

■ ■ ■ ■ **İslam Konferansı Teşkilatı**
■ ■ ■ ■ **Dışişleri Bakanları Toplantısı'nda**
■ ■ ■ ■ **Yapılan Konuşma**

∴ Bakü, 19 Haziran 2006

Mr. Chairman,
Dear Colleagues,
Mr. Secretary General,
Distinguished Delegates,

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I would like to express my heartfelt thanks and appreciations to the Government of Azerbaijan for its warm hospitality and excellent working environment accorded to us.

I also wish to extend my sincere congratulations to my distinguished colleague, Foreign Minister of the Republic of Azerbaijan, H. E. Elmar Mammedyarov for his assuming the Chair of the 33rd Islamic Conference Foreign Ministers Meeting (ICFM) today.

With his diplomatic skill and wisdom, I am confident that Azerbaijan's Presidency will be crowned with success and achievements for the OIC.

My special thanks also go for the outgoing Chair of the 32nd ICFM, my dear friend H. E. Al Qirbi, Foreign Minister of Yemen, for his courageous efforts in pressing ahead the reform endeavors, as well as to the Secretary-General Prof. Ekmeleddin İhsanoğlu and his able team for their professionalism and dedication.

Dear colleagues,

The world is going through a tumultuous period where rationality seems to have become the hostage of uncertainties.

Terrorism, proliferation of weapons of mass destruction, Islamophobia, ethnic and sectarian violence, poverty, illiteracy, natural disasters and widespread diseases continue to pose severe threat for global peace and security.

Today, the world is desperately in need of calm. The current state of affairs unfortunately breeds the ground of fear and insecurity.

We need a new conciliatory rhetoric in mending the widening rifts among civilizations. The recent troubling events have made it imperative that we engage in a meaningful and operational dialogue.

The risk of such widening fault-lines is most vividly felt between the Western and Islamic worlds. Indeed, the growing Islamophobia in Western societies and the ensuing practices of a discriminatory nature causes anti-Western feelings in most Moslem communities and creates a psychological obstacle to be overcome.

In this regard, we see that those values common to all nations and societies are unfortunately overlooked. The universal tenets of the human civilization which every society has contributed in time individually or collectively is not paid enough attention. The cultural and religious differences which must be seen within the understanding of the “unity in diversity” are rather perceived as threats.

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The most functional and trustworthy means to get rid of this impasse and enable common sense to prevail is to immediately establish channels of a genuine dialogue between different cultures and religions, and to support this process with practical measures.

In an attempt to foster such dialogue, Turkey has given strong support to the idea of “Alliance of Civilizations” and our Prime Minister agreed to co-sponsor the initiative along with his Spanish counterpart. We believe that this dialogue lays the foundation for the future.

We welcome each and every country’s intellectual and financial contributions to the project. We need to do more on our part as the OIC members.

I am confident that the OIC can also play a constructive role in this regard to help wiping out the misunderstandings and their dreadful consequences.

But, are we really doing enough to reverse the flow of history in our favour? Needless to say, what we have achieved up to now, still is short of reaching out our ultimate objective.

Dear colleagues,

We can make the OIC an effective mechanism through a comprehensive reform process.

In recent years, thanks to our collective wish, we have now reached an advanced point in setting out our reform parameters.

We all acknowledge that reform is no longer a choice but a necessity to live up to the challenges of the 21st century. However, there is still a long way to go before we can talk about a genuine transformation.

Our success hinges mainly on our common desire and joint efforts. It is high time for all of us here to brush aside our nuances and focus on our common aspiration to reform.

We know that, while the success of an OIC member is not counted as a success of all, anyone's wrongdoing is perceived as a fault of the entire Muslim world. Therefore, we have collective responsibility to each other.

We are obliged to root out all taboos and prejudices, which cripple our walk towards embracing the universal values and principles. It is incumbent upon us to be pioneer in placing our home in order through our indigenous initiatives.

Having said that, this should, in no way, make us deaf and blind to the outside friendly advises. No doubt, once we push through with concrete reforms, we will face less interference.

We appreciate the pivotal role of Prof. İhsanoğlu, the Secretary-General of the OIC and his prudent staff in pressing ahead the implementation of the Ten-Year Action Programme, which was unanimously approved in the Third Extraordinary Summit, held in Mekkah last year.

I am proud to reiterate that Turkey will be one of the steadfast supporters of the reform process through encouraging resounding steps.

Dear colleagues,

The Middle East suffers from decades-long territorial disputes, political standoffs and sectarian violence. Unfortunately, seeds of hatred and hostility are deep and pervasive in the region. Our shared commitment and collective action for restoring peace and security in our region is of crucial importance.

Turkey strongly supports a secure, stable, peaceful and democratic Middle East, free from tensions, animosities and weapons of mass destruction.

The current state of affairs serves no one's interest. Turkey is doing everything she could to prevent the current tension from evolving into a regional and global crisis.

Certainly, we prefer this issue to be settled through diplomacy. With this mindset, we continue to make our contribution to the multinational efforts

to this end. It is, first and foremost, incumbent upon all parties concerned to exercise maximum restraint and to show flexibility to reach a negotiated solution.

Turkey has always been an active proponent of the political process in Iraq and of the efforts to revive the Middle East Peace Process.

The new government in Iraq must give hope to its people that there is a light at the end of the tunnel. Its success mainly depends on the willingness and faithful cooperation of all ethnic and sectarian groups.

Certainly, difficult tasks are awaiting the new government and now the goal will be to meet the urgent needs of the Iraqi people for creating a prosperous, viable, united, secure and stable country.

The new government of Iraq will have to tackle serious issues ahead, including the amendment of the constitution. We believe that the solutions to the outstanding issues lie beyond the ethnic and sectarian agendas shaping Iraqi politics today.

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Turkey is ready to be in close cooperation in all possible fields with Iraq in this regard. Iraqi leadership still has a long way to go. Greater efforts are needed to build an all-embracing political center in Iraq.

The outlook of the Middle East Peace Process remains uncertain. There is not much room for optimism. Turkey's ultimate objective remains the creation of the necessary conditions for the resumption of the peace negotiations within the framework of the Road Map.

On the other hand, the need to address the economic and social problems of the Palestinians remains a priority. We have come to provide concrete support to the Palestinian side in the framework of a structured plan of action.

In this framework, Turkish Union of Chambers of Commerce has undertaken the project of the revitalization of the Palestinian Industrial Zone in the Gaza Strip. Turkey is considering sending flour directly to the Palestinian people living in the Gaza Strip in the form of humanitarian aid to alleviate their plight. We are also dispatching humanitarian assistance through UNRWA. This year, again we will continue our donations to support small and medium scale projects in the Palestinian territories.

The "frozen" conflicts continue to undermine security, stability and democratic governance in the South Caucasus. Resolution of the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict and the withdrawal of Armenia from the occupied Azerbaijani territories are still awaited, after more than a decade.

Needless to emphasize that any solution in this vein should respect Azerbaijan's territorial integrity. Return of the internally displaced persons

is a pressing humanitarian issue, requiring our constant attention, and thus should be urgently addressed.

The international community, therefore, should urge Armenia to adopt forthcoming and constructive policies towards its neighbours, fully adhering to international law. Turkey, for its part, will sustain its efforts to facilitate a solution based on compromise.

Turkey and the TRNC are working hard to achieve a comprehensive settlement for the Cyprus question under the good-offices mission of the UN Secretary-General and on the basis of the settlement plan, known as the "Annan Plan". However, despite our willingness and good intention, the Greek Cypriot Administration is opposed to the UN parameters and doing everything to erode them.

My government also continues with constructive initiatives which aim at creating an improved environment of mutual confidence. In this context, on 24 January 2006, we declared a package of proposals which envisage simultaneous lifting of restrictions on the free movement of goods, people and services by all relevant parties.

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We believe that our new initiative, which is balanced and provides substantial benefits to all parties, would provide the basic pillars of a stronger regional cooperation and contribute to the UN process for a comprehensive settlement.

Our Action Plan received positive reactions from the international community, including many OIC member states. We request all OIC countries to give due consideration and support the Plan publicly.

I would like to thank to the courageous efforts of many countries for their cooperation and solidarity with the Turkish Cypriots in all fields with an attempt to ease their plight due to the decade-long inhumane and unjust isolations.

The issue of Jammu and Kashmir continues to be a source of concern for the whole world. We strongly hope that a peaceful solution to this question is found as early as possible through dialogue and on the basis of international legitimacy.

The human rights of the Kashmiri people should be fully respected and their will honored as mandated by the relevant UN Security Council resolutions.

Maintenance of an effective dialogue between Pakistan and India is a prerequisite of a successful peace process. In this regard, we welcomed the steps taken by Pakistan and India in the context of "Composite Dialogue". We commend Pakistan for its continuing efforts to sustain this dialogue.

We sincerely hope that such positive developments will lay the foundations of a solid understanding between the two countries and pave the way for the peaceful solution of this issue. We believe that the solution of the issue of Jammu and Kashmir would also contribute significantly to the peace and stability in the subcontinent as a whole.

The nation-building and reconstruction process in Afghanistan are moving forward despite hurdles and difficulties. Turkey stands on the side of her Afghan friends in their search for peace and stability.

Following our lead in ISAF-II and ISAF-VII, in August 2006, we will be assuming the joint leadership of the Regional Command in Kabul, together with France and Italy. Our contributions to the training of the Afghan National Army and the Police Force also continue. In addition, we have recently announced our decision to establish a Provincial Reconstruction Team in the Wardak Province this year.

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We have organized new training programs in Turkey for a total of 100 Afghan narcotics police officers for the year 2006. We will also be financing alternative livelihood projects in Afghanistan.

Our government has decided to increase our pledge for the reconstruction of Afghanistan to 100 million Dollars. We will continue to carry out projects mainly in the areas of health, education and agriculture.

Turkey strongly supports the OIC's active involvement in African issues. Undoubtedly, African solution to the Africa's problems should be supported and nurtured.

In line with our "Policy of Opening Up to Africa", adopted in 1998, we declared 2005 as the "Year of Africa" and our relations with African countries have rapidly developed ever since.

In order to better understand and closely follow the developments in Africa and in African institutions, Turkey acquired "observer status" to the African Union in April 2005, and has accredited her Embassy in Addis Ababa to the Union, in May 2005.

We welcome and appreciate the efforts of the African Union to promote peace, stability, democracy and human rights in the Continent. We also share the new vision put forward by the New Partnership for Africa's Development for the future of Africa, and we are ready to contribute to its success.

Turkey also regularly contributes to relief efforts and humanitarian assistance operations in Africa. The total amount of Turkey's humanitarian assistance donation to African countries reached 3,5 million US Dollars in the last two years. We will continue our support in the future.

The 150 thousands strong Turkish minority of Western Thrace in Greece still faces serious problems in enjoying their fundamental human rights and freedoms. The minority's ethnic identity is continuously denied. Greece does not recognize the right of the minority to freely elect their muftis, and appoints muftis herself against the common will of the minority.

The educational standards of the Turkish minority schools are of a low quality, mainly due to the excessive interference of the Greek authorities. Furthermore, the number of the minority secondary schools is inadequate. In view of the foregoing, it is safe to say that Greece fails to live up to the contemporary standards with regard to the protection of minorities. We expect more intervention of the OIC into these issues in line with the resolutions adopted by the previous OIC Foreign Ministers Meetings and OIC Summits.

Dear colleagues,

Turkey, in a bid to serve better the international peace and stability, has declared its candidature for one of the two seats allocated to Western European and Others Group at the Security Council for the term 2009-2010. Turkey has not had the opportunity to serve on the Council for 45 years. Therefore our Government attaches utmost importance to this candidature.

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As I may recall, The Thirty-First Session of the Islamic Conference of Foreign Ministers, held in Istanbul, on 14-16 June 2004 adopted a resolution extending support for our candidacy. In line with this decision, we already have the support of an important number of OIC members.

I would like to thank these countries again for their support and hope to receive, in the very near future, commitments of remaining brotherly countries. The undivided support of the OIC is very valuable to us.

Turkey encourages the development of economic, trade and tourism cooperation among OIC member states.

The Third Extraordinary OIC Summit, held in Mecca in December 2005, identified very important targets for economic and commercial cooperation in the Ten Year Program of Action. One of the main targets is to increase the level of intra-OIC trade to 20 percent by the end of the Program period.

The Extraordinary Summit also mandated the COMCEC to undertake the necessary measures in order to achieve this target. The COMCEC has brought to fruition an important project that has been on its agenda over the last several years; the establishment of a Trade Preferential System among the OIC member states.

In this regard, the first round of trade negotiations undertaken by the Trade Negotiating Committee was completed last year and the Protocol on Tariff Reduction Scheme (PRETAS) was adopted by the COMCEC in November 2005.

The PRETAS has specific tariff reduction targets and a time-frame for trade liberalization among our countries. As of June, 2006, six of the seventeen member countries participating in the first round have signed the PRETAS. Here, I would like to invite all the OIC member states, and in particular, the remaining eleven members of the Trade Negotiating Committee, to sign the PRETAS at their earliest convenience.

I would like to also inform that Turkey will host the second round of trade negotiations at the level of trade ministers of the member countries that are represented in the Trade Negotiating Committee.

Another important development in the area of economic cooperation is the formation of the OIC Member Countries Stock Exchanges Forum. In this context, I would like to call on the brotherly countries to vigorously participate in the activities of this Forum. We propose to host the second meeting of the Form in Turkey, this year.

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On the other hand, as the host country, we provide all assistance to the IRCICA, SESTRIC and recently established OIC Youth Forum.

In conclusion, I would like to thank you all once again, and reiterate our gratitude to the Government and the people of the Republic of Azerbaijan.