

H
Ekmeleddin Ihsanoglu
Secretary General OIC

Please check against delivery

**Statement by H.E. Prof. Dr. Ekmeleddin Ihsanoglu, Secretary General Organization of
Islamic Cooperation**

at the High Level Segment of the 19th Session of the UN Human Rights Council

(Geneva - February 28, 2012)

Madam President,

Madam High Commissioner,

Hon'ble Ministers,

Excellencies Heads of Delegations,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

As always, it is a matter of honor and privilege to address this Council. The Council is reinvigorated following the review process. This session, in particular, is of utmost significance being held at a time of unprecedented transformation. Events that symbolized this transformation during the last year or so placed human rights at the centre of the global agenda. Parts of the Muslim World formed exponent of this transformations. Accordingly, OIC has been closely associated with the other international organizations that carried the international community's effort to evolve ways and means to address different situations that unfolded over the last year. It only reflects the primacy accorded at the OIC to seeking multilateral solutions to issues and situations in contemporary international relations. We believe this Council's role would continue to figure prominently in forging and implementing international consensus. OIC believes in consensus being of the essence towards legitimizing international Community's action. This must be done with a sense of history and eye on the future.

Excellencies,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

It is in a similar vein that I would like to share an accomplishment of historical significance at the OIC. Last year, I informed this Council that OIC was on the verge of creating an independent permanent Human Rights Commission. I can today report with a sense of satisfaction that the Commission has been established. The first formal session was held in Jakarta last week. The Commission elected a distinguished Lady from amongst the 18 Commissioners to serve as its First Chairperson.

Establishment of the Commission - in half the stipulated period - symbolizes the new OIC propelled by the vision of 'moderation and modernization'. It is based on the collective will of Member States to mainstream the human rights dimension across the programs and activities of the OIC. It is a major focus of international attention as the first cross regional

human rights mechanism owing to the nature of OIC's membership. It is being seen and acknowledged as a paradigm shift. We hope its work would dispel the misperceptions regarding Islam's incompatibility with human rights. It would represent a confluence of universal rights and freedoms and Islamic values. It would catalyze a coherent and strong OIC system aimed at facilitating the full enjoyment of all human rights in the Member States.

Excellencies,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

This session of the Council is characterized by a substantive agenda with imminent implications towards global peace, security and stability. Movements, particularly in parts of the Muslim world lately, indicate the absence of appetite for continuing violations of Human Rights on the international scene. The longstanding issues symbolizing such violations will, therefore, have to be addressed on a priority basis.

The situation in Palestine and other occupied Arab territories constitutes a permanent agenda item. The Palestinian issue has been at the core of OIC's concerns. It formed the *raison d'être* behind the inception of the OIC in 1969. The Israeli occupation and policies pose a continuing threat to human rights in the occupied Palestinian territories. Key issues including the Palestinian refugees; Civil, political, economic, social and cultural rights in Occupied East Jerusalem; settlements in the occupied Arab territories; apartheid wall; blockade of Gaza Strip; and the Palestinian prisoners are riddled with violation of the whole range of Human Rights.

Continuous and deliberate aggression by Israeli military forces and a frequency of flagrant violations of basic human rights merit Council's priority attention. Many reports and testimonies from various United Nations independent mechanisms have highlighted grave breaches of International Humanitarian and Human Rights law. These breaches underpin contentions of war crimes and crimes against humanity by the occupying power. I reiterate the urgent necessity for the Human Rights Council to effectively address the plight and permanent suffering of Palestinian people.

The alarming situation in Syria characterized by human rights violations has caused grave concern to the entire international community. The OIC has been actively involved in exploiting all available options to bring an end to the violence and loss of civilian lives through dialogue and negotiations without any external interference. I personally took the initiative in convening a Ministerial level Meeting of the Member States at the OIC headquarters to help evolve a solution. The OIC has been consistent in supporting the Arab League Plan. The latest resolution adopted by the UN General Assembly is a strong message that the ongoing killing and violence against the civilian population in Syria is totally unacceptable and must be brought to an end. I would like to take this opportunity to reiterate our appeal to the Government of Syria to take heed of the concerns and anxiety of the entire international community with all seriousness without any further delay and help avoid a major humanitarian crisis.

Promotion and protection of human rights of the Kashmiri people continues to form part of the OIC's agenda. We are particularly concerned at the Human Rights situation in the Indian Occupied Kashmir. We continue to call for a peaceful settlement of the Kashmir dispute in accordance with the relevant UN resolutions and aspirations of the people of Jammu and Kashmir. We believe resumption of engagement between Pakistan and India is a positive development that must be continued and intensified with a view to resolving all outstanding issues.

We are also following situation of Muslim minorities in non-OIC member states such as the Philippines and Thailand in close and positive collaboration with the Governments of these countries.

Excellencies,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Islamophobia is a contemporary manifestation of racism. Combating Islamophobia as well as vilification of all religions and denigration of symbols and personalities sacred to all religions is a matter of priority at the OIC. We regret that events representing constitutionalization and institutionalization of Islamophobia continue to unfold. Most disconcerting is Islamophobia being used as an instrument of electoral politics. This is a dangerous trend that needs to be arrested. It threatens the multicultural fabric of societies. It could seriously undermine international community's efforts aimed at interfaith harmony that could underwrite peace and security- particularly so in a world faced with the menace of terrorism. There is an urgent need to initiate and sustain 'preventive cultural diplomacy'.

It is in this context that OIC took the initiative embodied in the resolution 16/18. This session marks the first anniversary of the consensual passage of this resolution. It was based on the eight points that I mentioned during my address to the 15th session of the Council in September 2010. I am glad that these points found resonance with all the negotiating partners and resulted in a process of consensus building. We must now build on the consensus. It is with this in mind that I initiated – with the presence and participation of US Secretary of State Hillary Clinton, Baroness Ashton and other Ministers – the Istanbul Process for a consensual implementation of this resolution. The process seems to be going forward with the last meeting held in Washington and the next to be scheduled in the EU region. OIC will also be hosting an event this year to further the Process. We believe it is important to have a structured engagement. We must address the grey areas and the whole package of interrelated issues by accommodating all concerns of all parties. The alternative approach in resolutions 16/18 at HRC and 66/167 at UNGA has put the decade of polarization and politicization behind us. This enables us to address the real issues and chart out a sustainable and result-oriented course of action at the national and the international levels. Recent events characterized by loss of lives in Norway and Afghanistan underscored the importance of concerted and consensual international action. OIC has demonstrated ability to build consensus on the most sensitive of international issues. We look forward to being reciprocated in the same spirit.

Madam President,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

The international community agreed during the World Conference on Human Rights, held in Vienna in 1993, that national and regional particularities and various historical, cultural and religious backgrounds must be borne in mind while considering the issue of human rights. It is in this context that the issue of sexual orientation is approached by the OIC.

We are deeply concerned at the introduction of controversial notions like "sexual orientation and gender identity" at the Council. Focus on special groups has been questioned in terms of the universality of Human Rights. We have been consistent in opposition to the attempts to introduce - at the United Nations - concepts that have no legal foundation in any international human rights instrument. The international community only recognizes the rights enumerated in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. These rights were duly codified in subsequent international legal instruments. We note with concern the attempts to create controversial new notions or standards by misinterpreting the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and international treaties to include notions that were never articulated or agreed to by the UN membership. These attempts undermine the intent of the drafters and signatories to these human rights instruments. The entire international human rights framework is seriously jeopardized by such attempts.

Madam President,

Let me conclude by emphasizing that my presence here today bears testimony to the increasing importance accorded to Human Rights issues at OIC. I am confident that this session will bring about some conclusive decisions with regard to promotion and protection of Human Rights, under your wise stewardship.

I thank you all.