, discussed with the High Representative of the European Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy, Mr. Josep Borrell, the continuing Israeli military aggression against the Gaza Strip.

The Secretary-General called on the European Union, as a key global actor defending international law and universal humanitarian values, to engage in efforts to stop the Israeli military aggression against Palestinian civilians, open humanitarian corridors for the safe and continued delivery of humanitarian aid to the Gaza Strip, provide protection for the defenseless Palestinian people, and compel Israel to comply with its obligations under international law and international humanitarian law.

The Secretary-General expressed hope that the EU would contribute to efforts to revive the peace process toward the two-state solution, leading to the establishment of the independent Palestinian State in accordance with international law and the relevant UN resolutions.

For his part, Mr. Josep Borrell emphasized the pressing need for a truce to stop the war and to allow quick, safe and unhindered deli-

very of humanitarian aid for all those who need it, through various means including humanitarian corridors. He added that the EU would work closely with partners in the region to protect civilians and facilitate the delivery of food, water, medical care, and fuel for the inhabitants of Gaza. He also emphasized the need to reach a just and comprehensive political solution to the Palestinian issue, in a way that would ensure stability and security in the region and around the world.

On October 26, 2023, the OIC Secretary-General, H.E. Mr. Hissein Brahim Taha, received Mr. Christophe Varno, Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary of the European Union to the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, who presented his credentials as the EU Special Envoy to the OIC.

The meeting was an opportunity to commend the significant level of cooperation between the OIC and the EU and to exchange views on current issues, particularly the Palestinian question and the Israeli attacks on the Gaza Strip.

On November 1, 2023, the OIC Secretary-General, H.E. Mr. Hissein Brahim Taha, received a delegation from the European Parliament, led by MEP Hannah Neumann.

During the meeting, the Secretary-General reiterated his call for an end to the ongoing Israeli military aggression on the Gaza Strip, and for the revival of the peace process toward the two-state solution.

Following the meeting, talks were held between the EU Parliament delegation and a delegation from the OIC General Secretariat. Both sides reviewed cooperation between the OIC and the European Union and affirmed the joint determination to enhance dialogue and cooperation in various fields. They also discussed developments in the Palestinian question and the Israeli aggression on the Gaza Strip and its serious implications on regional and global security and peace. They stressed the importance of working to reach a just and comprehensive political solution to the Palestinian issue in line with the two-state vision, which would guarantee security and stability in the region and around the world.

On November 15, 2023, the OIC Secretary-General, H.E. Mr. Hissein Brahim Taha, received a phone call from Mr. Yván Gil Pinto, Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela.





## On the Anniversary of Issuing the Balfour Declaration: OIC Renews Support for the Legitimate Rights of the Palestinian People

November 2, 2023, marked the 106th anniversary of the issuance of the fateful Declaration by former British Foreign Secretary, Arthur Balfour. This Declaration marked the beginning of the tragedy and the Nakba in 1948, which ultimately led to the displacement of the Palestinian people, the rightful owners of the land, the denial of their legitimate rights, and the establishment of the Israeli colonial occupation-state based on the policies of colonial settlement, military aggression, forced displacement, ethnic cleansing, land confiscation, property destruction, and the Judaization of the Holy City of Al-Quds.

This painful anniversary coincides this year with serious developments in the Palestinian Territory, especially in the Gaza Strip, with the escalation of killings, organized terrorism, displacement, and the deliberate destruction of residential buildings, schools, hospitals, places of worship, and infrastructure. These war crimes and crimes against humanity perpetrated by the Israeli occupation reflect the international community's failure to fulfill its obligations and assume its responsibilities in putting an end to the Israeli military aggression, providing protection for the Palestinian people, and compelling Israel, the occupying power, to comply with the principles of international law and the relevant UN resolutions.

In a statement issued on this occasion, the OIC expressed its deep appreciation for the steadfastness and sacrifices of the Palestinian people over decades and reaffirmed its

unwavering commitment to supporting their just struggle to regain their legitimate national rights.

On the anniversary of this infamous Declaration, the OIC called on the international community to correct this historical injustice, assume its responsibilities in ending the Israeli occupation, and enable the Palestinian people to regain their legitimate rights, including their right to return and embody the establishment of their independent state on the borders of June 4, 1967, with East Al-Quds as its capital. This should be achieved in line with the two-state vision and based on the relevant UN resolutions and the Arab Peace Initiative.

On the other hand, the OIC issued a statement marking the International Day of Solidarity with the Palestinian People. It noted that the Palestinian people are the only people on earth that is still enduring colonial occupation, ethnic cleansing, forced displacement, and daily persecution in full view of the international community. It asserted its firm position and absolute support for the Palestinian people's just and continued struggle in defense of their land, sanctities and dignity, and in pursuit of freedom and self-determination.

The OIC statement noted that this occasion coincides this year with the unprecedented Israeli military aggression against the occupied Palestinian territory, especially the Gaza Strip, killing and wounding tens of thousands of Palestinian civilians, mostly women and children, and causing the displacement

of hundreds of thousands of families, and the deliberate destruction of homes, hospitals, places of worship, schools, and infrastructures, in flagrant contravention of international law and the relevant UN resolutions.

The OIC reaffirmed its position in this regard in the Resolution issued by the Joint Arab-Islamic Extraordinary Summit, convened in Riyadh, Saudi Arabia, on November 11, 2023. It warned against the danger of the continuation and expansion of the Israeli aggression against the Palestinian people, which threatens security and stability in the entire region, and underlined the need for the international community to assume its responsibilities toward ending this aggression immediately and completely, being a war crime and a crime against humanity, ensuring delivery of humanitarian aid and essential needs to the Gaza Strip, and providing international protection for the Palestinian people.

The OIC stressed that the absence of justice and international legitimacy and the adoption of double standards have encouraged Israel, the occupying power, to persist in its crimes with all impunity, and contributed to prolonging this conflict that undermines global peace and security. It called, in this regard, for activating the existing international judicial mechanisms and the international criminal justice process in order to deter the Israeli occupation, prevent it from committing more crimes, and hold it accountable for its past and current violations.



# The Dead Do Not Find Graves in Gaza

Gaza - Imad Abdeljawad (DPA):

Given the huge number of people killed as a result of the Israeli aggression since October 7, 2023, an empty piece of arable land was turned into a cemetery containing dozens of graves in the heart of the crowded "Al-Daraj" neighborhood in Gaza. With Gaza's cemeteries having become too overcrowded, small plots of land are often turned into burial spaces in the city's neighborhoods. Despite the small amount of space available therein, the new burial places, which are surrounded by houses on all sides, continue to receive increasing numbers of victims of the aggression.

All those who were buried in the new 'cemetery' were brought from Al-Ahly Baptist Hospital in Gaza, after bodies had piled up there for long days and could not be buried. Al-Ahly Hospital is located next to a cemetery, but it is now overcrowded. Bodies are being buried in old graves. Alternative burial places are therefore urgently needed.

Ahmed Abdelhalim, a 15-year-old child, is one of those buried in the new 'cemetery'. He was killed in an Israeli attack that tar-

geted a mosque near his family's home in the Shujaiya neighborhood, east of Gaza. Mohammed Khaled, an Administrative Official at Al-Ahly Hospital who supervises the transportation of the victims' bodies, said that Abdelhalim was buried without any of his family members being present, as they were unable to come due to the intensive Israeli bombing. With bodies piling up in the hospital, he added, they had to find a new burial place. Often 4 or 5 bodies of children are buried together in each grave, even though they are not from the same family. What is even more sad is that dozens of these children were buried unidentified, without being officially registered in hospitals.

With the record increase in the number of victims, local authorities and victims' families face difficulties in providing the necessities for burial, including body bags used for transporting bodies removed from under the rubble, shrouds to cover the dead, and even graves, already overflowing with bodies.

Scenes of bodies lying on the floor of hos-

pital corridors, and scenes of unidentified bodies in tents set up in hospital courtyards, can be seen everywhere.

Bodies are placed next to each other and dirt is poured over them without supporting stones surrounding the inner sides of the graves, and without covering them from above with cement cubes, after stone-cutting factories had ceased operating.

There is a large cemetery in Gaza on the eastern outskirts, but with the war growing more intense, access to it has become impossible due to the Israeli security fence. Local authorities and victims' families found themselves obliged to establish small burial places, even inside residential neighborhoods.

One of the tragedies of the Israeli war on Gaza is that the victim whose body is recovered and for whom a funeral and burial ceremony is held is considered a "lucky" victim. The war has also wiped out the funeral customs and traditions of the inhabitants of Gaza, which was already suffering from a limited space problem, with 9 out of the city's 11 cemeteries completely closed.

## “The Packaging of the Dead” and the Story of the Melting of Religions

Some time ago, I visited a multi-ethnic and multi-religious country in Southeast Asia. To move from one place to another, I used a “ride-hailing app”. I got into a small car driven by a man with Chinese features. We started an intermittent conversation; I asked him if his car was his only source of income, or whether it was an additional job, as is the case with some young men who work with similar applications to buy fuel for their cars. He nodded a silent yes, then added that he works in a “funeral service company”, just like a “wedding service company” but in the opposite sense...!

“Funeral Service Company” is the modern equivalent of the “undertaker” or “mortician”, a job that was practiced in some countries, but on a small scale, before being taken up by charitable societies that undertake the rites of washing, shrouding and burying, with a modest contribution paid by the family of the deceased.

The driver felt relieved when I asked him to tell me more about his job. He enthusiastically began talking about his company, indicating that it serves the Buddhist, Hindu, and Christian communities, but not Muslims. Clearly, Muslims are excluded from the company’s services. When I inquired about the reason, he said Muslims have their own method of burial.

In fact, the Islamic religion requires that funeral rituals be performed by Muslims who are legally qualified under Islamic law. Persons from other religions are not allowed to participate in these rituals.

The driver explained that the company’s business involves funeral planning and the preparation of the dead for burial or cremation. The company does not, of course, provide its services to Muslims. Indeed, no company with non-Muslim workers can provide funeral and burial services for Muslims.

In the event that the family of the deceased cannot afford to pay the costs of the funeral and burial, there are associations that volunteer to provide all the necessities of the funeral for needy families. Burial ceremonies are usually not costly and involve no celebrations or festivities.

While it is quite normal that profit-making companies that provide burial and cremation services are created in non-Muslim societies, as a logical development of the undertaker’s job, the fact remains that funeral rituals are “religious” par excellence. The question now is the following: how has this small-scale investment been transformed into a large-scale business involving a complex activity that previously required religious qualification, and being conducted by a company employing people belonging to different religions, and not to various sects of the same religion?

To express it more clearly, the question is: how has the predominant market mentality managed to turn a sacred ritual in three religions into a “neutral commodity”, to transform the burial, which involves performing a series of rituals, into something similar to a process of “packaging of the dead” in a company employing “neutral people”, most of whom belonging to different religions? How has this religious activity been turned into an ordinary business activity governed by the profit-and-loss rule, rather than a devotional ritual marking the transition from worldly life to the afterlife?

It is clear that the consumer culture that has succeeded in conferring an increasingly worldly dimension on many religious events and festivals, like Christmas in the West, turning them into opportunities to market goods and commodities, finds it difficult to “secularize” Islamic religious rituals and reproduce them in a way that serves business purposes.

In any case, we cannot establish a standard rule for this, nor can we imagine the blessed month of Ramadan without a commercial side to answer needs specific to the holy month, especially the food habits during “iftar” and “suhoor”, with possibly some excesses in food purchases on the part of some people. Actually, we cannot exclude the commercial side that is usually associated with these religious events to the point where consumption may predominate over their religious goals. However, this does not affect the act of worship, like fasting, turn it into a commodity or registered “trademark”, or subject it to the profit-and-loss rule and strip it of its religious value.

This dividing line between the prevailing market culture and the pursuit of religious ends demonstrates that Islam is a religion whose sacred texts cannot be circumvented, nor can it be “diluted” and turned into a “cultural religion” merely involving a set of practices, icons, models and rituals dissociated from their spiritual origin.

A company can manufacture and sell a hearse and provide the necessities for the funeral and burial; it can supervise the production and distribution of aid parcels for the poor, but it cannot turn prayer itself into a commodity, or generalize Islamic practices to Muslims and non-Muslims, considering this as being a religion-neutral act that anyone can perform as part of a production line or in a supermarket.



**Aiman Abboushi**  
Editor of the OIC Journal

*How has the predominant market mentality managed to turn a sacred ritual in three religions into a “neutral commodity”?*

## Signing of Second Group of AHTF Projects' Agreements



The OIC General Secretariat participated in the signing ceremony of the second group of projects of the Afghanistan Humanitarian Trust Fund (AHTF), in the presence of H.E. Dr. Muhammad Al-Jasser, President of the Islamic Development Bank Group (IsDB). The ceremony was held on December 27, 2023, at the IsDB headquarters in Jeddah, Saudi Arabia.

In his opening remarks, the IsDB President thanked the OIC for its role in mobilizing support for the AHTF from the OIC Member States and the international community.

In his statement on this occasion, delivered on his behalf by Amb. Tarig Ali Bakheet, OIC Assistant Secretary-General for Humanitarian, Cultural and Social Affairs, and Special Envoy of the Secretary-General to Afghanistan, the OIC Secretary-General, H.E. Mr. Hissein Brahim Taha, noted that the agreements between the IsDB and many of the parties responsible for implementing the agreed-upon projects involve emergency humanitarian and development assistance. These agreements, he added, embody the spirit of solidarity and the collective desire of regional and global humanitarian actors to alleviate the suffering of the Afghan people, by providing the needed humanitarian assistance to ensure a decent life for them, and preventing the waves of migration of the most vulnerable population groups.

The Secretary-General expressed his deep gratitude and sincere thanks to the Custodian of the Two Holy Mosques, King Salman bin Abdulaziz, as well as to Crown Prince, Prime Minister, HRH Prince Mohammed bin Salman, for the consistent humanitarian support provided by the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia to Afghanistan.

The Secretary-General also expressed his sincere thanks to Dr. Mohammed Al-Jasser, President of the IsDB Group, to the IsDB Board of Executive Directors, and to all the IsDB officials, for the tireless and sincere efforts they have exerted, in close cooperation and coordination with the OIC General Secretariat, to mobilize financial resources for the AHTF, and thus help address the humanitarian challenges faced by the Afghan people and alleviate their suffering.

The Secretary-General extended his sincere thanks to the King Salman Humanitarian Aid and Relief Center (KSrelief) for its significant role in implementing emergency relief projects in coordination with the OIC Mission in Kabul, noting that these efforts have enabled tens of thousands of Afghan families in various regions to continuously benefit from this vital assistance.

*The Secretary-General reiterated his call on the OIC Member States, non-Member States, and regional and international financial institutions to contribute to the AHTF*

The Secretary-General reiterated his call on the OIC Member States, non-Member States, and regional and international financial institutions to contribute to the AHTF so that it can provide sustainable assistance and urgently respond to the humanitarian needs of the Afghan people.

The Secretary-General stressed that this meeting came while all parties agreed to provide relief and humanitarian support to the Afghan people, which, he added, would effectively contribute to alleviating the impact of the economic crisis and successive natural disasters that have struck vulnerable segments of the Afghan society in many cities, villages and provinces.

Following official speeches, the participating parties signed the agreements for the second group of AHTF projects in the humanitarian and development fields.

## Special Envoy for Afghanistan Holds Consultations in Jeddah, Baku and Tashkent



The Special Envoy of the OIC Secretary-General for Afghanistan, Amb. Tarig Ali Bakheet, held consultations at the headquarters of the General Secretariat in Jeddah and during visits to Azerbaijan and Uzbekistan, as part of his coordination work to provide more aid to the Afghan people through the initiatives launched by the OIC.

On December 19, 2023, Amb. Bakheet was received, in Baku, Azerbaijan, by Mr. Jeyhun Bayramov, Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Azerbaijan.

Amb. Bakheet delivered a written message from the OIC Secretary-General to the Azerbaijani Foreign Minister.

Both sides exchanged views on issues of common concern, especially in the humanitarian, cultural and social fields. They agreed to move forward with the same positive spirit resulting from the fruitful cooperation between them, while emphasizing Azerbaijan's commitment to supporting the OIC goals and playing an effective role in hosting the OIC activities and events.

Both parties also discussed the efforts exerted by the OIC and Azerbaijan to support the Afghan people, in line with the successive resolutions issued by the OIC Council of Foreign Ministers in this regard. They emphasized the need for further coordina-

tion, consultation and cooperation to meet humanitarian challenges in Afghanistan, and for pursuing constructive dialogue with the de facto Authorities on various issues highlighted in the OIC's resolutions on Afghanistan.

On December 21, 2023, Amb. Bakheet met with Mr. Yalchin Rafiyev, Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs, and Mr. Elmaddin Mehdiyev, Director of the Azerbaijan International Development Agency (AIDA). The meeting was also attended by the Director-General of the Middle East and Africa Division at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, and the Ambassador of Azerbaijan to Afghanistan.

The meeting discussed issues of mutual interest, particularly the support that Azerbaijan could provide to the OIC humanitarian activities in different parts of the Muslim world, including in the Sahel and Afghanistan.

Both parties commended the significant momentum in the relations between the OIC and Azerbaijan, and the constructive contribution of Azerbaijan to the realization of the OIC goals in different sectors. They agreed to pursue discussions and exchange of visits in order to draw up an efficient roadmap for the implementation of shared goals in all fields.

On November 24, 2023, Amb. Bakheet met in Tashkent with Amb. Ismatulla Ergashev, Special Envoy of the Republic of Uzbekistan to Afghanistan.

Both sides discussed the efforts exerted by the OIC and Uzbekistan to support the Afghan people, in line with the resolutions issued by the OIC Council of Foreign Ministers in this regard. They underlined the need for further coordination, consultation and cooperation to alleviate the humanitarian and economic crisis in Afghanistan, and for pursuing constructive dialogue with the de facto Authorities on various issues highlighted in the OIC's resolutions on Afghanistan.

On December 12, 2023, Amb. Bakheet received, at the OIC General Secretariat in Jeddah, Mr. Thomas West, US Special Representative for Afghanistan and Deputy Assistant Secretary, Bureau of South and Central Asian Affairs.

Both sides exchanged views on matters of mutual interest and on ways to address the humanitarian, economic, and other challenges facing Afghanistan. Amb. Bakheet indicated that the OIC's engagement in Afghanistan is based on the relevant resolutions adopted by the OIC Council of Foreign Ministers.

## Afghanistan Humanitarian Trust Fund on Track to Provide Assistance to 38,000 Afghans



The plains of Kandahar, Afghanistan, bask under a relentless sun. Yet, its warmth fails to melt the icy fear gripping Shebnam, a mother cradling her six-month-old son, Moqadas, who suffers from acute malnutrition. But amidst the bleakness, a beacon ignites. The Afghanistan Humanitarian Trust Fund (AHTF), an initiative by the Organization of Islamic Cooperation (OIC) established and managed by the Islamic Development Bank (IsDB), stands on the ground, ready to offer a lifeline to mothers like Shebnam.

"This is a landmark agreement," declared H.E. Dr. Muhammad Al Jasser, President of IsDB, after witnessing the signing of a food assistance agreement between AHTF and the World Food Programme in May 2023. "It allows us to address the severe food insecurity facing the most vulnerable families in Afghanistan. We are on track to providing assistance to around 38,000 Afghans, laying the foundation for self-reliance and a brighter future."

Dr. Al Jasser expressed his sincere gratitude for the \$10 million contribution from King Salman Humanitarian Aid and Relief Center (KSRelief) to AHTF. He also thanked the Saudi Fund for Development for contributing \$20 million to AHTF.

This hope finds its way into the hands of Shebnam and Moqadas in the form of life-

saving RUTF (Ready-to-Use-Therapeutic-Food) provided by AHTF and funded by KSRelief. "Seeing the impact of these interventions fuels our dedication. KSRelief's contribution has empowered us to reach the

*Empowerment echoes even stronger in Herat, where AHTF-backed vocational training mends shattered lives, and where widows are empowered to run their own tailoring workshops and other small businesses.*

most vulnerable, one life at a time," said Mr. Mohammad Alsaati, Coordinator of AHTF. An IsDB report indicates that within weeks, children's laughter filled their homes once more in those needy areas. Their story, however, is but a single ripple in the vast ocean of lives touched by AHTF and KSRelief.

Across Afghanistan, the narrative is being rewritten. In Helmand Province, AHTF-funded workshops equip farmers with sustainable agricultural practices, empowering them to nourish not just their families but the entire community. "The land used to hold us captive," says one farmer, cupping plump wheat grains. "Now, thanks to AHTF training, we feed ourselves and the market."

In Kabul, the thirst for clean water is quenched by AHTF initiatives, with a new well installed near homes. Empowerment echoes even stronger in Herat, where AHTF-backed vocational training mends shattered lives, and where widows are empowered to run their own tailoring workshops and other small businesses.

"Women's empowerment isn't just economic," says Eng. Alsaati. "It's the bedrock of a resilient Afghanistan", paving the way for a brighter future for local communities across the country.

Despite hardships and resource scarcity, the Afghan spirit shines with unwavering resilience. "We stand shoulder-to-shoulder with the Afghan people," Eng. Alsaati states. "With AHTF and its partners, we are boosting our commitment to walk alongside them, every step of the way."

# Months After the Disaster, What Does Derna Look Like?

## Tripoli - Ashraf Al-Azabi (DPA)

Months have now passed since the unprecedented disaster that befell the Libyan city of Derna, where the situation is slowly improving.

Last September 10th, storm Daniel struck the east of the country. Exceptional rainfall (400 mm) caused the drowning of cities in the Green Mountain region. Under the pressure of the accumulated water, two dams in Derna collapsed, wiping out a third of the city. Buildings were uprooted and washed away with their inhabitants. All bridges connecting the two banks of Wadi Derna and all bridges to other cities collapsed as well. Damage befell even the more upland areas, though to a lesser extent.

The crisis brought about a social cohesion that Libyans had not recently known, as manifested through the rescue and relief campaigns in which all cities were engaged. Commenting on the huge number of victims, one of the inhabitants of Derna told the German Press Agency (DPA): "The disappearance of a third of the city means that 40000 people were directly affected by the floods, either swept into the sea or buried under the silt, or they barely survived." Some residents of Derna estimated the number of dead and missing persons to range from 10

to 15 thousand. Others consider that the number is much higher.

The spokesman for the General Authority for the Search and Identification of Missing Persons (GASIMP), Abdulaziz Al-Jaafari, indicated that the announced number of deaths "concerns only those who have been identified." "Many were buried without being identified or DNA samples being taken, especially in the first week," he told DPA. "They must be exhumed to take DNA samples and conduct genetic fingerprint test comparisons with the families of the missing, and this is what we will do next."

This, he added, will not take a long time, especially since the location of the Derna cemeteries is known. He indicated that their teams had already begun taking samples from the relatives of missing persons, expressing his concern that the death of entire families might disrupt the process.

Marwan Al-Walid, a diving instructor, confirmed these concerns and said: "Many bodies were torn apart or dismembered before reaching the sea, due to the collapse of houses before being swept away, and due to collision with rubble, rocks and trees washed away by the floods." "The drowning of dead bodies in the sea," he added, "was accompanied by high water tempera-

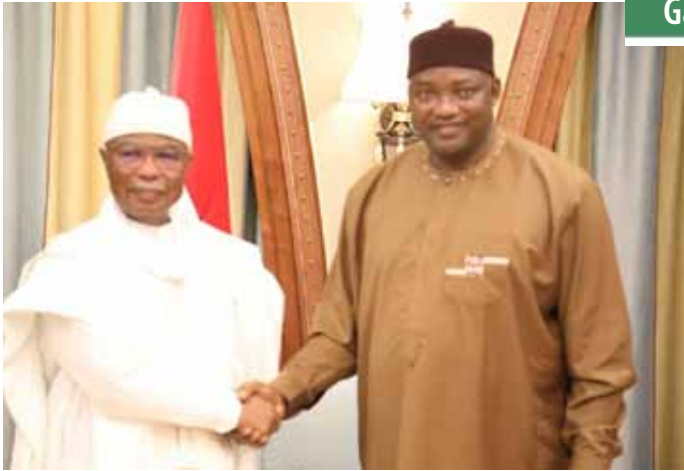
tures that accelerated decomposition, as well as by strong currents that took them as far as the shores of Tobruk," about 150 kilometers to the east.

With this high temperature, Al-Walid assumed that "most of the bodies and flood victims will float within four days of the disaster, with the beginning of decomposition and bloating". This helped to find many bodies during the first weeks, but "the presence of a body inside a car, for example, with accumulated debris on top of it, would hinder floating."

In the disaster-stricken city of Derna, some signs of a gradual return to normal life are looming, though timidly. The less damaged neighborhoods in upland areas, such as Al-Salam, Shiha, and Bab Tobruk, have started to recover, and the situation has relatively improved in the city center thanks to the clean-up work undertaken by volunteer youth.

In a press statement, Dr. Khaled Al-Mukhtar, Chief Consultant at the Psychological Research Center of the Libyan Authority for Scientific Research, indicated that "1085 families were displaced from Derna," while the International Organization for Migration estimated that the disaster "displaced over 43,000 people."





## Gambian President Receives OIC Secretary-General

H.E. President Adama Barrow, President of the Republic of The Gambia, received, on November 12, 2023, in Riyadh, Saudi Arabia, H.E. Mr. Hissein Brahim Taha, OIC Secretary-General, on the sidelines of the Joint Arab-Islamic Extraordinary Summit held in Riyadh on November 11, 2023.

The Gambian President commended the efforts of the Secretary-General at the head of the OIC, affirming his country's support for these efforts and for the OIC programs and projects.

The meeting discussed the outcomes of the Joint Arab-Islamic Extraordinary Summit, as well as cooperation between The Gambia and the OIC, and various issues of common interest.

The Secretary-General expressed his thanks to President Barrow for supporting the OIC and its programs, and his significant contributions to strengthening Islamic solidarity.

## OIC S.G. Receives Chad's Minister of Higher Education

The OIC Secretary-General, H.E. Mr. Hissein Brahim Taha, received on November 13, 2023, at the OIC Headquarters in Jeddah, the Minister of State, Minister of Higher Education, Research and Innovation of Chad, Dr. Tom Erdimi, who was accompanied by a large delegation.

The meeting discussed ways of strengthening and developing relations between the OIC and Chad's Ministry of Higher Education, especially in the fields of science, technology, and higher education. The Secretary-General commended Chad's efforts to promote higher education and scientific research, and expressed the OIC's readiness to support Chad in implementing its projects and programs to improve the quality of education and strengthen cooperation between academic and research institutions in Chad and their counterparts in other OIC Member States.

The Chadian Minister thanked the Secretary-General for the warm welcome and his continued support for Chad. He stressed the importance of boosting cooperation between the OIC and Chad in the fields of higher education, research, and innovation. He also reviewed Chad's main achievements in these areas, as well as the



challenges posed and the opportunities provided in this regard.

The meeting also discussed cooperation between the OIC and the King Faisal University in N'djamena and the Virtual University of Chad.

Both sides agreed to further strengthen coordination and consultation between the OIC and Chad. They also agreed to promote the implementation of the recommendations and resolutions issued by the OIC conferences and meetings in the fields of education, science, technology, and innovation.



## OIC Secretary-General Receives Somalia's Foreign Minister

H.E. Mr. Hissein Brahim Taha, OIC Secretary-General, received, on October 19, 2023, at the OIC headquarters, H.E. Mr. Absher Omar Jama Horsi, Minister of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation of the Federal Republic of Somalia.

The Minister stressed the importance that Somalia attaches to cooperation with the OIC to enhance its role and promote joint Islamic action. He also reviewed the political, economic, humanitarian, and security situation in Somalia.

For his part, the Secretary-General commended the efforts of the Somali Government to achieve development and stability, and to combat terrorism, and reaffirmed the OIC's support for Somalia.

## Snapshots



OIC Secretary-General, H.E. Mr. Hissein Brahim Taha, received, on October 9, 2023, Mr. Mohamed Salah Sobhi, who presented his credentials as Permanent Representative of the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan to the OIC.



The OIC Secretary-General, H.E. Mr. Hissein Brahim Taha, received, on October 8, 2023, H.E. Amb. Shahin Abdullayev, Permanent Representative of the Republic of Azerbaijan to the OIC.



The OIC Secretary-General, H.E. Mr. Hissein Brahim Taha, received, on October 12, 2023, H.E. Mr. Muhammad Samir Al-Naqshbandi, Permanent Representative of the Republic of Iraq to the OIC.



The OIC Secretary-General, H.E. Mr. Hissein Brahim Taha, received, on October 10, 2023, Ambassador Hichem Fourati, Permanent Representative of the Republic of Tunisia to the OIC.



The OIC Secretary-General, H.E. Mr. Hissein Brahim Taha, received, on October 30, 2023, H.E. Ambassador Iya Tidjani, Permanent Representative of the Republic of Cameroon to the OIC.



OIC Secretary-General, received, on October 17, 2023, H.H. Sheikh Ali bin Abdul Rahman bin Ali Al Khalifa, who presented to the Secretary-General his credentials as Permanent Representative of Bahrain to the OIC.



## OIC Special Envoy Visits Pakistan and Azad Jammu and Kashmir

The Jammu and Kashmir issue witnessed significant developments over the past few months. The OIC General Secretariat expressed concern over the verdict rendered by the Supreme Court of India, on December 11, 2023, upholding the unilateral actions taken by the Indian government on August 5, 2019, that stripped the special status of the territory of Jammu and Kashmir.

Referring to the decisions and resolutions of the Islamic Summit and OIC CFM meetings related to the issue of Jammu and Kashmir, the General Secretariat reiterated its call for reversing all the illegal and unilateral measures taken since August 5, 2019, with the aim of changing the internationally-recognized disputed status of the territory.

The General Secretariat reaffirmed its solidarity with the people of Jammu and Kashmir in their quest for the right to self-determination, and reiterated its call on the international community to increase efforts for resolving the issue of Jammu and Kashmir in accordance with the relevant UN Security Council resolutions.

The OIC Special Envoy to Jammu and Kashmir, Mr. Yousef Aldobeay, Assistant Secretary-General for Political Affairs, visited Pakistan and Azad Jammu and Kashmir on October 10-14, 2023. The visit, conducted in implementation of the relevant resolu-

tions of the OIC CFM and the Action Plan adopted regarding Jammu and Kashmir, aimed to take stock of the human rights and humanitarian situation in Jammu and Kashmir.

The OIC Special Envoy had previously visited Jammu and Kashmir and submitted reports to the CFM.

During his three-day visit, the Special Envoy visited the Line of Control and met with those affected by the cross-border bombings. He also managed to visit the Tota refugee camp.

The Special Envoy held talks with the President and the Prime Minister of Azad Jammu and Kashmir. He expressed the OIC's continued solidarity with and support for the legitimate struggle of the Kashmiri people to exercise their inalienable right to self-determination, as stipulated in the relevant UN Security Council resolutions.

In Islamabad, the Special Envoy met with H.E. the Prime Minister and the Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Islamic Republic of Pakistan, and held talks with members of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee.

During these meetings, the Special Envoy stressed that the purpose of his visit was to reaffirm the OIC's firm support for the just struggle of the Kashmiri people in pursuit of their inalienable right to self-determination,

in line with the relevant CFM resolutions. He indicated that he would submit a report on developments of the situation in Jammu and Kashmir to the forthcoming Islamic Summit in The Gambia.

The Prime Minister of Pakistan welcomed the Special Envoy, and stressed that the relevant firm and principled position of the OIC, the collective voice of the Islamic Ummah, has always been a source of strength for the people of Jammu and Kashmir.

In a statement issued on October 27, 2023, which marked the 76th anniversary of India's illegal occupation of Jammu and Kashmir, the OIC General Secretariat reiterated its call on the international community to take concrete steps for resolving the Jammu and Kashmir dispute in accordance with the relevant UN Security Council resolutions. It reaffirmed the OIC's support for the rights of the people of Jammu and Kashmir, including their right to self-determination.

Referring to the relevant decisions and resolutions issued by the Islamic Summit and the CFM meetings, the General Secretariat urged India to respect the fundamental human rights of the people of Jammu and Kashmir and to reverse the illegal and unilateral measures taken since August 5, 2019, to change the internationally-recognized disputed status of the territory.



## Maldives President Receives OIC ASG for Political Affairs

H.E. Dr. Mohamed Muizzu, President of the Republic of Maldives, received, on November 19, 2023, in the capital city of Malé, Amb. Yousef Al-Dobeay, OIC Assistant Secretary-General for Political Affairs.

Amb. Al-Dobeay congratulated President Muizzu on his assumption of office as President of the Republic of Maldives, and conveyed to him the greetings of the OIC Secretary-General, H.E. Mr. Hissein Brahim Taha. He also delivered to His Excellency a

letter from the OIC Secretary-General.

The President welcomed the visit of the Assistant Secretary-General to attend the Presidential Inauguration Ceremony on behalf of the OIC Secretary-General, and expressed the commitment of the Government of Maldives to the principles and ideals outlined in the OIC Charter.

The President and the Assistant Secretary-General commended the excellent relations between the OIC and the Maldives, and ex-

pressed their willingness to further strengthen bilateral cooperation. They discussed the Israeli aggression against Gaza, the humanitarian plight endured by the Palestinian people, and the long-term consequences that the war on Gaza will have on regional and global peace and security.

During his visit to the Maldives, the Assistant Secretary-General was accompanied by Amb. Ahmed Sareer, Director of Asian Affairs at the OIC General Secretariat.

## OIC Participates in Election Observation in Bangladesh

H.E. Sheikh Hasina Wajid, the Prime Minister of Bangladesh, received on Monday 8 January 2024, in the capital, Dhaka, H.E. Ambassador Yusuf bin Muhammad Al-Dubaey, OIC Assistant Secretary-General for Political Affairs, who led a high-level delegation from the General Secretariat, at the invitation of the Minister of Foreign Affairs of Bangladesh, to observe the general elections that took place in Bangladesh.

Ambassador Dubaey and his accompanying delegation congratulated the Prime Minister on the successful organization of the

general elections. He conveyed to her the greetings of H.E. Hissein Brahim Taha, OIC Secretary-General. In turn, Sheikh Hasina appreciated the participation of the General Secretariat in observing the elections and the level of the delegation of observers. The meeting provided an opportunity to review existing cooperation between the OIC and the Republic of Bangladesh. On 5 January 2024, the mission held a meeting with the Chairman of the Election Commission of the Republic of Bangladesh, who made a briefing on the electoral process. The two

sides discussed strengthening cooperation between the Election Observation Unit of the General Secretariat and the Commission. The mission stressed the importance attached by the OIC to the processes of observing elections in Member States, as stipulated in the relevant provisions of the OIC Charter. The OIC team observed the three stages of the election process: pre-poll preparations, polling day, and vote counting. The delegation concluded its mission, noting that the electoral process was transparent, free and orderly.



## President of Senegal Opens 12th Session of COMIAC in Dakar

The 12th session of the Standing Committee for Information and Cultural Affairs (COMIAC) was held in Dakar, Senegal, on October 16-18, 2023, under the theme: "What role for Muslim youth in promoting the Islamic values of peace, solidarity and tolerance?" The opening ceremony was chaired by H.E. Mr. Macky Sall, President of the Republic of Senegal, in the presence of Amb. Tarig Ali Bakheet, Assistant Secretary-General for Humanitarian, Cultural and Social Affairs, representative of H.E. Mr. Hissein Brahim Taha, OIC Secretary-General. It was also attended by ministers, senior officials, heads of diplomatic missions accredited in Dakar, representatives of relevant OIC institutions, and other invited guests.

In his speech to the meeting, President Sall commended COMIAC's role in strengthening cooperation and solidarity among OIC Member States in the fields of information and culture. He underlined the role of Muslim youth as key players in promoting development and inter-civilizational dialogue. He emphasized the need for more intensive efforts to face common challenges, including religious extremism, Islamophobia, and disinformation, based on the Islamic values of peace, brotherhood, and tolerance.

For his part, Amb. Bakheet thanked the Re-

public of Senegal for the warm welcome and for its strong commitment to the causes of the Muslim Ummah. He recalled the achievements of COMIAC since its creation in 1981 and the initiatives launched by the General Secretariat to promote the positive image of Islam and Muslims.

Amb. Bakheet highlighted the opportunities offered by modern ICTs to strengthen exchanges and cooperation among media and cultural actors in Member States. He called for greater involvement on the part of Muslim youth in COMIAC's activities, as well as for supporting projects designed to promote the universal Islamic historical and cultural heritage.

President Sall and Ambassador Bakheet also drew attention, in their speeches, to the grave humanitarian situation in Palestine, and stressed the urgent need to put an end to the Israeli military aggression on Gaza.

During the two-day meeting, participants reviewed the activity reports of the General Secretariat and the COMIAC Coordination Office. They also discussed issues related to information, culture, the Cause of Palestine and Al-Quds Al-Sharif, and the protection of Islamic holy sites.

The Senior Officials Meeting (SOM) preparatory to the 12th COMIAC session was held

on October 16, 2023, in Dakar, Senegal.

Addressing the meeting, Amb. Tarig Ali Bakheet, Representative of the OIC Secretary-General, recalled the COMIAC's objectives and priorities in terms of cultural diversity and its role in promoting rapprochement among peoples and dialogue among cultures, as well as in strengthening cooperation among media institutions within the OIC.

Amb. Bakheet reiterated the OIC's firm condemnation of the serious and unprecedented aggression against civilians in the besieged Gaza Strip and throughout the Israeli-occupied Palestinian territory. He also stressed the need to combat Islamophobia and anti-Muslim sentiments, as manifested through the burning of copies of the Holy Qur'an under the guise of freedom of expression.

For his part, H.E. Mr. Pierre Faye, Representative of Senegal, the host country of the 12th session of COMIAC, expressed Senegal's pride and honor to host this meeting. He stressed COMIAC's significant role in strengthening inter-Islamic solidarity, promoting shared values, and protecting Islamic cultural heritage.

## Secretary-General's Envoy Meets Senegalese Foreign Minister During COMIAC Session



As part of the 12th session of the OIC Standing Committee for Information and Cultural Affairs (COMIAC), convened in Dakar on

October 16-18, 2023, the OIC Assistant Secretary-General for Humanitarian, Cultural and Social Affairs, Amb. Tarig Ali Bakheet, met with Senegal's Minister of Foreign Affairs and Senegalese Abroad, H.E. Mr. Ismaila Madior Fall.

Amb. Bakheet conveyed the greetings of the OIC Secretary-General to the Foreign Minister and congratulated him on his new position, wishing him success in his mandate. He also congratulated the host country for the excellent organization of the 12th COMIAC session. For his part, the Foreign Minister thanked the Assistant Secretary-General for the visit and for his constant support to Senegal. He emphasized the strategic importance of COMIAC as a framework for the development of cultural policies in the Islamic world. He reaffirmed Senegal's commitment to cooperating with the OIC and with Member States in order to meet common challenges and promote the values of peace, tolerance, and cultural diversity.

## International Forum in Jeddah on "The Role of Media in Inciting Hatred and Violence"

The International Forum on "The Role of Media in Inciting Hatred and Violence: Risks of Misinformation and Bias" was held in Jeddah, in the presence of H.E. Dr. Muhammad Bin Abdulkarim Al-Issa, Secretary-General of the Muslim World League, Chairman of the Organization of Muslim Scholars, and H.E. Minister Ahmed Assaf, General Supervisor of Official Media in the State of Palestine. The Forum was also attended by Ministers, Ambassadors, Islamic and international media leaders, religious, intellectual and human rights personalities, and heads of international organizations.

The Forum was convened as part of the close partnership and shared goals between the Assistant Secretariat for Corporate Communication at the Muslim World League and the Union of News Agencies of the OIC Countries, a specialized organ of the OIC.

During the opening session, a number of journalists spoke live from the Palestinian territories about the state of journalistic work under the Israeli aggression and the challenges faced by journalists in carrying out their profession. A short film was also screened about the role of the media in shaping public opinion and public awareness, in the negative or positive direction.

The first session of the Forum discussed "the role of religious institutions and leaderships in combating hate speech and violence on media platforms." The second session addressed "Bias and Misin-



formation in International Media: The Palestinian Cause as a Case Study." The third session focused on "ethical responsibility in international media." The fourth session dealt with "international religious and media alliances to counter hate speech and extremism." On the sidelines of the Forum, a Memorandum of Cooperation was concluded between the Assistant General Secretariat for Corporate Communication at the Muslim World League and the Union of News Agencies of the OIC Countries. It was signed by Mr. Muhammad bin Abd Rabbo Al-Yami, Director-General of UNA, and Mr. Abdulwahab Al-Shehri, Assistant Secretary-General for Corporate Communication.

## Director-General of the Cabinet of the OIC Secretary-General Visits UNA



The Director-General of the Cabinet and Senior Advisor to the Secretary-General of the Organization of Islamic Cooperation (OIC), Dr. Mahamat Adam Koulbou, paid a visit to the headquarters of the Union of News Agencies of the OIC Countries (UNA), an OIC specialized organ.

During the visit, Dr. Koulbou met with the Acting Director-General of UNA, Mr. Muhammad bin Abd Rabbo Al-Yami. The meeting discussed ways to enhance coordination and cooperation between UNA and the OIC General Secretariat in order to further promote joint Islamic media action.



Azerbaijan's

## "Shusha" Declared Capital of Islamic Culture for 2024

The Ministry of Culture of the Republic of Azerbaijan announced that the city of "Shusha", the pearl of the Karabakh region, was declared "Capital of Islamic Culture for 2024".

A statement issued by the Ministry indicated that the Minister of Culture, Mr. Adil Karimli, participated in the 12th Conference of Culture Ministers of the Islamic World, held in Doha, Qatar, and proposed to ICESCO that the city of "Shusha" be named "Capital of Islamic Culture for 2024", a proposal that was unanimously welcomed.

It is worth recalling that the city of "Shusha" in Azerbaijan had been selected as "Cultural Capital of the Turkic World" in 2023.

Mr. Najib Al-Ghayati, Cultural Advisor to the Director-General of ICESCO, presented the document on mechanisms for developing ICESCO's Islamic Culture Capitals program, which included a new approach to selecting Culture Capitals.

The Conference approved the document, which included the names of the cities scheduled to be celebrated as Culture Capitals in the coming years, namely: Shusha (Azerbaijan) for 2024, Samarkand (Uzbekistan) for 2025, Hebron (Palestine), Abidjan

(Côte d'Ivoire) for 2026, Siwa (Egypt) for 2027, and Lusail (Qatar) for 2030.

"Shusha" is the historical capital and the pearl of the Azerbaijani "Karabakh" region liberated from the Armenian occupation in 2020. The city was built in 1752 by the founder of the Karabakh Khanate, Panah Ali Khan.

The city is of great importance to Azerbaijanis, boasting many historical monuments, and being the hometown of prominent scholars and cultural figures in the country's history.

The Armenian forces had occupied the city of "Shusha" on May 8, 1992, before it was liberated by the Azerbaijani army on November 8, 2020.

"Shusha" is a city located in the Karabakh Heights of the Republic of Azerbaijan. It was originally named "Panahabad".

"Shusha" includes 17 neighborhoods, namely: "Seyidli", "Julfalar", "Guyulug", "Chukhur", "Dord Chinar", "Dordlar gudu", "Haji Yusifli", "Cholgala", "Gurdlar", "Saatli", "Kocharli", "Mamayi", "Khoja Marjanli", "Damirchilar", "Hamamgabaghi", "Merdinli" and "Taza mahalla". In each neighborhood, there was a bath, a

mosque and a spring. Shusha became one of the main Azerbaijani cities in the 18th century.

At the end of the 19th century and the beginning of the 20th century, Shusha developed into the musical center of the Caucasus. Shusha was often referred to as "Little Paris", "Art Temple of Caucasus", "Cradle of Azerbaijani Music" or "Conservatory of Transcaucasia". A prominent composer, Uzeyir Hajibayli, established the foundations of professional music education in Azerbaijan.

According to some historical sources, the people of "Shusha" descended from Turkish tribes in the Caucasus. Folk stories say that the city is called "Shusha" because of its fresh air and pure atmosphere. Other sources indicate that the word "Shusha" might have origins in the Scythian tribe in Azerbaijan.

The city of "Shusha" was occupied by Armenian forces on May 8, 1992. As a result of this occupation, 195 Azerbaijani citizens were killed, 165 were injured, 150 of them were permanently disabled, and more than 20,000 others were displaced.

## A Stronghold of Pharaohs, Called by the Arabs "Aswan"



### Luxor - Hajjaj Salama (DPA)

The Governorate of "Aswan", as named by the Arabs, is one of the most famous cultural tourism destinations in Egypt. It is known for its many monuments and huge temples built by the kings of ancient Egypt in Abu Simbel, Philae Island, Edfu, Kom Ombo, and other historical areas that spread throughout the governorate.

Arabic sources, however, reveal a variety of other aspects of Aswan's history, which became famous as a center of ancient Egyptian civilization. Sources, historians and travelers, as well as Islamic and Coptic archaeologists, agree that Aswan has a significant place in Coptic and Islamic history.

Egyptian Archeologist, Dr. Suad Maher Mohamed, who served as Dean of the Faculty of Archeology at Cairo University for years, described Aswan as "the museum of Egyptian archeology throughout the ages". In her book "Aswan and its Monuments in the Islamic Era", she explained that the names given to Aswan varied according to the multiple functions it performed and the historical events it witnessed throughout the ages, thanks to its unique location.

All of this has made Aswan a destination for the whole world, and a magnet attracting archaeologists, explorers, and excavation

teams, where one can find the traces of prehistory, of the Pharaohs, Ptolemies and Romans, and then of the Coptic and Islamic era.

Dr. Souad Maher Mohamed tells about her contribution, along with other archaeologists, to the excavation works that, in her view, prove the originality of the city of Aswan, and its embrace of Islam. She indicates that some of the Prophet's companions and followers came to Aswan, and some of them even died and were buried therein since the year 31 AH, as is shown through ancient inscriptions and scripts. Aswan, she adds, also served as a place of residence for princes and high-ranking people in the Middle Ages, which can be inferred from the marriage contracts that were found written on archaeological textiles.

Books and literature on the history of Aswan tell much about the archaeological monuments and historical landmarks that reflect the cultural diversity of that Egyptian governorate located in the far south of the country.

The book "Aswan and its Monuments in the Islamic Era", and other Arab and foreign books, works and sources, have documented many accounts about Aswan's landmarks and history, reported by travelers and histo-

rians in their ancient works.

French Archaeologist Henri Gauthier, in his famous "Dictionary of Geographical Names contained in Hieroglyphic Texts", mentioned many of the names by which "Aswan" was known in the past, including "the market", or "the place of trade" where there were varied commercial exchanges between Egypt and Sudan. Various names were successively given to the city until the Arabs called it "Aswan".

"Aswan" was also mentioned by the French scholar Emile Amélineau in his book "The Geography of Egypt in the Coptic Era", by Yaqut Al-Hamawi in "The Dictionary of Countries" where it is described as "a region in the far end of Upper Egypt", and also in the book entitled "Sunni Masterpiece in the Names of the Egyptian Country", by Yahya Bin Al-Jiyan who described Aswan as one of the frontiers of Egypt.

In his book "The Best Partitions in Knowledge of the Regions", Abu Abdullah Muhammad Ibn Ahmad al-Maqdisi al-Bashari described "Aswan" as a large city in Upper Egypt on the eastern bank of the Nile, with a tall lighthouse, plenty of palm-trees and vines, abundant riches, and intensive trade. It is one of the key cities of the country.

## Eminent Muslim Women Leaders Participate in Conference on “Women in Islam”



Under the generous patronage of the Custodian of the Two Holy Mosques, King Salman bin Abdulaziz Al Saud, the “International Conference on Women in Islam: Status and Empowerment”, organized by the OIC General Secretariat and convened and hosted by the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, kicked off on November 6, 2023, in Jeddah. The Conference was attended by H.E. Sheikh Hasina, Prime Minister of Bangladesh, as well as by Muslim women leading delegations from OIC countries, high-ranking women, and other participants, invitees, and experts, Addressing the opening session, H.E. Mr. Hissein Brahim Taha, OIC Secretary-General, stated that since its inception, the OIC has diligently worked to defend the rights and promote the empowerment of Muslim women. These efforts, he added, culminated in the adoption of the OIC Programme of Action for the Advancement of Women (OPAAW), which serves as a roadmap for Muslim societies.

The Secretary-General noted that the Conference is being held at a time when the Palestinians are facing bloody and brutal Israeli aggression. Women, particularly in Gaza, as

well as children, elderly people, and other innocent civilians, are victims of continuous bombardments. The large number of victims killed in the midst of a state of silence constitutes the weakest link in this tragedy.

The Secretary-General asserted that the situation in Gaza is a continuing tragedy that places all parties in front of significant responsibilities that impose themselves on the agenda of the Conference. This situation requires more intensive efforts to lay bare these barbaric practices and defend the rights of Palestinian women and the Palestinian people in general, as well as protect the blessed Al-Aqsa Mosque. In the Palestinian Cause, he added, it is impossible to separate people from the land or the land from the reality of occupation.

With regard to Afghanistan, the Secretary-General reaffirmed the OIC’s determination to pursue constructive dialogue with the aim of empowering Afghan women and guaranteeing their right to access education at all levels and to participate in public life.

The Secretary-General pointed out that the Conference will serve as a beacon for the OIC and for the participating bodies and in-

stitutions in terms of promoting and asserting women’s rights in Islam, noting that the Conference will adopt the “Jeddah Document on Women’s Rights in Islam”. He concluded by expressing his sincere gratitude and appreciation to the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia for convening and hosting the Conference. He extended thanks to all the eminent women who participated in this event. The Conference was also addressed by the Prime Minister of Bangladesh, as well as by several Foreign Ministers and Ministers of Women and Family Affairs from OIC countries. Papers were also delivered by other participants and invitees.

The International Conference on “Women in Islam: Status and Empowerment”, which concluded on November 8, 2023, came out with 20 recommendations that were included in the Final Declaration. The recommendations underlined the advanced rights granted by Islam to women and the status of women in Islam. They also highlighted the challenges and opportunities related to the promotion of women’s rights and the enhancement of their role in society in various fields and at all levels.

## Secretary-General Asserts Islam's Fairness toward Women



In his address at the closing session of the “International Conference on Women in Islam: Status and Empowerment”, organized by the OIC General Secretariat and convened and hosted by the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, the OIC Secretary-General, H.E. Mr. Houssein Brahim Taha, stressed that women’s empowerment issues would remain high among the OIC’s priorities. He indicated that the OIC would launch and support numerous efforts and initiatives designed to advance the status of women in Muslim societies.

The Secretary-General noted that the “Jeddah Document on Women’s Rights in Islam” serves as a significant intellectual and practical reference for legislative institutions and human rights organizations in the Member States and for all Muslim societies when considering the rights of Muslim women. He expressed hope that those who still cast doubts about Islam’s fairness toward women would consider women’s rights as set out in this Document, and not through some isolated social practices in some Muslim societies that in no way reflect the sub-

lime vision and universality of Islam and its teachings.

The Secretary-General also highlighted in his speech the OIC’s efforts to support Palestinian women in all fields.

The Conference featured five panels, with rich discussions and presentations by ministers, officials, scholars, and thinkers, dealing with women’s status and rights in Islam, the prospects for Muslim women’s empowerment in education and work, along with other issues related to women in contemporary societies.

It is noteworthy that the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia had presented its initiative to organize this international conference during the 49th session of the OIC Council of Foreign Ministers, held in Nouakchott, Mauritania, on March 16-17, 2023, which adopted a resolution in this regard. This initiative reflects Saudi Arabia’s determination to move forward in empowering women, based on its national initiatives and driven by its keenness to support these efforts within the framework of the OIC and with the international framework, with the aim of advanc-

ing the role of women in all areas of comprehensive development.

On the sidelines of the Conference, the OIC Secretary-General, H.E. Mr. Houssein Brahim Taha, met, on November 7, 2023, with H.E. Mrs. Cadi Seidi, Minister of Women, Family and Social Protection of the Republic of Guinea-Bissau.

The meeting discussed bilateral relations between the OIC and the Republic of Guinea Bissau and the prospects for enhancing cooperation between the two sides, especially with regard to improving the conditions of women, children and people with special needs.

The Secretary-General commended Guinea-Bissau’s efforts to address the issues of women and children, and its support for efforts to strengthen joint Islamic action.

For her part, the Minister expressed her gratitude to the Secretary-General for the OIC’s support for her country, and reviewed the efforts made by the Government of Guinea-Bissau to support and promote the rights of women and children in all fields.

## Secretary-General Holds Talks with Bangladesh P. M. and Iran V.P.



The OIC Secretary-General, H.E. Mr. Hissein Brahim Taha, held a series of meetings on the sidelines of the International Conference on Women in Islam: Status and Empowerment”, held on November 6-8, 2023 in Jeddah, Saudi Arabia.

The Secretary-General was received by H.E. Sheikh Hasina Wazed, Prime Minister of Bangladesh. Both sides stressed the importance of this Conference, which aims to enhance women’s rights and status. They reviewed cooperation between the OIC and Bangladesh, and the prospects for its further enhancement, as well as ways to enhance joint Islamic action. They also addressed the Israeli aggression on the Gaza Strip as well as its humanitarian impacts and its repercussions on regional and global peace and security.

The Secretary-General commended Bangladesh’s commitment to defending the cause of Rohingya Muslims and providing care to Rohingya refugees. For her part, Sheikh Hasina expressed her country’s support for the OIC and for its role in promoting joint Islamic action and unifying Member States’ efforts to serve the causes of the Muslim world.

The OIC Secretary-General also met with Dr. Ensieh Khazali, Vice-President for Women and Family Affairs of the Islamic Republic of Iran. Both sides discussed relations between the OIC and Iran and the prospects for further cooperation, especially in terms of empowering women and enhancing their status in the OIC Member States.

Dr. Ensieh Khazali expressed her condemnation of the heinous crimes committed by the brutal occupation forces against the Palestinian people and their properties, especially in the Gaza Strip, and stressed her country’s continued support for the Palestinian Cause. She underlined the importance of empowering women in all fields, indicating that her country stands ready to contribute to providing the needed support to women entrepreneurs in Muslim societies within the framework of the OIC, especially in the areas of education, creativity development, artificial intelligence for women, and family funds.

For his part, the Secretary-General commended the role of Iran in supporting the OIC’s programs and activities, and its contributions to strengthening inter-Islamic solidarity and promoting joint Islamic action.

He called for further intensifying cooperation between Iran and the OIC, especially in terms of women’s empowerment and family support.

Dr. Ensieh Khazali thanked the Secretary-General for his efforts at the head of the OIC, and expressed appreciation for the significant role played by the OIC in advancing the status of women in all fields in Muslim societies.

The OIC Secretary-General, H.E. Mr. Hissein Brahim Taha, also met with H.E. Ms. Olivia Ragnagnewendé Rouamba, Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Burkina Faso.

Both sides discussed relations between the OIC and Burkina Faso and the prospects for further cooperation. They also reviewed the efforts exerted by the Burkina Faso government to combat terrorism, promote security and stability, and enhance development in the country.

The Secretary-General commended Burkina Faso’s efforts to serve the issues of women and youth within the framework of the OIC, and its contributions to strengthening joint Islamic action.

## International Day for the Elimination of Violence Against Women

In a statement issued on November 25, 2023, the Organization of Islamic Cooperation (OIC) commemorated the "International Day for the Elimination of Violence against Women".

The statement considers that the International Day for the Elimination of Violence against Women is a sad reminder of the egregious and continuing violations of women's and girls' rights taking place in the world, particularly in areas of conflict. "Investing to prevent violence against women and girls", the theme chosen for this year, highlights the importance of financing measures to prevent violence proactively. The OIC reasserted its firm position and its commitment to promoting women's empowerment and putting an end to all forms of violence against them.

As part of the commemoration of the International Day for the Elimination of Violence against Women, the OIC Secretary-General, H.E. Mr. Hissein Brahim Taha, emphasized the significant role of the OIC in evaluating Member States' progress in their efforts to end violence against women. He noted that this occasion provides a renewed opportunity for governments, international organizations, and civil society organizations to develop the needed policies and programs

to address this problem more firmly and thoroughly.

The Secretary-General pointed out that the International Day for the Elimination of Violence against Women is being commemorated this year at a time when a horrific humanitarian crisis is happening as a result of the brutal Israeli aggression against the Palestinian people in the Gaza Strip. Women, particularly in Gaza, as well as children, elderly people, and other innocent civilians, are victims of continuous bombardments. The large number of victims killed in the midst of a state of silence constitutes the weakest link in this tragedy.

The Secretary-General reiterated the OIC's strong condemnation of the continuing war crimes committed by the Israeli occupation against the Palestinian people, and called on the international community to take all measures to stop these crimes and pressure Israel to abide by the international humanitarian law, observe a ceasefire, and allow unhindered delivery of urgent humanitarian aid to the people of Gaza and the surrounding regions.

In a plea to all OIC Member States, the Secretary-General emphasized the importance of strengthening cooperation and undertaking joint actions to safeguard women and

girls, particularly in times of crisis, war, and natural disasters.

The OIC has always taken a clear position on issues relating to the elimination of all forms of violence against women, consistent with the principles of Islam and the relevant international instruments, and in line with the goals and principles of the OIC.

The OIC Plan of Action for the Advancement of Women (OPAAW), the Ten-Year Programme of Action (OIC-2025), and the relevant resolutions adopted by Summit and Ministerial Conferences on women, provide guidelines on ways and means of addressing the challenges facing women, including eliminating all forms of violence against them.

In line with its proactive approach to combating violence against women, the OIC established the Women Development Organization (WDO) as a specialized institution active in the field of women empowerment. On this occasion, the Secretary-General reiterated his call on Member States that are yet to ratify the WDO Statute to accelerate their ratification and accession procedures, so that the WDO can best perform its role in promoting and empowering women and advancing their status in the Muslim world.



## OIC Delegation Participates in Women Empowerment Forum in Uzbekistan



A high-level delegation from the OIC General Secretariat, headed by Amb. Tarig Ali Bakheet, Assistant Secretary-General for Humanitarian, Cultural, and Social Affairs, participated in the International Forum on the "Experience of Uzbekistan and OIC Member States in Women Empowerment", organized by the Family and Women Committee on November 22-23, 2023 in the historic city of Samarkand, Uzbekistan.

The Conference aimed to highlight the efforts and achievements of the Government of Uzbekistan in supporting and empowering women. It was also designed to enhance cooperation and the sharing of experiences among OIC Member States in empowering women and promoting their full participation in public life and state governance, as well as in strengthening and protecting the family institution.

The Conference saw the participation of Ministers and representatives from a number of OIC Member States, along with representatives from national and governmental institutions in Uzbekistan, and from international organizations.

The Communiqué issued by the Conference underlined the crucial role of women in promoting the development of their countries at all levels, and called for more intensive efforts to enhance women's participation in decision-making and leadership positions.

In this same context, the OIC Secretary-General Mr. Hissein Brahim Taha, held a meeting, in his office, with Dr. Afnan bint Abdullah Al-Shuaibi, Executive Director of the Cairo-based OIC Women Development Organization (WDO).

*The OIC Secretary-General, has always underlined the necessity of supporting women, and the need for all parties to pursue their shared responsibility to ensure that women and girls live in a violence-free society.*

The meeting addressed the OIC's efforts to promote women's empowerment and preserve their rights in the Islamic world. It also discussed preparations for the Conference on Women in Islam, which was later held in Jeddah, Saudi Arabia, on November 6-8, 2023, under the generous patronage of the

Custodian of the Two Holy Mosques, King Salman bin Abdulaziz.

The OIC has attached great attention to women's issues, and has exerted significant efforts in this regard, especially for the elimination of violence against women. The 8th session of the OIC Ministerial Conference on Women was held in Cairo, Egypt, on July 6-8, 2021 under the theme of: "Preserving the Achievements of Gender Equality and Empowerment of Women in Light of the COVID-19 Pandemic and Beyond." The Conference adopted significant resolutions regarding the protection and empowerment of women, the mainstreaming of gender equality in strategies and policies to combat COVID-19, and the promotion of economic and social empowerment of women in Member States.

The OIC Secretary-General, H.E. Mr. Hissein Brahim Taha, has always underlined the necessity of supporting women, and the need for all parties to pursue their shared responsibility to ensure that women and girls live in a violence-free society. He noted that through collaboration, solidarity and unity, it is possible to put an end to violence against women and girls, and ensure a future in which women's empowerment and gender equality are not just slogans, but an everyday reality.

## New Uzbekistan: Attention to National and Religious Values and to Women's Rights

Women's issues and their role in the social, moral, religious, and educational life of society have become more important than ever before. It is well known that women are held in high regard in the noble Islamic religion. Moreover, the prominent status of women in the family and in public life actually guarantees the assertion of their rights.

In this context, it is worth highlighting the great attention attached, especially in recent years, by H.E. Mr. Shavkat Mirziyoyev, President of the Republic of Uzbekistan, to women's rights and the enhancement of their role in society, as well as to family issues. To date, about one hundred international legal documents have been adopted in Uzbekistan with the aim of protecting women's rights. A number of actions have been implemented in Uzbekistan as part of implementing the provisions of these instruments.

In particular, strict measures have been taken within the framework of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action to achieve gender equality and to expand the scope of women's rights and the opportunities offered to them. For the first time, a woman was elected as Chairperson of the Senate. Moreover, in the Senate of the Oliy Majlis, a committee in charge of women's issues and gender equality was set up, in addition to a Republican Body concerned with enhancing the role of women in society and promoting gender equality and family issues.

Uzbekistan is a democratic country where everyone enjoys a legally guaranteed right to equality, regardless of origin, race and gender. This is best evidenced through the passing of laws guaranteeing equal rights and opportunities for women and men, and protecting women from harassment and violence.

In New Uzbekistan, a Strategy for Achieving Gender Equality Until 2030 was adopted. The strategy covers 61 indicators related to achieving the UN Sustainable Development Goals, in particular ensuring equal access to quality education for all, promoting access to higher education for girls in rural areas, and preventing violence and human trafficking.

The establishment of a Committee on Family and Women to promote public policy in this area, as part of the comprehensive reforms undertaken in Uzbekistan, reflects our aspirations to develop and foster national-religious values.

Thanks to these achievements, Uzbekistan was ranked among the top 20 countries in the Open Gender Data Index. Moreover, Uzbekistan has risen by 8 positions in the SDG Index ranking for 2023, published by the Sustainable Development Solutions Network, ranking 69th among 166 countries.

As part of the Agreement to Eliminate Discrimination in Education, significant work is currently being implemented in this regard. Two thousand girls from underprivileged families were granted government funds to pursue higher education at universities. Moreover, two hundred billion soums are annually allocated to finance contract payments for girls studying for a Master's degree at state universities, and a target quota of 300 seats is allocated annually for female doctoral students.

As a result of the aforementioned reforms, the percentage of women in administrative positions reached 35 percent, in the field of business 37 percent, in political parties 46 percent, and in higher education 49 percent.

Ensuring security for women and children is one of the highest values in Islam, and is a highly cherished principle for the Uzbek people.

It is worth highlighting, in this regard, the significant work undertaken by Ms. Saida Mirziyoyeva, Assistant to the President of the Republic, in terms of providing comprehensive protection for women's rights in Uzbekistan. Ms. Mirziyoyeva is one of the initiators of the law providing for the application of criminal liability and toughening punitive measures for domestic violence against children. This law was a bold step forward toward promoting the full development of women and children and ensuring their safety and security not only in Uzbekistan, but also in our entire region.

As part of all these reforms taking place in New Uzbekistan today, a very wide range of opportunities, advantages and guarantees are being provided for women. Our ultimate goal is: women's happiness, ensuring that women lead a happy life within their families.

Our action along this path will continue uninterrupted. Aware of the importance of sharing international experience in this regard, H.E. Mr. Shavkat Mirziyoyev, President of the Republic of Uzbekistan, proposed, during the 78th session of the United Nations General Assembly, to hold the Asia Women's Forum in 2024 in Uzbekistan, in cooperation with UN-Women.



**Muzaffar Kamilov,**  
Advisor to the President of  
the Republic of Uzbekistan

*Thanks to these achievements, Uzbekistan was ranked among the top 20 countries in the Open Gender Data Index. Moreover, Uzbekistan has risen by 8 positions in the SDG Index ranking for 2023, published by the Sustainable Development Solutions Network, ranking 69th among 166 countries*



## Secretary-General Calls on OIC Countries to Improve the Situation of the Disabled and the Elderly

The OIC Secretary-General, H.E. Mr. Hissein Brahim Taha, called on Member States, relevant OIC organs, and international and non-governmental organizations to intensify efforts in order to promote social justice for persons with disabilities, by implementing the resolutions and policies adopted in this regard, and developing programs to support disabled persons and strengthen awareness activities to facilitate their integration into their societies.

This call was launched as part of the commemoration of the "International Day of Persons with Disabilities", observed since 1992 on December 3rd of each year, pursuant to a United Nations resolution aimed at intensifying efforts to promote social integration for persons with disabilities, to better understand their problems, and to raise general awareness in this regard.

The OIC Ministerial Conference on Social Development, held in Cairo, Egypt, in June 2023, adopted resolutions designed to support persons with disabilities. It also encouraged Member States to share experiences in terms of integrating and rehabilitating persons with disabilities, in order to improve the quality of services and activities provided for them. The Conference also adopted the draft OIC Plan of Action for the protection

and integration of people with disabilities in Member States.

The Secretary-General highlighted the difficult humanitarian situation experienced by the Palestinian people, especially persons with disabilities, as a result of the killing of innocent children, women, elderly and disabled persons, and young people, in addition to the repression, violence, and destruction of health, cultural, sport and services facilities.

On the International Day of Older Persons, celebrated by the international community on October 1st of each year pursuant to a UNGA resolution adopted on December 14, 1990, the OIC Secretary-General, H.E. Mr. Hissein Brahim Taha, called on Member States and the international community to join efforts in order to provide opportunities for elderly persons and strengthen their capabilities to face various challenges, especially in the areas of peace, security and development; thereby building societies where justice and equality would prevail among all generations.

The Secretary-General stressed that the OIC realizes that providing protection for elderly persons is key to ensuring the well-being of society. The resolutions adopted by the OIC have affirmed the crucial importance of the

social dimension in achieving sustainable development, and that investing in social protection is a means to that end. The First Session of the OIC Ministerial Conference on Social Development, held in Istanbul in 2019, had adopted the OIC Strategy on the Protection and Well-being of the Elderly in Member States. The Second Session of the Conference, held in Cairo in June 2023, adopted a resolution calling for strengthening cooperation among OIC Member States in social fields, including in preserving well-being and social security for the elderly.

In this context, the Secretary-General urged Member States to promote and support elderly persons, improve their conditions, and provide them with a supportive environment, while benefiting from their experience and expertise, enhancing their role within their communities, and adopting best practices in dealing with them. He called on the relevant OIC and partner institutions to work towards supporting the efforts of Member States in this regard.

The theme chosen by the United Nations to celebrate the 2023 International Day of Older Persons was: "Fulfilling the Promises of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights for Older Persons: Across Generations".



## OIC Addresses Children's Rights amid Aggression on Gaza

The Organization of Islamic Cooperation (OIC) convened, on October 29-30 at its headquarters in Jeddah, the 3rd Open-ended Intergovernmental Group of Experts Meeting to finalize the discussion of the draft OIC Convention on the Rights of the Child. This meeting took place in the midst of the escalation and deterioration of the security and humanitarian conditions and the continuing brutal aggression perpetrated by the Israeli occupation army against innocent civilians in the Gaza Strip.

Amb. Tarig Ali Bakheet, OIC Assistant Secretary-General for Humanitarian, Cultural, and Social Affairs, called for the necessity to finalize the review of the draft OIC Convention on the Rights of the Child and its implementation mechanisms, in order to submit it to the next session of the CFM meeting for approval before initiating its implementation. He recalled that the meeting is being held under difficult and harsh circumstances due to the blatant and unprecedented Israeli aggression in the occupied Palestinian territories and the heinous massacres committed against civilians in the Gaza Strip, claiming the lives of thousands of innocent civilians and injuring thousands more, most

of whom being children, women and elderly people.

Amb. Bakheet stressed that the Islamic religion attaches great attention to the rights of children, being the future of the Ummah and the youth of tomorrow. Islam has established rights for children that cover the different stages of their lives. Accordingly, he added, the OIC Member States pay significant attention to children's rights and look forward to the adoption of the OIC Convention on the Rights of the Child as an international charter that matches other international human rights instruments, while being consistent with the teachings of Islam. Amb. Bakheet thanked the Islamic Republic of Mauritania, Chair of the 49th session of the Council of Foreign Ministers, and the Arab Republic of Egypt, Chair of the 2nd session of the Ministerial Conference on Social Development, for their efforts and continued support for the General Secretariat in following up the implementation of the OIC resolutions in this regard.

On October 12, 2023, the OIC General Secretariat convened a virtual meeting, at the OIC General Secretariat in Jeddah, to follow up on the Project of Promoting the Fam-

ily Bank Concept in the G-5 Sahel Member States.

Addressing the meeting, the Assistant Secretary-General for Humanitarian, Cultural and Social Affairs, Amb. Tarig Ali Bakheet, highlighted the role of the Islamic Chamber of Commerce, Industry and Agriculture (IC-CIA) and its efforts in following up on this important project. He also commended the efforts of the project's partners, especially the Chambers of Commerce in Burkina Faso, Chad, Niger, Mauritania, and Mali, as well as the national committees established to follow up on the project's implementation. He extended his appreciation to the Arab Republic of Egypt, Chair of the current session of the OIC Ministerial Conference on Women and the OIC Ministerial Conference on Social Development, for its efforts in following up on the implementation of the Resolutions issued by the relevant conferences, and its support to the General Secretariat's activities.

Amb. Bakheet stated that the OIC Secretary-General, H.E Mr. Hissein Brahim Taha, attaches great importance to this project and to the role of microfinance in empowering women and promoting family stability.

## General Secretariat Participates in Arabic Language Conference in Dubai



Under the high patronage of HH Sheikh Mohammed bin Rashid Al Maktoum, Vice-President, Prime Minister, and Ruler of Dubai, the 9th International Conference of the Arabic Language was held on November 6-8, 2023, in Dubai, UAE. The OIC General Secretariat was represented in this event by the Department of Cultural Affairs.

This Conference is designed to enhance the teaching of the Arabic language and preserve the Arab-Islamic identity in a way that contributes to promoting the use of knowledge in Arabic and enhancing the status of the Arab culture among the world's cultures. This involves the sharing of information, documents, and publications related to topics of common interest, which are particularly concerned with enhancing language policies, developing the teaching of Arabic, and promoting its dissemination at the Arab and international levels.

The Conference was attended by representatives from a number of Arab countries, Arab, regional, and international organizations, and civil society institutions concerned with the Arabic language.

The "Mohammed bin Rashid Arabic Language Award", the largest award in the history of the Arabic language, was handed over during this Conference. Thousands of scientific and field research studies related to the Arabic language were published in all specialties and professions.

The General Secretariat's participation in this event came as part of implementing the Ministerial Resolution No. 13/49 on the Arabic language, issued by the OIC CFM meeting held in March 2023 in Nouakchott, Mauritania. The resolution aimed at promoting the status of the Arabic language (the language of the Qur'an), and building a network of partners and relevant actors to develop programs and activities designed to enhance the presence of the Arabic language in all scientific, intellectual and cultural forums and fields.

The Conference discussed scientific studies, research and working papers in various fields related to the Arabic language and literature, in addition to evaluating Arabic language curricula in schools and universities in comparison to international standards. It also reviewed the mechanisms for teacher training and qualification.

The Conference was an opportunity to highlight the efforts of ministries and governmental and non-governmental organizations and institutions concerned with Arabic language issues, to present theoretical, applied and field studies, reports and initiatives, as well as to examine the relevant laws, policies, language systems, and language planning process.

The Conference also contributed to analyzing standards for classification, accredita-

tion, evaluation, and designing national and international proficiency tests, in addition to showcasing innovations, technologies, and electronic language applications. It discussed ways of promoting the dissemination and use of the Arabic language across all professions and disciplines.

The Conference publishes thousands of studies, research and applications to support scientific research in governmental and private scientific and educational institutions. The Conference seeks to promote integration, cooperation, and the sharing of expertise among individuals, societies, and governmental and non-governmental institutions at the national, Arab, and international levels, as well as to bring together thousands of scholars, researchers, and officials from all over of the world.

On the sidelines of its participation in the Conference, the OIC delegation held bilateral meetings with heads of Arabic language academies to explore opportunities for future partnerships and look into proposals for the implementation of joint activities. The delegation met with Dr. Abdullah bin Saif Al-Toobi, Director of the Center for Translation, Arabization, and Sparking Interest in the Arabic language of the Gulf Cooperation Council; Dr. Emhamed Safi Mosteghanemi, Secretary-General of the Sharjah Arabic Language Academy and Executive Director of the Historical Dictionary of the Arabic Language Project; Dr. Mamoun Wajih, Scientific Director of the Historical Dictionary of the Arabic Language; Dr. Abdelmajid Benamara, Secretary-General of the Union of Arab Scientific Research Councils; and Dr. Ali Abdullah Moussa, Secretary-General of the International Council of the Arabic Language.

The Conference warned of a declining interest in the skills, abilities and linguistic knowledge that the Arab citizen needs all along his life, especially the capacity for reading, writing, conversation, communication, thinking, research, comprehension and expression in proper Arabic language.

The Conference called on all relevant stakeholders to assume their responsibilities in enhancing the status of the Arabic language and increasing its use in the family, school, university, and workplace, and in all governmental, civil, and corporate institutions.

## OIC Participates in the 9th Edition of the “Journey to the Holy Sites”



The Ministry of Sports of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia organized, jointly with the General Secretariat of the Organization of Islamic Cooperation and the General Secretariat of the League of Arab States, from 17 to 26 November 2023, the “Journey to the Holy Sites in Islam for Youth of Arab and Islamic countries”.

This event was concluded with an official closing ceremony held in the presence of H.E. Mr. Abdulaziz bin Abdul Rahman Al-Musad, Undersecretary for Sports Affairs, representing HRH Prince Abdulaziz bin Turki Al-Faisal, Minister of Sports of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, Chair of the 5th session of the Islamic Conference on Youth and Sports Ministers (ICYSM).

In his statement on this occasion, the Undersecretary for Sports Affairs expressed his thanks to the participating Member States, as well as to the General Secretariats of the OIC and the League of Arab States, for their close coordination with the Ministry of Sports, which contributed to the success of the program. He also underlined Saudi Arabia’s readiness to continue this initiative

and organize other similar programs and activities in its capacity as current Chair of the ICYSM, in coordination with the OIC General Secretariat; the aim being to empower youth from OIC Member States to build their capacities and share knowledge and experience.

For his part, Ambassador Musa Kulalikaya, OIC Assistant-Secretary General for Administration and Finance, representing the OIC Secretary-General, H.E. Mr. Hissein Brahim Taha, commended the Saudi Sports Ministry’s significant initiative to organize this interesting and worthwhile program that enabled tens of youth from many Arab and Islamic countries to perform Umrah and to visit Islamic holy places, including the Kaabah, Safa and Marwa, Mina, Musdalifah, Arafah, the Prophet’s Mosque in Al-Madinah Al-Munawwarah, Uhud, Masjid Quba, the King Fahd Glorious Quran Printing Complex, the Revelation Exhibition, and the Kiswah Factory of the Holy Kaabah, among others.

Amb. Kulalikaya conveyed the OIC’s deep gratitude to the Ministry of Sports of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia for its valuable co-

operation and constant support to the OIC, especially since assuming the chairmanship of the ICYSM.

Amb. Kulalikaya highlighted the key role that the newly established Department of Youth and Sports within the General Secretariat will play in better coordinating efforts and implementing policies aimed at promoting youth empowerment and development in the OIC Member States, in line with the relevant OIC resolutions. He concluded by emphasizing the importance of pursuing this program, and calling on participants to make the best of this experience and to build on it to promote dialogue, tolerance, brotherhood and peaceful coexistence within their respective societies and countries.

The representatives of the participating delegations expressed their personal appreciation, and conveyed the gratitude of their respective countries, to the Ministry of Sports of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia and to the OIC General Secretariat for this successful initiative.

## Brainstorming Roundtable: Promoting OIC Countries' Response to the Crisis of Missing Persons



The OIC General Secretariat held, on October 26, 2023, at its headquarters in Jeddah, a High-level Brainstorming Roundtable on “Missing Persons during Conflicts and Disasters: Strengthening the Response in the OIC Countries”, in partnership with the Regional Delegation of the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) for the Gulf Council Countries.

The roundtable was held as part of implementing the bilateral Cooperation Agreement and its subsequent Plan of Action between the Organization of Islamic Cooperation (OIC) and the Regional Delegation of the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) for the Gulf Council Countries. Addressing the roundtable, the OIC Assistant Secretary-General for Humanitarian, Social and Cultural Affairs, Amb. Tarig Ali Bakheet, commended the valuable contributions made by the Kuwaiti Foreign Ministry to this event, through the participation of Amb. Rabie Al-Adsani, Assistant Foreign Minister for the Prisoners and Missing Affairs, in response to an invitation extended to him by the ICRC. Amb. Bakheet highlighted Kuwait’s pioneering role in addressing the issue of missing persons during conflicts, by co-sponsoring the first-ever resolution on this issue, which was adopted by the UN Security Council.

Amb. Bakheet noted that the problem of missing persons during conflicts and disasters is a source of global concern, a fact that led the UN Security Council to adopt Reso-

lution 2474 of 11 June 2019, sponsored by Kuwait, which urged the international community to pay greater attention to the fate of missing persons, address their situation, and support their families.

Amb. Bakheet stressed that the OIC General Secretariat is called on to raise awareness about the issue under discussion in order to develop optimum ways and means to strengthen the response to the crisis of missing persons. This is particularly crucial in an increasingly complex world marked by protracted conflicts, escalating violence, forced displacements, natural disasters, and large-scale trans-regional migration. He also commended the ICRC’s efforts to alleviate the suffering of people in Gaza, especially during the current crisis.

For his part, the ICRC Head of Regional Delegation for the GCC countries, H.E. Mr. Mammadou Sow, noted, in his statement, that “behind every statistic is a human story, a family longing for a beloved one.” “Addressing the issue of the missing,” he added, “is not just a task to be fulfilled; it is a humanitarian imperative. Our collaboration with States has shown us the path we will take, but real progress requires unwavering political will and resources”. He pointed out that “in Gaza, the magnitude of the crisis is now quite visible. We have been flooded with urgent pleas from those agonizing over the unknown fate of their family members, which only amplifies the daily horrors they face.”

*Amb. Bakheet stressed that the OIC General Secretariat is called on to raise awareness about the issue under discussion in order to develop optimum ways and means to strengthen the response to the crisis of missing persons*

## OIC–UNHCR Cooperation on Refugee Crises



As part of implementing the Memorandum of Understanding and Plan of Action (2022-2025) signed between the Organization of Islamic Cooperation (OIC) and the United Nations High Commission for Refugees (UNHCR) in the Gulf Cooperation Council, the OIC General Secretariat, in partnership with the UNHCR, hosted a humanitarian event on November 1-2, 2023. The event involved a briefing on the Second Global Refugee Forum, scheduled to take place in Geneva on December 13-15, 2023, as well as a training workshop on “Emergency Preparedness and Response”, designed for representatives from the participating Member States, some OIC humanitarian institutions, and the General Secretariat personnel.

In his opening statement, the OIC Assistant Secretary-General for Humanitarian, Cultural, and Social Affairs, Amb. Tarig Ali Bakheet, emphasized the high priority given to the refugee issue on the OIC’s humanitarian and diplomatic agenda, pursuant to the resolutions issued by the Islamic Summit and the Council of Foreign Ministers. He expressed the OIC’s concern over the deteriorating humanitarian conditions of refugees, noting that the OIC has been making tireless efforts since the call of the First Conference

on Refugees in the Islamic World, held in Ashgabat in 2012, to find a radical solution to the plight of refugees. He considered them as the most vulnerable population in the world, and as the direct victims of natural disasters and climate change, as well as of crises arising from armed conflicts, poverty, and intolerance.

Amb. Bakheet highlighted the unwavering commitment of the OIC, its Member States, and its humanitarian institutions to providing humanitarian and relief aid to refugees, amid a severe humanitarian funding crisis. He emphasized the OIC’s determination to ensure the safe and voluntary return of refugees to their homelands and to continue working closely with international partners to achieve this goal, in accordance with the OIC and UN resolutions. He particularly drew attention to the plight of Palestinian refugees, being the most long-standing refugees in the world, as well as to the current crisis of displaced Palestinians in Gaza. He considered that the scale of the crisis and the daily atrocities have reached catastrophic levels and amount to a war crime that is being committed, in full view of the international community, by the Israeli occupation forces that must be held accountable

for their inhumane acts in accordance with the international humanitarian law.

Amb. Bakheet commended the Member States that are generously hosting millions of refugees, and insisted on the need for all countries to share the responsibility of hosting refugees, as outlined in the Global Compact for Refugees. He noted that most of the refugee-hosting countries are low-income, and that the international community must work to support both refugees and host countries. Bridging the gap between humanitarian aid and development efforts for refugee-hosting countries, he added, will strengthen the resilience of refugees and enable them to lead a normal and dignified life, access essential services, and eventually exercise their right to return to their homelands safely and voluntarily. He insisted that diplomatic efforts must go hand in hand with humanitarian efforts in order to tackle the root causes of the problem and reach a lasting solution to the refugee crisis. Amb. Bakheet highlighted the importance of holding a training workshop on emergency preparedness and response, and insisted on the need to build Member States’ technical capacities in disaster prevention and management.

## OIC Medical Camp in Uganda Provides Free Medical Services to Hundreds of Patients



As part of a remarkable humanitarian initiative, over 2000 patients from various regions received free medical services, including screening and surgeries for conditions such as hernia and cataracts.

Thousands of people attended a weeklong medical-surgical camp organized by the Organization of Islamic Cooperation (OIC) in collaboration with the Islamic University in Uganda (IUIU) and the Uganda Private Medical Practitioners (SOUAMP), at Yumbe Regional Hospital and Yumbe Health Centre IV in Yumbe district, Northern Uganda.

The camp offered a wide range of medical services, including ultrasonic scans, a free open pharmacy, and medical consultancy and counseling.

The camp, themed “A Healthy Community for a Prosperous Nation”, was inaugurated by H.E. Amb. Askar Mussinov, OIC Assistant Secretary-General for Science and Technology, in the presence of Hon. Huda Oleru, Member of Parliament and Minister of State for Defense, along with a number of community leaders.

Amb. Mussinov conveyed a message on be-

half of the OIC Secretary-General, H.E. Mr. Hissein Brahim Taha, in which he stressed the OIC’s commitment to improving health-care systems in African OIC Member States. He expressed his gratitude to Member States, OIC institutions, and international partners for their continued support. He also extended special thanks and appreciation to the Republic of Kazakhstan for its generous financial support, and for playing a key role in making the camp a reality. “We are equally grateful to the People’s Republic of China for signing Practical Arrangements with the OIC General Secretariat to strengthen healthcare systems in OIC African Member States, with Uganda being one of the beneficiaries of this vital project,” he added.

Health workers reported that the majority of patients came from Yumbe, Moyo, Koboko, Maracha, Madi-Okollo, Arua, South Sudan, and refugee communities in the region. Dr. Odongo Patrick Olwedo, District Health Officer in Yumbe, highlighted the challenges faced by major health facilities in the district in conducting surgeries, due to the shortage of specialists. He indicated that these health camps were temporary measures to address the backlog of untreated surgical conditions.

Hon. Huda Oleru Abason expressed her gratitude to the OIC and IUIU for providing medical services to the district. She emphasized the profound impact of this initiative on local populations, noting that many inhabitants could not afford the bills for such surgeries.

## On International Volunteer Day: Secretary-General Pays Tribute to Volunteers

The Organization of Islamic Cooperation (OIC) commemorated the International Volunteer Day on December 5th, pursuant to the relevant UNGA resolution, to reaffirm its commitment to economic and social development.

On this occasion, the OIC Secretary-General, H.E. Mr. Hissein Brahim Taha, called on Member States to encourage volunteering in their societies, so that they are best equipped to meet the goals of the OIC 10-Year Programme

of Action geared towards poverty alleviation, hunger eradication, and the provision of humanitarian relief. Achieving these goals involves coordination with other development partners, with a focus on post-conflict peace-building processes, food security, land and water resources management, small-scale development projects, healthcare, and education.

The Secretary-General pointed out that volun-

teering is deeply entrenched in Islamic teachings, which uphold the virtues of compassion, empathy, and community responsibility. The OIC, he added, recognizes and celebrates the contributions of volunteers worldwide who embody these core Islamic values, and dedicate their time and expertise in various fields such as humanitarian aid, education, healthcare, environmental conservation, and community development.



## “Love Restaurant”: A Volunteer Project for the Homeless

**Tunisia, Tarek Guizani (DPA):**

In the early hours of the long winter night, Sami Ayed and other volunteers begin preparing dinner meals to be distributed in the alleys and streets of the Tunisian capital, Tunis, where homeless people are waiting to be given anything to eat.

Meals are prepared in the “Love Restaurant,” the first restaurant that provides social and humanitarian services and offers free meals to homeless people, relying on the donations received by the “United for Humanity” Association, which runs the restaurant. Today’s menu includes pasta, a slice of meat, salad, and an apple.

“We provide a full meal. We do not just feed the homeless. We seek to find permanent solutions for them so that they can have better opportunities in life,” Sami told the German News Agency, while preparing the meals.

The “United for Humanity” Association began its activity in 2014. Over the years, it has gained greater momentum through the restaurant located near Mohamed V Avenue, one of the capital’s main avenues.

Sami works as a waiter in a café next to the charitable restaurant. As a member of the

Association, he takes care of logistical aspects, including bringing food donated by supermarkets to the restaurant.

“We signed an agreement with supermarkets to provide food items that can be repackaged, so that we give them to those in need and thus minimize food waste,” Sami said.

At the same time, the restaurant serves meals to ordinary customers, with revenues being used to finance charitable activities, including providing sufficient food to feed hundreds of homeless people who can mostly be found near mosques, hospitals, or abandoned buildings.

Every night of the week, volunteers distribute meals to those in need.

Sami says that in its early years, the restaurant provided about 300 meals every day to homeless people who were sleeping outdoors, but the number has been going down to reach about 100 meals in 2023. This is due, according to Sami, to the fact that the Association has succeeded in reducing the number of homeless people, by providing solutions that helped them improve their life conditions.

One of the success stories related by Sami

is when the Association succeeded in transforming the miserable life of a homeless person into a life full of hope. “He moved to live in a Social Care Center in Ezzahrouni [west of the capital], and he is even offering language courses to illiterate elderly people. He is now enjoying his life, and his health and psychological state have considerably improved”, Sami added.

Yet, admitting homeless people into social care centers involves some challenges, including the limited intake capacity of such centers, in addition to complaints about the poor services provided in some of them.

Hichem Bin Abada, Director of Ezzahrouni Social Care Center, told “Inkyfada”, a web magazine specialized in investigation, “Our capabilities are very limited. We are sparing no effort, but we find ourselves powerless to solve the problems of all these people.” Homeless people often find it difficult to adapt to the internal rules of Ezzahrouni Center, “considered by some of them to be too strict,” according to Inkyfada. A lawyer at the center added: “Many of them reject the idea of being sheltered in a social care facility”.

## OIC Welcomes Danish Parliament's Adoption of Law Banning Desecration of Religious Texts

The OIC General Secretariat welcomed the adoption, on December 7, 2023, by the Danish Parliament of a law criminalizing "inappropriate treatment of writings with significant religious importance for a recognized religious community." Paradoxically, the OIC had, weeks before, condemned incidents of Holy Qur'an desecration committed in Sweden and the Netherlands.

The OIC Secretary-General, H.E. Mr. Hissein Brahim Taha, commended the significant step taken by Denmark, following the series of incidents of desecration of copies of the Holy Qur'an in a number of European countries. He expressed hope that the law adopted by the Danish Parliament would contribute to efforts to combat acts of desecration of holy texts and religious hatred, and would serve to promote peaceful coexistence, tolerance, friendship, and harmony among followers of different religions, peoples, and communities. Still, incidents of Holy Qur'an desecration did take place during the past period. The OIC General Secretariat condemned in the strongest terms the provocative act of Holy Qur'an desecration committed on September 30, 2023, in Malmo, Sweden, despite the repeated calls on the Swedish authorities to pre-

vent the recurrence of such despicable acts. It should be recalled that similar acts of desecration had taken place last summer.

The OIC Secretary General, H.E. Mr. Hissein Brahim Taha, reaffirmed the OIC's position as stated by the OIC Council of Foreign Ministers in the resolution it adopted at its 18th Extraordinary Session, held on July 31, 2023, and devoted to discussing the repeated incidents of Holy Qur'an desecration. He reiterated the OIC's calls on the Swedish authorities to take

immediate measures against such provocative acts that constitute acts of religious hatred in violation of international law, and to prevent their recurrence.

Earlier in the same month, the OIC General Secretariat had condemned in the strongest terms the provocative act of desecration of a copy of the Holy Qur'an, which took place on September 23, 2023, in front of the Embassies of some OIC Member States in The Hague, Netherlands.

The General Secretariat reaffirmed the OIC's position as stated by the OIC Council of Foreign Ministers in the resolution it adopted at its 18th Extraordinary Session, held on July 31, 2023, and devoted to discussing the repeated incidents of Holy Qur'an desecration. The Council condemned all attempts to violate the sanctity of the Holy Qur'an and other sacred books, as well as the values and symbols of Islam and other religions, under the garb of freedom of expression, which runs counter to the spirit of Articles 19 and 20 of the ICCPR.

The General Secretariat called on the Dutch authorities to take the necessary measures against such provocative acts that constitute acts of religious hatred, in violation of international law, and to prevent their recurrence.

*The Council condemned all attempts to violate the sanctity of the Holy Qur'an and other sacred books, as well as the values and symbols of Islam and other religions, under the garb of freedom of expression.*





# The Resilience of Palestinians

## is Changing Misconceptions about Islam in the West

The resilience and steadfastness of the Palestinian people in the Gaza Strip in the face of the genocidal war waged by Israel against them are raising many questions in the West, especially among youth. After the prevailing misconceptions about Islam and Muslims, many in the West are now embarking on a journey to understand what actually makes the Palestinians so strong and resilient. The first step in this journey is to look into the Holy Qur'an.

The British newspaper "The Guardian" has published a long report in this regard, highlighting influential figures on Social Media, such as Megan B. Rice, who lives in Chicago and addressed the humanitarian crisis in Gaza in her TikTok accounts. "I wanted to talk about the faith of Palestinian people, how it's so strong, and they still find room to make it a priority to thank God, even when they have everything taken away from them," Rice said in an interview.

Rice organized a "World Religion Book Club",

where people of all backgrounds could study the Qur'an, Islam's central religious text.

The more Rice read the Qur'an, the more she found its contents aligned with her own core belief system. She found the Qur'an to be anti-consumerist, anti-oppressive, and grants women their rights. Within a month, Rice took the "Shahada", Islam's official profession of faith, bought hijabs to wear, and became a Muslim.

Rice, according to The Guardian, is not alone in wanting to experience the Qur'an. On TikTok, young people are reading the text to better understand a religion that has long been vilified by western media.

It is noteworthy that the majority of those interested in the Qur'an are women, thanks to the BookTok space, a sub-community where mostly female users gather to discuss books. Other interested young people, according to the newspaper, are finding free versions online.

Zareena Grewal, an associate professor at Yale

who is working on a book about the Qur'an and religious tolerance in American culture, said that the Western interest in Islam was not entirely unprecedented.

After 9/11, the Qur'an became an instant bestseller, though at that time many Americans purchased it to confirm biases they held about Islam being an "inherently violent" religion. "The difference is that after October 7, people are turning to the Qur'an to understand the incredible resilience, faith, moral strength and character they see in Muslim Palestinians," she added.

In Australia, at least 30 women embraced Islam at the Meadow Heights Mosque in Melbourne, after being deeply moved by the Palestinians' strong faith. Jacqueline Retzack who recently converted to Islam said, "I converted due to the ongoing conflict and I wanted to be closer to Islam and Gaza." Christine Crnogonac expressed her profound connection to the concept of one God in Islam and the inspiration it provides for the Palestinian struggle.



## On the Sidelines of the 5th ICLM in Baku: President of the Republic of Azerbaijan Receives OIC Secretary-General

The President of the Republic of Azerbaijan, H.E. Mr. Ilham Aliyev, received, on November 22, 2023, the OIC Secretary General, H.E. Mr. Hissein Brahim Taha, on the sidelines of the 5th session of the Islamic Conference of Labor Ministers, held in Baku, Azerbaijan.

During the meeting, President Aliyev commended the significant role played by the OIC and its institutions in promoting joint Islamic action, and appreciated the Secretary-General's efforts in advancing the interests of the Muslim world.

For his part, the OIC Secretary-General thanked President Aliyev for Azerbaijan's hosting of the 5th ICLM, and congratulated him on the inaugural session of the new specialized institution of the OIC, the "OIC Labor Center", based in Baku, which convened its first session on the same day.

In this context, the Secretary-General thanked the President for Azerbaijan's hosting of the Labor Center's Secretariat and for generously offering to fund the Secretariat's activities during the 2023-2026 financial years.

The 5th session of the Islamic Conference of Labor Ministers commenced on Novem-

ber 23, 2023, in Baku, Azerbaijan, under the theme of "Innovative Solutions and Digitalization of Labor and Employment Services in the OIC Member States".

Addressing the Conference, the OIC Secretary-General, H.E. Mr. Hissein Brahim Taha, noted that the high levels of unemployment, especially among youth, continue to pose one of the most serious challenges to the OIC Member States. He pointed out that the total population of the OIC Member States is expected to increase by nearly 1 billion people in the next 30 years, reaching 2.9 billion by 2050, compared to 2 billion currently. He, therefore, stressed the urgent need for OIC Member States to invest in quality education and put in place policies and institutions that will provide stable and decent jobs for all job seekers.

The Secretary-General underscored the significant role of the ICLM Conference in providing policy support for the OIC Labor Centre, which is entrusted with implementing the OIC resolutions in the fields of labor, employment, and social protection.

The Secretary-General expressed concern over

the catastrophic situation suffered by the Palestinians in Gaza and throughout Palestine. He urged all OIC Member States to implement the resolutions issued by the Joint Arab-Islamic Extraordinary Summit on the Israeli Aggression against the Palestinian People, held in Riyadh, Saudi Arabia, on November 11, 2023. The opening session of the 5th ICLM featured statements by the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, the Chair of the 4th session, and the Republic of Azerbaijan, the Chair of the current 5th session, as well as a video message from the ILO Director-General.

Moreover, six additional OIC Member States signed the Statute of OIC Labor Center during this session, bringing up to sixteen the total number of signatory Member States.

In the closed session of the Conference, the OIC Labor Ministers discussed the current state of the labor market in Member Countries, and proposed a set of policy recommendations to enhance intra-OIC cooperation in the fields of labor, employment, and social protection.



## 5th ICLM: OIC Urges Innovative Solutions to Promote Employment in Member States

The Senior Officials Meeting (SOM) preparatory to the 5th Islamic Conference of Labor Ministers, themed “Innovative Solutions and Digitalization of Labor and Employment Services in the OIC Member States”, was held on November 21, 2023, in Baku, Azerbaijan.

H.E. Dr. Ahmad Kawesa Sengendo, OIC Assistant Secretary-General for Economic Affairs, representing the OIC Secretary-General H.E. Mr. Hissein Brahim Taha, pointed out that the purpose of the Conference is to keep up with current technological advancements and policy directions relevant to labor, employment, and social development in the OIC Member States, given the alarming trend of rising unemployment, especially among youth.

Dr. Sengendo highlighted the emergence of new worker categories in the Platform Economy as a factor of resilience during the COVID-19 pandemic. He emphasized the potential of the Platform Economy to generate employment, particularly for youth and women, through flexible work arrangements and additional income sources.

Dr. Sengendo highlighted the necessity for OIC countries to enhance their education and training systems. This involves focusing on digital literacy, critical thinking, and vocational training aligned with emerging industries,

*H.E. Dr. Ahmad Kawesa Sengendo, OIC Assistant Secretary-General for Economic Affairs stressed the necessity for OIC Member States to extend support to the OIC Labor Center, a new specialized institution that will focus on labor, employment, and social protection issues.*

crucial for future employment opportunities and economic growth. He emphasized that educational institutions should impart critical and continued learning skills to 21st-century learners.

Dr. Sengendo underlined the importance of regular consultations and experience-sharing through the Islamic Conference of Labor Ministers, urging Member States to take practical steps in implementing the OIC cooperation frameworks, especially the OIC Framework on Labor, Employment, and Social Protection and the OIC Labor Market Strategy. He also stressed the necessity for OIC Member States to extend support to the OIC Labor Center, a new specialized institution that will focus on labor, employment, and social protection issues, contributing significantly to the implementation of OIC resolutions and initiatives through relevant activities and projects.

Simultaneously, a Senior Officials Meeting in preparation for the Inaugural Session of the General Assembly of the OIC Labor Center was conducted at the same venue. The Senior Officials reviewed progress in implementing ICLM resolutions, the OIC Labor Market Strategy, and various activities aimed at addressing unemployment, enhancing workforce capacity, and improving social protection.

## In the Final Quarter of 2023: OIC Promotes Efforts to Eliminate Unemployment



The OIC Secretary-General, H.E. Mr. Hissein Brahim Taha, stressed that the inauguration of the OIC Labor Center, a new specialized institution of the OIC, is a crucial event and a significant milestone in the collective effort to enhance socio-economic cooperation among the OIC Member States.

In his speech at the Inaugural General Assembly held in Baku, Azerbaijan, on November 22, 2023, the Secretary-General emphasized that the new institution would effectively complement the ongoing activities of the OIC General Secretariat in the areas of trade, investment, agriculture, food security, tourism, education, science and technology, and health, among others. He commended the leadership and far-sightedness of H.E. Mr. Ilham Aliyev, President of the Republic of Azerbaijan, for proposing the establishment of the Center during the Second Islamic Conference of Labor Ministers, held in Baku, Azerbaijan, on April 25-26, 2013.

The inaugural session also featured an address by H.E. Mr. Sahil Babayev, Minister of Labor and Social Protection of Population of the Republic of Azerbaijan.

During this session, candidates were elected for various key positions within the OIC Labor Center, including the Chairman, Vice-Chairman, and Members of the Executive Board. The meeting also elected Mr. Azar Bayramov

as Director-General of the OIC Labor Center, which will enable the Center to start working towards achieving the goals for which it was established.

The session also approved the Interim Organizational Structure and the Budget for the Secretariat of the Center for the period of 2023-2026. The Republic of Azerbaijan generously contributed USD 1 million as a voluntary donation to the budget of the new Center.

In a related context, and as part of the OIC's interest in labor market issues at the Islamic and international levels, an OIC Delegation

led by Dr. Ahmad Kawesa Sengendo, Assistant Secretary-General for Economic Affairs, participated in the Global Labor Market Conference, held at the King Abdulaziz International Convention Center in Riyadh, Saudi Arabia, on December 13, 2023.

The Conference, organized by the Ministry of Human Resources and Social Development of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, was designed to enhance inter-state cooperation in the field of labor. It also provided a platform to share successful practices and innovative experiences to develop labor markets, as well as to discuss labor laws and policies aimed at facilitating job seekers' integration into the labor market, enhancing workers' professional development, and promoting safe work environments.

Some of the key topics discussed during the Conference included: "Global labor market catalysts"; "Skills and productivity conundrums"; "Labor market makeovers", "Youth employment"; "Work for All"; "AI and labor market"; "The right way to (de) regulate"; and the "Future proofed organization", among others.

The Conference was attended by Labor Ministers from various countries, leaders of relevant international organizations, heads of businesses, academics, experts, and representatives of labor organizations.

*The Republic of Azerbaijan generously contributed USD 1 million as a voluntary donation to the budget of the new Center.*

## Due to Shortage of Staff: Robot Waiters in German Restaurants



### Hanau – Michael Bauer (DPA)

"Here's your food," whispers the robot at the airfield restaurant in Gelnhausen, some 45 kilometers east of Frankfurt. "Please take the food from tray one".

The guest complies, reaching for the plate full of steaming meat, gravy and mashed potatoes.

"Press the screen to confirm," says a voice from the serving trolley. The robot concludes by wishing the patron a hearty appetite. Then the monitor's face - with big googly eyes and a red kissy mouth - smiles. "I'm a hard-working waiter. I'm happy to serve you," says the robot.

The rolling waiter clearly has self-confidence and the right attitude for this job. With this table served, robot "Peanut" rolls back to its regular spot, playing a classical melody. It waits at the counter to see if restaurant owner Veronika Döll has any new orders for it, such as delivering coffee cups or collecting used utensils and plates from another table.

"Robi is a valuable help when I'm alone at the counter or in service," praises Döll. "The general shortage of staff in the catering industry is also a big issue for us."

At the end of last October, Döll was given her robotic helper free of charge for a total

of four weeks. The project is organized by the Spessart Tourism marketing agency in southwestern Germany with the support of the Main-Kinzig district and the Hanau Chamber of Industry and Commerce.

"We're in touch a lot with the hotel and catering industry in the region, where the shortage of skilled workers is a major issue," says Bernhard Mosbacher, managing director of Spessart Tourism. That's why they came up with the idea of trialing the use of service robots,

*The rolling waiter clearly has self-confidence and the right attitude for this job. With this table served, robot "Peanut" rolls back to its regular spot, playing a classical melody.*

to see whether that would help catering businesses, which would ultimately also strengthen tourism.

The project is scheduled to run for a total of two years. The restaurant on the edge of the airfield is the second station, and ideally suited because it is at ground level, has no steps and has a wooden floor allowing Peanut to roll easily. The project is being scientifically supported by Heilbronn University.

Mosbacher says that there is great interest in the project. Seven companies have already signed up. "After the deployment in Gelnhausen, it will continue seamlessly. We also want to test the robots in different areas," he says. Peanut is being provided by the company BZB Bürozentrum in Gelnhausen. "We deliberately tried to make the robot cute," says Managing Director Marc Ihl. This should help it to be appealing to guests and reduce any skepticism. In addition to Peanut, the program also includes Schorsch and another, as yet unnamed robot.

According to Ihl, Schorsch, Peanut and their nameless companion cost €12,000 to €14,000 (\$13,150 to \$15,300) if you want to buy them. "But we also offer them for rent at rates of between €450 and €520 per month," says the managing director.

## Secretary-General Calls on Member States to Increase Investments in Key Economic Sectors



The President of the Republic of Türkiye, H.E. Mr. Recep Tayyip Erdogan, inaugurated, on December 4, 2023, the 39th session of the OIC Standing Committee for Economic and Commercial Cooperation (COMCEC), held in Istanbul, Türkiye. The ceremony was attended by the OIC Secretary-General, H.E. Mr. Hissein Brahim Taha, and relevant ministers from Member States.

In his opening speech, President Erdogan highlighted the grave situation in Gaza amid the Israeli aggression, as well as the rising trend of Islamophobia. He stressed the need for all OIC Member States to have a unified stand in the face of the current challenges confronting the Muslim Ummah. He also underscored the importance of implementing the Trade Preferential System among OIC Member States, supporting the OIC Arbitration Center, as well as developing small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) and halal industries towards promoting sustainable socio-economic growth in OIC Member States.

Speaking at the opening ceremony of the 39th session of COMCEC, H.E. Mr. Hissein Brahim Taha, OIC Secretary-General, commended the continued support provided by President Recep Tayyip Erdogan, Chairman of COMCEC, for the implementation of various economic programs and projects of the OIC. Referring to the tragic massacres taking place

in Gaza and throughout Palestine, the Secretary-General called on the international community to intervene urgently in order to put an end to the Israeli criminal aggression and murder of Palestinians.

The Secretary-General highlighted the activities of the OIC and its institutions in the economic field during the past year, and underlined the need for further enhancing intra-OIC

*President of the Republic of Türkiye, H.E. Mr. Recep Tayyip Erdogan underscored the importance of implementing the Trade Preferential System among OIC Member States, supporting the OIC Arbitration Center, as well as developing small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs).*

cooperation in vital sectors of the economy, especially the food and agriculture sector so as to build more resilient food systems, as well as for sharing knowledge and best practices in order to help develop production capacities in OIC Member States. He also called for increasing cooperation and synergizing efforts to address the development challenges facing OIC Member States.

The opening ceremony was also addressed by Ministers in charge of Trade from Qatar, Senegal and Kazakhstan in their capacities as representatives of the Arab, African, and Asian Groups, as well as by H.E. Dr. Muhammad Al Jasser, President of the Islamic Development Bank (IsDB) Group.

The 39th session of COMCEC, themed "Improving E-Commerce Capacities of the OIC Member Countries", was attended by Ministers in charge of Trade and Economy of the OIC Member States, as well as representatives from OIC institutions and international organizations. The session reviewed the state of implementation of COMCEC projects in the areas of trade, investment, agriculture, tourism, financial development, private sector, and poverty alleviation.

COMCEC is an OIC Standing Committee for Economic and Commercial Cooperation. It meets annually to review OIC activities in the areas of economic and trade development.

## Doha Ministerial Conference: A Strategic Plan to Ensure Food Security in OIC Countries

The OIC Secretary-General, H.E. Mr. Hissein Brahim Taha, stressed that work is underway to develop a strategic plan to ensure food security in the OIC Member States, through building synergies among the existing national strategies as well as mobilizing OIC-wide resources and capacities for sustainable agricultural and rural development and enhanced food security.

This was part of the Secretary-General's speech, delivered on October 2, 2023, at the opening session of the 9th OIC Ministerial Conference on Food Security and Agricultural Development, hosted by the State of Qatar in the capital, Doha, under the theme: "Towards Achieving the 2030 Sustainable Development Goals in the OIC Member States".

The meeting was chaired by H.E. Dr. Abdullah bin Abdulaziz bin Turki Al Subaie, Minister of Municipality of the State of Qatar, and was attended by Ministers in charge of Agriculture and Food Security from the OIC Member States.

The Secretary-General pointed out that 23 OIC Member States are still among the 44 low-income countries in the world that suffer from food deficits. Most of these countries are located in sub-Saharan Africa and in the arid regions of West Asia and Northeast Africa. He stressed that the Sustainable Development Goals, including poverty and hunger elimination, cannot be achieved without serious and direct attention given to the development of agricultural and food systems, especially in the least developed OIC countries.

The Secretary-General noted that the OIC Member States have many opportunities for



mutual cooperation in this vital sector. Collectively, they possess sufficient arable land, resources, and technologies to support themselves. He called for establishing partnership arrangements between countries that have arable lands and natural agricultural resources and those that possess funds and technologies, in order to address the chronic lack of investment in agriculture and food security, as well as to build national capacities in this vital sector.

Doha also hosted the preparatory meetings for the 9th OIC Ministerial Conference on Food Security and Agricultural Development. Addressing the preparatory Senior Officials

Meeting, the OIC Assistant Secretary-General for Economic Affairs, Dr. Ahmad Kawesa Sengendo, noted that the meeting provided the opportunity to share best practices in the areas of agriculture and rural development, and to discuss optimal ways to effectively implement the OIC programs and initiatives, and ensure agricultural and rural development policy coherence.

Dr. Sengendo pointed out that the agricultural area in the OIC countries is estimated at about 28.7 percent of the total arable land in the world, while 48.3 percent of the total population of Member States live in rural areas and depend on agriculture for their livelihood.

## Secretary-General Urges OIC Countries to be in the Forefront of Halal Sector Development

In his speech at the opening session of the OIC Halal Expo 2023 and 9th World Halal Summit in Istanbul, Turkiye, held on November 25, 2023, the OIC Secretary-General, H.E. Mr. Hissein Brahim Taha, pointed out that in recent years, the global halal market has witnessed significant growth and that demand for halal-certified products is on the rise, reaching US\$ 4.7 trillion market value in 2020.

The Secretary-General's speech was read out on his behalf by Dr. Ahmad Kawesa Sengendo, Assistant Secretary-General for Economic

Affairs.

The Secretary-General stressed that the Halal industry has the potential to promote the growth of national economies and generate employment opportunities, and that Member States need to join and coordinate their efforts to be at the forefront of the Halal industry development.

The OIC Halal Expo 2023 is an international trade fair showcasing products and services that comply with the Halal regulations of Islamic law. As an annual platform for Halal

industry experts, traders, and entrepreneurs from both OIC and non-OIC countries, the Halal Expo offers a comprehensive overview of the variety of Halal-certified goods and products, including food products, cosmetics, fashion, financial services, and educational institutions. A particular highlight of the OIC Halal Expo 2023 and the 9th edition of the World Halal Summit was a conference during which industry experts discussed the latest trends and exchanged knowledge on various aspects of the Halal industry.

## Secretary-General: OIC Countries Suffer Most from Negative Climate Impacts

The OIC Secretary-General, H.E. Mr. Hissein Brahim Taha, delivered a statement at the opening session of the 9th Conference of Environment Ministers in the Islamic World, held on October 19, 2023, in Jeddah, Saudi Arabia, under the slogan "Towards Green Transformation in the Islamic World". In his statement, the OIC Secretary-General decried the fact that Islamic countries suffer most from the negative impacts of climate change, which he considered "unacceptable". The Secretary-General underlined the need for the voice of the Muslim world to be heard



at international and global environmental forums. He expressed satisfaction with the ever-growing engagement of Islamic countries in global efforts to address environmental threats and challenges. COP 27 (2022) in Egypt and COP 28 (2023) in the United Arab Emirates bear clear testimony to the OIC Member States' commitment to climate change action. The Conference also featured the "Saudi Arabia Award for Environmental Management" ceremony. It concluded with the adoption of the Declaration and the Resolutions.

## Secretary-General Calls for Closer Cooperation among OIC Universities

The OIC Secretary-General, H.E. Mr. Hissein Brahim Taha, called for closer collaboration among OIC universities so that they complement each other's strengths. He made this call in a statement delivered on his behalf by H.E. Amb. Askar Mussinov, Assistant Secretary-General for Science and Technology, at the 37th Meeting of the Governing Council of the Islamic University in Uganda (IUIU), held on December 7, 2023, in Kampala, Uganda. The Secretary-General commended the IUIU Council and Administration for the positive strides made over the past two years, which placed the University on the right path towards full recovery from the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic. He urged the relevant stakeholders to develop innovative approaches to address financial challenges and promote sustained growth and development.



During the meeting, Prof. Muhammed Al-Tabtabaea, from Kuwait, was elected as the new Chairman of the Governing Council. Distinguished attendees included the Second Deputy Prime Minister of the Republic of Uganda, Rt. Honorable Retired General Moses Ali; the Executive Director of the Muslim Islamic Solidarity Fund H.E. Mr. Mohammed

Balkhail; and the Assistant Secretary-General of the World Muslim League H.E. Dr. Abdul Rahman Al-Zaid.

The agenda included an examination of the reports of the Rector, the External Auditors, and the Council Committees. The meeting concluded with the adoption of resolutions aimed at upgrading the administrative and academic performance of the University. IUIU also hosted its 32nd Graduation Ceremony, on December 9, 2023, at its main campus in Mbale, Eastern Uganda. A total of 2573 graduates from diverse disciplines were granted their awards. The ceremony witnessed the laying of the foundation stone to mark the official launch of the construction of the Faculty of Engineering, as part of Phase 2 of the IsDB project aimed at enhancing the learning environment at IUIU.

## IUIU Honors two Distinguished Personalities

The Islamic University in Uganda (IUIU) celebrated its 32nd Graduation Ceremony at its main campus in Mbale, Eastern Uganda. The event was attended by prominent personalities, including H.E. Major Jessica Alupo, Vice-President of the Republic of Uganda; H.E. Prof. Mohammed Al-Tabtabaea, Chairman of the Islamic University in Uganda Governing Council; Rt. Honorable Retired General Moses Ali, Second Deputy Prime Minister; and Rt. Honorable Mr. Lukia Nakadama, Third Deputy Prime Minister. The OIC General Secretariat was represented by Mr. Abdunur M. Sekindi, Director-General of the Science and Technology Department. In his statement, read out by the Vice-President, H.E. Uganda's President Yoweri Kaguta Museveni commended the OIC for its continued support for higher education in Uganda and the wider region of Africa.



# OIC Congratulates Saudi Arabia on Winning Bid to Host FIFA World Cup 2034 and Expo 2030

The General Secretariat of the Organization of Islamic Cooperation congratulated the Government of the Custodian of the Two Holy Mosques King Salman bin Abdulaziz Al Saud, and Crown Prince and Prime Minister, HRH Prince Mohammad bin Salman bin Abdulaziz Al Saud, and the people of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, on the occasion of Saudi Arabia's winning the bid to host the 2034 FIFA World Cup. Earlier, the President of FIFA had announced that the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia would be granted the honor of hosting the 2034 World Cup.

The OIC Secretary-General, H.E. Mr. Hissein Brahim Taha, expressed the OIC's full confidence in Saudi Arabia's ability to organize a successful, exceptional, and unprecedented edition of the World Cup, as it possesses the needed potential, experience, and qualifications, in addition to its human, logistical and infrastructure capabilities. He expressed his wishes to Saudi Arabia for full success in hosting this edition of the World Cup.

The Secretary-General commended the OIC Member States' support for Saudi Arabia's bid to host the 2034 World Cup, a grandiose event that carries a message of unity and inclusion. This reflects a high sense of inter-Islamic solidarity and joint action in the interest of the world's youth.

The OIC General Secretariat had expressed its full support for Saudi Arabia's bid to host the 2034 World Cup, following the announcement made by the Saudi Football Federation on October 4, 2024.

The OIC Secretary-General commended the statement made by HRH Prince Mohammed bin Salman bin Abdulaziz Al Saud, Crown Prince and Prime Minister of Saudi Arabia, Chair of the Islamic Summit and host country



of the OIC. He emphasized that Saudi Arabia possesses all the needed human, logistical, and infrastructure capabilities to host a unique and unprecedented edition of the World Cup.

The Secretary-General stressed that Saudi Arabia, the country of love, peace, and harmony, will leverage football, the world's most popular game, to spread messages of love and peace to all peoples worldwide, in their diverse cultures and ethnicities. He added that Saudi Arabia's successful hosting of numerous international and sports events reflects the goals outlined in its Vision 2030.

On the other hand, and on the occasion of Riyadh's successful bid to host the 2030 Expo, the OIC Secretary-General, H.E. Mr. Hissein Brahim Taha, congratulated the leadership, government, and people of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia on this deserved and outstanding global achievement. This achievement, he added, reflects the high standing and great confidence enjoyed by the Kingdom of Saudi

Arabia within the international community, and is a recognition of Riyadh's outstanding qualifications making it a fitting host for this grandiose event.

The Secretary-General stressed that this achievement is the fruit of the sincere efforts and tireless endeavors of the wise leadership of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, represented by the Custodian of the Two Holy Mosques King Salman bin Abdulaziz Al Saud and HRH Prince Mohammed Bin Salman, Crown Prince and Prime Minister.

The Secretary-General expressed his sincere wishes to the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia for further progress and prosperity, noting that Riyadh was chosen to host the 2030 Expo thanks to its advanced infrastructure as well as its political, economic, and security stability and cultural diversity. This victory, he added, is not an achievement for the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia alone, but also for all States of the Muslim world and the OIC, Saudi Arabia being the host country of the OIC.

## OIC Considers Ways to Operationalize the Establishment of the “Islamic Court of Justice” in Kuwait



The OIC Secretary-General, H.E. Mr. Hissein Brahim Taha, received, on November 2, 2023, at the headquarters of the General Secretariat in Jeddah, H.E. Mr. Muhammad Saoud Al-Mutairi, Consul-General of the State of Kuwait in Jeddah and Permanent Representative of the State of Kuwait to the OIC. The Kuwait delegation also included Minister

Plenipotentiary, Mr. Muhammad Rashid Al-Nuaimi, from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, First Secretary, Mr. Turki Melfi Al-Daihani, and Diplomatic Attaché, Mr. Khaled Hamad Al-Mikhil.

The OIC General Secretariat held, on November 1-2, 2023 at the headquarters of the General Secretariat in Jeddah, a preparatory

meeting with the Kuwait delegation for the organization of a workshop to activate the OIC International Islamic Court of Justice (IICJ).

The OIC side was chaired by Mr. Youssef Al-Dobeay, Assistant Secretary-General for Political Affairs. The meeting was attended by Dr. Mahamat A. Koulbou, Director-General of the Cabinet of the Secretary-General, and Amb. Hassan Ali, Director of the Legal Affairs Department. The Kuwait delegation was led by H.E. Consul-General Muhammad Saud Al-Mutairi. Specialists from both sides were also in attendance.

The meeting was held as part of following up on the implementation of Resolution No. 9/49-LO, issued by the 49th CFM session held in March 2023 in Nouakchott, Mauritania. It discussed the best ways and means to accelerate the establishment and operationalization of the Islamic Court of Justice, and the organization of a workshop to that effect.

## Secretary-General Commends the Crucial Role of the ICCIA

The 39th General Assembly Meeting of the Islamic Chamber of Commerce, Industry, and Agriculture (ICCIA) was held in Doha, State of Qatar, on December 16, 2023.

In his address to the meeting, delivered on his behalf by Mr. Naghi Jabbarov, Director-General of the Department of Economic Affairs, the OIC Secretary-General, H.E. Hissein Brahim Taha, highlighted the ICCIA's prominent role in promoting the recovery of Member States' economies. This role involves promoting intra-OIC trade, investment, agriculture, rural development, food security, tourism, Islamic financial services, infrastructure development, as well as women and youth employment.

The Secretary-General called on the ICCIA's General Assembly to take appropriate actions for the implementation of the resolutions issued by the 9th Ministerial Conference on Food Security and Agricultural Development, the 5th Islamic Conference of Labor Ministers, as well as the 39th session of COMCEC, which were held recently.



The meeting approved the recommendation of the 35th ICCIA Board of Directors to change the name of ICCIA to the Islamic Chamber of Commerce and Development (ICCD). It also approved the new Logo of the Chamber.

The meeting reviewed the report on the im-

plementation of the ICCIA programs and projects for 2023 as well as its financial report for the same year. It also adopted the recommendations of the ICCIA Board of Directors on ICCIA Activities and Programs for 2024, and approved the ICCIA Budget for the same year.

## Secretary-General Warns against the Serious Consequences of Racial Discrimination

The OIC Assistant Secretary-General for Political Affairs, Amb. Yousef Al-Dubaey, inaugurated the 22nd session of the OIC Independent Permanent Human Rights Commission (IPHRC), held on November 26, 2023, in Jeddah, Saudi Arabia. He delivered a speech on behalf of the OIC Secretary-General, H.E. Mr. Hissein Brahim Taha, on the occasion of the thematic discussion on "Eliminating racial discrimination from an Islamic and human rights perspective," which addressed ways and means to counter the growing scourge of discrimination, including racial discrimination and its various contemporary manifestations. The Secretary-General expressed his sincere appreciation and gratitude to the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, the OIC host country, for the generous and continuous support for the OIC, for the special attention it gives to all the OIC activities, and for hosting the headquarters of the IPHRC in Jeddah, under the generous

patronage of the Custodian of the Two Holy Mosques, King Salman bin Abdulaziz Al Saud, and HRH Prince Mohammed bin Salman, Crown Prince and Prime Minister.

The Secretary-General commended the tangible efforts exerted by the IPHRC, and expressed his thanks to the Executive Director of the IPHRC Secretariat, Dr. Noura Al-Rashoud, who demonstrated her professional commitment by providing valuable technical support to the OIC General Secretariat on a number of human rights issues. He also hailed the services provided by the IPHRC and its Commission Members whose tenure would end after the session.

The Secretary-General stressed that the OIC and the international human rights community recognize the valuable contribution of the IPHRC to the promotion and protection of human rights, in full independence, impartiality, and objectivity. The IPHRC, he added, has un-

dertaken great work to provide consistent recommendations to Member States on various issues, with the aim of ensuring compatibility of the universal human rights and fundamental freedoms with Islamic values.

The Secretary-General pointed out that racial discrimination has serious consequences for the affected individuals and communities, as it perpetuates social inequality, limits opportunities for social advancement and employment, undermines mental and physical well-being, and may lead to the outbreak of social tensions and conflicts and to a weak sense of belonging. He stressed that the OIC and its Member States will remain at the forefront of efforts to combat racism, recalling that the OIC has played an active role in setting standards that have helped to counter this scourge.

## Secretary-General Receives IPHRC Executive Director



The OIC Secretary-General, H.E. Mr. Hissein Brahim Taha, received, on November 14, 2023, the Executive Director of the Independent Permanent Human Rights Commission

(IPHRC), Dr. Noura Al-Rashoud.

The IPHRC Executive Director reviewed the Commission's activities and work progress, and emphasized the importance of close col-

laboration with the OIC General Secretariat to effectively serve the OIC's objectives and the aspirations of Member States. She touched on preparations to convene the 22nd ordinary session of the Commission in Jeddah, Saudi Arabia, on November 26-30, 2023, under the theme of "Elimination of Racial Discrimination from the Islamic and Human Rights Perspectives." She extended an invitation to the Secretary-General to attend the opening ceremony of this event.

For his part, the Secretary-General welcomed the IPHRC Executive Director, and expressed his appreciation for her significant efforts to monitor and follow up on human rights issues. He also indicated that the relevant departments of the General Secretariat stand ready to strengthen coordination and cooperation with the Commission in a manner that would preserve its independence and enhance its effectiveness.

## OIC Director of Cabinet Visits the IPHRC

The Director-General of Cabinet and Senior Advisor to the OIC Secretary-General, Dr. Mahamat Adoum Koulbou paid a visit, on October 8, 2023, to the headquarters of the OIC Independent Permanent Human Rights Com-

mission (IPHRC).

Dr. Koulbou met with Dr. Noura Al-Rashoud, IPHRC Executive Director. Both sides emphasized the continued coordination between the OIC and the IPHRC in order to achieve com-

mon goals in supporting human rights issues in the Islamic world and around the globe, in accordance with the OIC Charter and the IPHRC Statute.

## OIC Commends the Creative Initiatives of the Islamic Solidarity Sports Federation

The OIC General Secretariat, represented by Assistant Secretary-General for Humanitarian, Cultural and Social Affairs, Amb. Tarig Ali Bakheet, member of the Islamic Solidarity Sports Federation (ISSF) Executive Committee, participated in the 12th session of the ISSF Executive Committee and General Assembly meeting, held in Riyadh, Saudi Arabia, on November 27, 2023.

The session was chaired by HRH Prince Abdulaziz Bin Turki Al-Faisal Bin Abdulaziz, President of the ISSF and Minister of Sport in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, and Chair of the 5th Islamic Conference of Youth and Sport Ministers.

Addressing the General Assembly, Amb. Bakheet commended the wise leadership of

HR Prince Abdulaziz Bin Turki Al-Faisal Bin Abdulaziz, which enabled the ISSF to record major successes and achievements in the development of sports in the Muslim world. He underlined the General Secretariat's commitment to enhancing coordination with the ISSF through the Department of Youth and Sport, with the aim of achieving the goals set out in the OIC Plan of Action for the Development of Sports and the OIC Youth Strategy; thereby serving youth issues in the Muslim world, particularly in the area of sports.

Amb. Bakheet commended the great efforts deployed by Saudi Arabia for the development of youth and sports, in line with the generous attention attached to youth well-being and sports activities in the Kingdom and

the Muslim world by the Custodian of the Two Holy Mosques King Salman in Abdulaziz Al Saud and Crown Prince, Prime Minister HRH Prince Mohamed Bin Salman. He also hailed the valuable efforts of the Ministry of Sports to implement the resolutions of the 5th session of the Islamic Conference of Youth and Sports Ministers, held in September 2022, as well as its support for the activities of the General Secretariat.

Amb. Bakheet highlighted, in his statement, the dire humanitarian situation suffered by the Palestinian people, particularly the killing of innocent children, women, and young people by the Israeli occupation forces, in addition to the repression, violence, and destruction of health, cultural, and sports facilities.

## Labor Market Report 2023: Impacts of Increasing Digitalization and Automation

The Statistical, Economic and Social Research and Training Center for Islamic Countries (SESRIC) launched the OIC Labor Market Report 2023 during the 5th Islamic Conference of Labor Ministers, held in Baku, Azerbaijan on November 21-23, 2023.

The Report analyses the state of the labor market and discusses important aspects of labor market policy and developments in OIC countries. It also provides a brief assessment of progress made toward the implementation of the OIC Labor Market Strategy 2025, based on key performance indicators and survey responses.

The Report commences by providing valuable insights into the dynamics of labor force participation and employment in OIC countries. It highlights the steady increase in the share of OIC countries in the global labor force, despite participation rates remaining stagnant within the OIC region. In light of these changes, the Report emphasizes the crucial importance of achieving gender parity and engaging youth who face limited opportunities in labor markets. This situation necessitates focused efforts to unleash the potential of this significant segment of the population. The report also underscores the urgent need to promote social protection and income equity. While progress has been made in reducing poverty rates, there is still a demand for enhanced social safety nets to ensure the well-being of all workers.

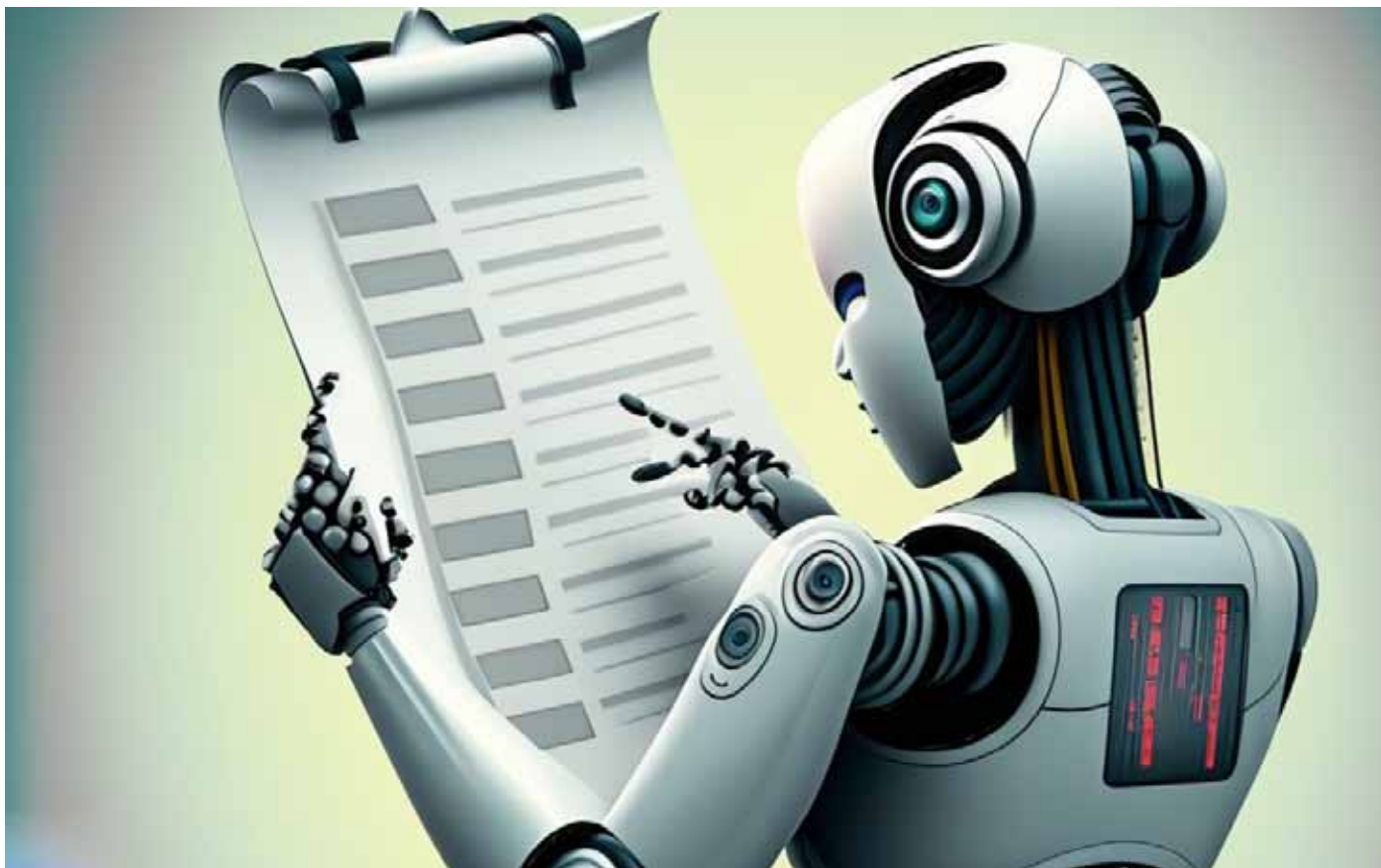


The central theme of the Report revolves around the examination of digitalization and automation and their implications for OIC countries. As industries undergo digitization, jobs are being re-defined, tasks are being re-structured, and skills are evolving. Despite the promises of increased productivity, groundbreaking innovation, and a changing job market in the digital age, there are risks, particularly for individuals whose skills and roles are most susceptible to automation.

The core message of the Report centers on

the urgent need to equip individuals with the skills and capabilities needed for the future of work. The challenge ahead involves not only the preservation of jobs but also the full utilization of emerging technologies to drive economic growth, create new avenues for prosperity, and pave the way toward inclusive development. Success hinges on proactive measures to address the digital divide, enhance education and training, foster innovation, and promote a collaborative and partnership-driven ecosystem.

## ICESCO Holds International Conference on Translation and Artificial Intelligence



The Islamic World Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (ICESCO) held, on October 4, 2023, a conference themed "Translation and Artificial Intelligence Technology: Translation from and into Arabic as an example", in cooperation with the Association of Court Certified Translators of Morocco (ATAJ). The Conference, attended by international experts, students and researchers in the field of translation, was designed to discuss ways and means for fostering the aesthetic and creative dimensions of Arabic translations in digital and non-digital environments, promoting capacity-building for young translators, and training professionals on machine translation. It also offered an opportunity to share experiences in creative translation in order to improve translation quality.

The opening session started with a recitation of verses from the Holy Qur'an, followed by opening remarks by Dr. Salim M. AlMalik, ICESCO Director-General, delivered on his behalf by Dr. Abdelillah Benarafa, ICESCO Deputy Director-General.

Dr. AlMalik stressed that the Conference seeks to highlight the challenges facing translation from and into Arabic, in view of the emergence of AI tools, and amid ethical concerns about AI's distortions of meaning. He expounded the role of translation in building bridges of communication and interaction among diverse nations and cultures, and reiterated the ever-growing need for translation in today's world. He highlighted ICESCO's efforts in translating hundreds of books and articles in various disciplines of concern to the Islamic world, in order to convey its civilizational message worldwide.

Following the opening session, the first session kicked off with a paper by Mr. Diego Cresceri, CEO of "Creative Words", on "Machine Translation and AI: Reality and Challenges". Mr. Cresceri stressed the need for translators to master machine translation tools and understand their limitations.

Dr. Mohamed Ougamadan, Chief of the Arabic Translation Section in Geneva, noted that AI helps with quality checking and consistency

of translations, and comes in handy for languages with low resources and references.

Mr. Smail Ajbaili, Head of ICESCO Translation Department, reviewed the history and advantages of machine translation from and into Arabic, and attributed its drawbacks to the wide variety of Arabic vocabulary.

Mr. Abdel-Fattah Lahjomri, Director of the Rabat-based Arabization Coordination Bureau, affiliated with the Arab League Educational, Cultural and Scientific Organization (ALECSO), delivered a paper entitled "Arabic and the much-needed Human Intelligence".

Mr. Muwafaq Faeq Tawfiq, the first Head of the Translation Section at Al Jazeera, noted that translation is more than transferring words in a text from one language to another. Rather, the intended meaning and the context of the text should be taken into account, in addition to the cultural specificity of each language.

## ICESCO Participates in Sharjah and Casablanca Book Fairs



The Islamic World Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization (ICESCO) participated in the 42nd edition of the International Book Fair organized by the Sharjah Book Authority, and inaugurated by H.H. Sheikh Dr. Sultan bin Muhammad Al Qasimi, Member of the Supreme Council, Ruler of Sharjah, in the presence of several Emirati and international figures.

This year's exhibition, held under the theme "We Speak Books", ran from 1 to 12 November 2023 at the Expo Centre Sharjah, with the participation of over 2000 publishing houses from 109 countries, showcasing over 1.5 million titles, including 800,000 in Arabic and 700 in other languages.

The ICESCO Pavilion at the Book Fair offered a diverse cultural and artistic program, underscoring the Organization's profound interest in books, publishing, and culture in the Islamic world in general.

Prominent experts, intellectuals, writers, and poets from Member States participated in discussion panels held at the Pavilion. They delivered lectures on a wide range of current cultural and intellectual issues, and offered readings from a selection of modern publications. The event also featured competitions and awards to honor literary works in the Islamic civilization, as well as heritage sites and properties across the Islamic world.

The ICESCO Pavilion also featured display screens broadcasting videos produced by the Organization, highlighting its projects and initiatives, including the "Museum and Exhibition of the Prophet's Seerah and Islamic Civilization" hosted in its headquarters.

ICESCO also participated with a pavilion in the first edition of the International Children and Youth Book Fair, organized in Casablanca by the Moroccan Ministry of Youth, Culture, and Communication, under the high patronage of His Majesty King Mohammed VI. The book fair was inaugurated on November 15th and ran until November 22nd, 2023.

Dr. Salim M. AlMalik, ICESCO Director-General, received at the Organization pavilion, Mr. Mohamed Mehdi Bensaïd, Moroccan Minister of Youth, Culture, along with high-ranking figures attending the Fair's inauguration. He offered an overview of the ICESCO pavilion, which included publications in both print and digital formats, and the main activities scheduled throughout the Book Fair days. These activities were primarily designed for children and youth, as part of ICESCO's Year of Youth Program.

Dr. AlMalik also participated in the opening of the "Marvel" creators' pavilion at the Book Fair, which hosted seven Marvel graphic artists with significant contributions to the world of

comic books.

ICESCO's pavilion hosted a diverse cultural, artistic, and entertainment program, encompassing numerous activities, discussion sessions and dialogues tailored for children and youth, with the participation of prominent thinkers, intellectuals, writers, and poets. Of particular note is an open dialogue session held with Dr. AlMalik to discuss crucial issues of concern to youth in the Islamic world. This session was an opportunity to present ICESCO's programs and projects designed to nurture youth's skills for future professions, to promote a culture of strategic foresight, and to provide a platform for youth to express their views and suggestions.

Heads of sectors, directors of departments and centers, and experts from ICESCO took part in the pavilion's daily activities. They offered overviews of the Organization's efforts in the fields of education, science, and culture, especially those designed for children and youth. Additionally, seminars were held on topics such as the Arabic language, heritage preservation and valorization, literary and artistic production for children and youth, and digital culture. The pavilion also featured competitions and creative drawing workshops.

## International Law and the Gaza Black Hole

A "Black Hole" in astronomy is a region of spacetime where gravity is so strong that nothing, not even light, can escape. It swallows leftovers and remnants of vanishing massive stars.

This time, the hole is the genocide and war crimes taking place in Gaza, and the leftovers are the Universal Declaration of Human Rights as well as the international law and international humanitarian law, both of which draw their very essence from the Declaration itself.

One of the strange paradoxes of our world, a world where paradoxes have now become the rule, is the celebration of the 75th anniversary of the Declaration's proclamation on December 10, 1948, which is the same number of years that have passed since the creation of Israel that is, paradoxically enough, celebrating this year the 75th anniversary of its founding in May 1948.

It is, in fact, in this coincidence that lies the supreme paradox, with Israel being the entity that most violates, and pays absolutely no heed to, the most basic provisions of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, international humanitarian law, international law, and other international norms and treaties, all swallowed by Gaza's black hole.

The Gaza black hole has proved, beyond any doubt, that the pre-WWII world still exists, and that the brutal nature of international relations based on the logic of force and hegemony is the essence of the prevailing world order. Today, the wide array of international organizations, the arsenal of legal and human rights instruments, and the endless list of international treaties and conventions, can only stand helpless in the face of more than 32000 tons of high-explosive bombs with which Gaza has been turned into rubble during more than three months of relentless bombardment. Gaza has indeed proved that the law of force and the logic of interests have the upper hand over international law instruments and institutions.

Gaza's black hole has debunked Western modernity and Western countries that have long infused our world, the post-WWII world, with theoretical concepts and slogans of human rights, equality, democracy and other "grand" principles. It has laid bare the sloganeering of Western countries, which now, for the first time, "stand naked", so that we - in our Islamic world - can see them as they truly are, not as they want us to see them. We are now certain that international relations are governed only by interest and ideology, even if these latter collide blatantly with the most basic human and international values, as is the case with Gaza today.

Gaza's black hole has swallowed 75 years of efforts to 'beautify' the image of Israel, the occupying power, and to legitimize its existence in reality and in the Arab, Islamic and global consciousness in general. The solid core underlying this project has glaringly and blatantly manifested itself through the stream of radical statements made by the Israeli extremist government's politicians, media figures and thinkers. This solid core is founded on a religious biblical principle that is totally inconsistent with today's realities and the current course of events. Still worse, it contradicts the general international "taste" which, at least apparently, does not accept bragging about committing genocides, razing cities to the ground, calling for dropping a nuclear bomb on Gaza, and dedicating the bombing of residential squares in Gaza and their inhabitants to Israeli children on the occasion of their birthdays. One of the soldiers even regretted that he did not find newborn babies in Gaza to kill them, and killed only a twelve-year-old girl.

This is not to mention the many references to biblical texts and their application to today's war on Gaza, including explicit calls for killing and extermination, with no heed paid to any principles, norms or laws.

Gaza's black hole has proven that the structural weakness afflicting the Security Council and other UN bodies, which has long been highlighted by advocates of UN system reform, has caused the UN system to move from the stage of powerlessness to maintain global peace to that of fueling the state of war and imposing the logic of "right of force" instead of the logic of "force of right". It has thus become a danger in itself. The (new) free world must, therefore, be quick to impose its logic in reforming this system before it collapses, just as the League of Nations and its agencies had one day collapsed.

Palestine is the first real test for international treaties and for the so-called "international law", born the same year in which the Palestinian tragedy started. Throughout its history, Palestine has indeed constituted a challenging test for all the mechanisms of international humanitarian law; a test to gauge the degree of the seriousness of nations in maintaining global peace. Over the past 75 years, Palestine has been telling us that the world is not going well, and that the international system is not operating properly.

Demanding comprehensive reforms within the legal framework to address systematic biases in the international arena is now more necessary than ever, especially for the countries of the South against which these biases are mostly practiced. Likewise, deciding on the structure of the unipolar global system has now become an existential requirement dictated by the national security of each of our countries.



**Tarek Ladjal**

*Professional Officer at  
the Cabinet of Secretary-  
General*

*Demanding comprehensive reforms within the legal framework to address systematic biases in the international arena is now more necessary than ever, especially for the countries of the South against which these biases are mostly practiced.*

# Earth is Now Well Outside of the Safe Operating Space for Humanity



## Los Angeles - Helen Smith (DPA)

Amid a backdrop of extreme weather events and devastating wildfires, US and international officials have issued dire warnings about record-setting temperatures and the worsening effects of climate change.

The National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration announced that last August was the Planet's warmest month on record, and the Northern Hemisphere experienced its hottest meteorological summer.

"Global marine heat waves and a growing El Niño are driving additional warming this year, but as long as emissions continue driving a steady march of background warming, we expect further records to be broken in the years to come," read a statement from NOAA Chief Scientist Sarah Kapnick.

The warning comes on the heels of a study published in the journal "Science Advances", which found that the Planet has transgressed

*The report confirmed what millions of people experienced in recent months, including record-shattering heat waves that touched nearly every corner of the planet.*

6 out of 9 boundaries for processes deemed critical for maintaining the stability and resilience of the Earth system as a whole.

The boundaries include biosphere integrity, freshwater changes and climate change. Two boundaries – air pollution and ocean acidification – are close to being breached, while only one, atmospheric ozone, has slightly recovered. "Earth is now well outside of the safe operating space for humanity," the study said. According to NOAA researchers, global surface temperatures last August were 2.25 degrees above the 20th-century average, surpassing the previous record (15.6) from August 2016 by more than half a degree.

"That to me is a really huge jump from one record to the next," said Ellen Bartow-Gillies, a physical scientist with NOAA's National Centers for Environmental Information. She noted that graphs of temperature records dating to the 1850s show a steady climb – accelerating during the industrial era – but that August 2023 was "on a point of its own, essentially." The report confirmed what millions of people experienced in recent months, including record-shattering heat waves that touched nearly every corner of the planet. Asia, Africa, North America and South America had their warmest August on record, as did the Arctic. It wasn't just the land that boiled: August set a record for the highest monthly sea surface temperature anomaly – 1.85 degrees above average.

"We've seen unprecedented warmth in the global ocean, and that's definitely alarming because it has ramifications beyond just the scope of the ocean," Bartow-Gillies said. "Not only are you disturbing marine habitats, but you're affecting storm creation."

## Somalia

**Area:** 637,657 km<sup>2</sup>

**Official languages:** Somali and Arabic

**Currency:** Somali shilling



Somalia, officially the Federal Republic of Somalia (previously the Somali Democratic Republic) is an Arab country and a founding member of the Organization of Islamic Cooperation (OIC). It is located in the Horn of Africa, and is bordered to the northwest by the Republic of Djibouti, to the southwest by the Republic of Kenya, to the north by the Gulf of Aden, to the east by the Indian Ocean, and to the west by the Republic of Ethiopia. It has the longest coastline in the African Continent.

Somalia's terrain consists mainly of plateaus, plains and highlands. Its climate is a hot desert all year round, with some monsoon winds and irregular rainfall.

Somalia was an important center for commerce with the rest of the ancient world. Somali sailors and merchants traded in incense, frankincense (mastic), myrrh, and spices, which were among the most valuable products in the southern region of the Arabian Peninsula and Socotra for ancient Egyptians, Phoenicians, and Babylonians, with whom Somalis established trade relations.

With the advent of Islam on the opposite side

of Somalia's Red Sea coast, Somali merchants, sailors and expatriates living in the Arabian Peninsula converted to Islam through their dealings with Arab-Muslim trading partners.

With the migration of fleeing Muslim families from various parts of the Islamic world to Somalia in the early centuries of Islam, in addition to the peaceful conversion of the majority of the Somali population through Somali Muslim scholars who worked to spread the teachings of Islam, the city-states on the land of Somalia eventually transformed into Islamic Mogadishu, Berbera, Zeila, Barawa, and Merca, which were part of the Berber civilization.

After the spread of Islam in Somalia, Mogadishu came to be known as the "City of Islam". It also dominated the gold trade in East Africa for several centuries.

Somalia was initially able to resist colonialism, as the Dervish state successfully repulsed the British Empire four times and forced it to retreat to the coastal region, but the Dervishes were finally defeated in 1920 by British airpower in their attacks on "Taleh," the capital of the Dervish state, thus turning all of the

state's lands into a colony of the British Empire.

Italy also faced the same resistance from the Somali Sultans, and was able to establish full control over the country only during the fascist rule of Italy in late 1927. The Italian occupation continued until 1941 when it was replaced by British military rule. Northern Somalia remained a British colony, while southern Somalia turned into an independent state under the British protectorate, until the two parts of Somalia were unified in 1960 under the name of the "Somali Democratic Republic".

Somalia was keen to strengthen its relations with African countries. It was one of the founders of the African Union. It also supported the African National Congress in South Africa against the apartheid regime.

Despite the civil war and internal instability, Somalia has succeeded in adopting a free economic system whose performance is higher than that of many African economies, according to a UN study.



## Our Hope: Overcome Media Work Obstacles and Make a Difference!

For quite a few years, we have been tirelessly working to enhance and upgrade the media and information work of the OIC General Secretariat, so that it can keep pace with events and developments, and provide comprehensive and innovative media coverage that attracts the audience and heightens their interest in the OIC's activities and initiatives. This, in itself, constitutes a challenge that is not always easy to meet.

Our effort has always been driven by the hope that we make a difference and reach the stage where we can overcome the numerous and diverse obstacles facing media work, which are often beyond our control; the stage where we can properly perform our media work in order to achieve our core goal: Enhancing the OIC's media visibility by highlighting its efforts, initiatives and achievements in all fields, and publicizing its programs and activities at the local and international levels. Without digital media and attractive news stories, images and videos, the Organization's news and events will remain unknown to many.

In its media and information approach, the OIC has already gone beyond the monotonous process of publishing news texts for the mere sake of documentation; it now seeks to achieve interactivity, reach out to all segments of society and to all ages, and present news and events in fresh ways that are attractive to visitors of the OIC Website, Social Media platforms, such as Facebook, X (formerly Twitter), Instagram, and YouTube, as well as to browsers of its electronic and paper publications.

We are keenly working to develop a distinctive visual identity for the Organization, inspired by its specificity and goals, and to make sure this is clearly reflected in all the news and reports published on its website or social media networks.

Those who follow the OIC's news, especially on Social Media, may have noticed that a distinctive visual identity has already begun to take shape, and is gradually manifesting itself in the posting of press releases and other information content for all those interested in following the Organization's news and events on its media platforms, which are continuously enriched and updated.

We are doing all this with a key goal in mind: keeping pace with events and informing our audience in real-time and in the three official languages of the OIC. This is a challenge we are seeking to meet, supported by a cadre of experienced translators who spare no effort to remain in step with news and events, and who undertake the translation of news items that are then posted and sent to media outlets and journalists. In that way, news about OIC events reaches the media in real-time, even before events are over.

In addition, the OIC is working to enhance media networking and to increase cooperation with media institutions in the Member States, with joint Islamic media work organizations, and with leading media organizations that are interested in circulating the OIC news. This requires us to follow up and benefit from the outcomes and outputs of these partnerships to serve the OIC goals and enhance its media visibility worldwide. We aim to widely publicize the OIC's mission, goals, and projects, as well as its contributions to advancing issues relevant to the OIC countries' development in all fields. This can be achieved only with vigilant media that provide intensive coverage of events and initiatives.

With the media and information capabilities available to us, we are keen to make a tangible difference. And though media work requires high-quality equipment, we are indeed determined to spare no effort to achieve excellence in our work, while involving all relevant parties in developing media and information work, with a new spirit and with openness to constructive ideas aimed at achieving excellence and delivering high-quality performance.

Excellence will also be pursued through a "new-look" OIC website that will soon be launched. The new website is almost ready, with work already underway to launch the media applications for the posting of news items, pictures, and other illustrative and interactive content in the three official languages of the Organization. Work is also in progress to develop other applications to monitor news, reports, and videos published about the Organization in media outlets of all types.

Obstacles to media work are always there, wherever we turn, and no matter how much we try to sidestep them. However, with determination, perseverance, advice-seeking, sound governance, and teamwork, we will certainly be able to develop new ways and out-of-the-box solutions to overcome challenges and pursue the goal that we – the media and information team and all the General Secretariat personnel – have set for ourselves: "Achieve ... and make a difference". We hope all relevant parties support us in our endeavor, so that all our efforts are pooled to serve our Organization and make it one of the international organizations that are most active on media platforms and social networks.



**Dr. Abdelhamid Salhi**  
*Editor-in-Chief of OIC  
 Journal,  
 Acting Director of Informa-  
 tion Department*

*Obstacles to media work are always there, wherever we turn, and no matter how much we try to sidestep them.*

# About OIC

The Organisation of Islamic Cooperation (OIC) is the second largest inter-governmental organization after the United Nations with a membership of 57 states spread over four continents. The Organization is the collective voice of the Muslim world. It endeavors to safeguard and protect the interests of the Muslim world in the spirit of promoting international peace and harmony among various people of the world.

The Organization was established upon a decision of the historical summit which took place in Rabat, Kingdom of Morocco on 12th Rajab 1389 Hijra (25 September 1969) following the criminal arson of Al-Aqsa Mosque in occupied Jerusalem. In 1970 the first ever meeting of Islamic Conference of Foreign Minister (ICFM) was held in Jeddah which decided to establish a permanent secretariat in Jeddah headed by the organization's secretary general. H.E. Hissein Brahim Taha is the 12th Secretary General of the Organization. He assumed the position in November 2021.

The first OIC Charter was adopted by the 3rd ICFM Session held in 1972. The Charter laid down the objectives and principles of the organization and fundamental purposes to strengthen the solidarity and cooperation among the Member States. Over the last 40 years, the membership has grown from its founding members of 30 to 57 states. The Charter was amended to keep pace with the developments that have unraveled across the world. The present Charter of the OIC was adopted by the Eleventh Islamic Summit held in Dakar on 13-14 March 2008 to become the pillar of the OIC future Islamic action in line with the requirements of the 21st century.

The Organization has the singular honor to galvanize the Ummah into a unified body and have actively represented the Muslims by espousing all causes close to the hearts of over 1.5 billion Muslims of the world. The Organization has consultative and cooperative relations with the UN and other inter-governmental organizations to protect the vital interests of the Muslims and to work for the settlement of conflicts and disputes involving Member States. In safeguarding the true values of Islam and the Muslims, the organization has taken various steps to remove misperceptions and have strongly advocated elimination of discrimination against the Muslims in all forms and manifestations.

The Member States of the OIC face many challenges in the 21st century and to address those challenges, the third extraordinary session of the Islamic Summit held in Makkah in December 2005, laid down the blue print called the Ten-Year Program of Action. It has successfully concluded with the close of 2015. A successor programme for the next decade (2016-2025) has been adopted.

The new programme OIC-2025 is anchored in the provisions of the OIC Charter and focuses on 18 priority areas with 107 goals. The priority areas include issues of Peace and Security, Palestine and Al-Quds, Poverty Alleviation, Counter-terrorism, Investment and Finance, Food Security, Science and Technology, Climate Change and Sustainability, Moderation, Culture and Interfaith Harmony, Empowerment of Women, Joint Islamic Humanitarian Action, Human Rights and Good Governance, among others.

Among the OIC's key bodies: the Islamic Summit, the Council of Foreign Ministers (CFM), the General Secretariat, in addition to the Al-Quds Committee and three permanent committees concerned with science and technology, economy and trade, and information and culture. There are also specialized organs under the banner of the OIC including the Islamic Development Bank and the Islamic Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization, as well as subsidiary and affiliate organs that play a vital role in boosting cooperation in various fields among the OIC member states.

*For more details, visit the OIC website at*  
**[www.oic-oci.org](http://www.oic-oci.org)**



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Augmenting Islamic cultures • Combating poverty  
 Protecting the rights of Muslim minorities • Promoting Science and Technology  
 Preserving Islamic heritage • Joint Islamic solidarity  
 Strengthening International relations • Promoting development  
 Combating terrorism • Achieving economic and trade cooperations  
 Encouraging dialogue among cultures and religions  
 Boosting Economic and Trade cooperation  
 Defending the Palestine Cause • Defending the rights of Muslims



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