

∴ Tahran, 28 Mayıs 2003

Mr. Chairman,
Excellencies,
Distinguished delegates,

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At the outset, I would like to congratulate you on your assumption of the Chairmanship of our Ministerial Conference this year. I rest assured that your contribution to the deliberations of our meeting and to the work of our Organization will be substantive. Your term as Chairman will, I am sure, give a new impetus to our common efforts in addressing manifold questions that we face.

Likewise, I would like to express our deep appreciation for the leadership that your predecessor His Excellency Moustapha Osman, the Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Sudan, has employed in the course of his tenure.

I would be remiss if I did not pay tribute to the valuable work of the OIC Secretariat in carrying out their duties under the guidance of the Organization's distinguished Secretary General Mr. Belkeziz.

Before moving to the matters under our agenda, I would like to express our deep sympathy to the Government and the people of Algeria for the heavy loss of lives and material damage resulting from the massive earthquake that hit their country on 21 May 2003. We mourn their losses. Turkey has dispatched humanitarian assistance and a search and rescue team to Algeria, and we stand ready to offer further assistance to this friendly nation at their time of distress.

Mr. Chairman,

The Tehran Conference takes place at a critical juncture. Before I address the major issues that currently preoccupy us, I would like to pause for a moment and take stock of what we as the Muslim world are faced with today. We need to attempt to determine the issues and shortcomings that continue to hamper our progress at home. We have a spiritual heritage of peace, harmony, tolerance and affection. It should strengthen our inspiration for achieving freedom, peace, prosperity and democracy. And, we have many strategic advantages and potentialities. But we also face strategic risks. Our fates have in the past often been dominated by these risks.

The time has come that we avoid precisely this. The question is how do we do this? We must act with a refreshed vision – a vision in which good governance, transparency and accountability will reign, the fundamental rights and freedoms as well as gender equality are upheld, and there would be no place for blunting rhetoric and slogans. In short, we should first put our house in order. Rational thinking should be our driving force, as we draw our strength from our spiritual values. Creating a synergy from these values inherent in our being will be our test in as well as our contribution to our modern age.

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We should start by eradicating illiteracy, corruption, waste of human natural and material resources. We should address the underlying causes of violence. We must promote higher living standards for all, and reduce income disparities and urban rural divide. We must be cognizant of the fact that the absence of economic rationality and perpetual political instability in our societies prevent us from fully benefiting from our resources as well as capabilities. At the extreme case, we find ourselves in devastating wars. Our conflict-ridden geography has substantially undercut our ability to develop economically. Natural wealth, including oil revenues has been wasted and the focus of attention has been other than human development. Iraq has been a striking example of this failure.

We should not be shy in defining our course. We should encourage political participation in our systems. I am pleased in this respect to observe the increasing awareness and the actions taken in our societies towards reform and political inclusiveness. This will be the key for developing the sense of ownership on the part of the people of the systems they live in.

We should likewise devise ways and means to resolve political issues among us, so that they do not evolve themselves into wider crises.

If we take meaningful steps in the direction that I have outlined, we shall also be challenging those who speak of clash of civilizations. The

contemporary and peaceful message of the Muslim community of nations will thus become prevalent.

The Organization of the Islamic Conference can be highly instrumental in projecting our peaceful and forward-looking message beyond our geography. Civilizations have a lot to gain from inter-acting each other. Our diversity in the OIC has already enriched the minds of all our members. Therefore, “unity in diversity” should be our message, and with this message, we should reach out the entire world community. And, we should do that in full confidence of our own values, and in full openness.

Mr. Chairman,

In the Middle East, we are on the threshold of a new process. If duly given chance, it can put in motion dynamics that will help bring about comprehensive peace in the Middle East. The road-map prepared by the Quartet has been submitted to the parties, and they have agreed to proceed along its lines. The objective is to realize the vision of full Palestinian statehood and lasting peace and normalcy in which all states in the region will live side by side within secure and recognized boundaries. This will be the only viable and effective way to put an end to the sufferings of the Palestinian people and violence in the region. Turkey stands ready to be an active contributor to this process.

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Mr. Chairman,

Since we met in Khartoum last year, significant developments have taken shape in Iraq. In this process, Turkey deployed everything within her capacity to prevent yet another war and devastation in Iraq. We worked together with our friends in the region, with the OIC and with our partners in the West. A recognizable outcome of these efforts was the Istanbul Declaration of the regional countries. We likewise tried to impress upon the Iraqi leadership of the time to heed the calls of Iraq’s friends and show the level of cooperation to the United Nations that would allow no leeway for any military move. Yet, the confrontation took the upper hand and the status quo in Iraq has changed.

In this new phase in Iraq, important roles and responsibilities fall on the shoulders of us all. In helping Iraq to regain its full sovereignty and build a peaceful and prosperous future, the following principles should guide us:

- Iraq’s national unity and territorial integrity must be preserved;
- The Iraqi state should be in peace with its own people as well as with its neighbours;
- The natural wealth of Iraq should remain the property of the Iraqi nation as a whole.

The adoption by the United Nations Security Council of resolution 1483 on 22 May 2003 is a welcome development. Its immediate impact is that the more than a decade-long economic sanctions are now lifted. This resolution represents a compromise based on realism. The underpinning objective of this resolution is to prepare the conditions for the Iraqi people to fully take charge of their country. It gives a vital role to the United Nations through which all members of the international community will be able to play their constructive role in helping rebuild Iraq.

This resolution is also in conformity with the conclusions of the meeting of the Foreign Ministers of eight regional countries that took place in Riyadh last month.

Mr. Chairman,

There are a host of other issues that occupy our political agenda.

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In Afghanistan, we are pleased that the Bonn Process has so far been fairly successful. In state-building however, governing institutions still do not have the capacity, power and resources to function effectively. Furthermore, the future success of the Bonn Process will primarily depend on the expansion of the authority of the central government over the entire country. To enhance its security, Afghanistan also needs a robust national army. So far, the priority has been for humanitarian assistance, and the reconstruction of the country has lagged behind. Therefore, the country remains in need of strong international support.

The Nagorno-Karabakh conflict and the Armenian occupation of one-fifth of the Azerbaijani territory still stands as the principal obstacle on the way to enhancing cooperation in the Caucasus. Turkey is a neighbour to the region, and a member of the OSCE Minsk Group. We have a particular interest in finding a peaceful solution to this conflict. We believe that after ten years of work by the Minsk Group, peace efforts have reached a certain level of maturity. We hope to see a peaceful settlement in not so distant future.

We remain concerned by the ongoing tensions in Jammu and Kashmir. Its people have already suffered tremendously. This question is a constant source of instability for the whole region. We look forward to a peaceful solution to this question through dialogue, in line with the aspirations of the Kashmiri people and on the basis of international legitimacy. It is in this vein that we welcome the recent openings on the part of both Pakistan and India for the resumption of this much needed dialogue.

The world is increasingly plagued by a major scourge to the entire humanity. International terrorism continues to claim lives and hopes all around

the world. The recent outrages in Riyadh and Casablanca are ominous reminders of how savage and bloodthirsty terrorists can be. We stand by Saudi Arabia and Morocco in their struggle against terrorism. Terrorism has no religion, ethnicity or culture. It is an affront to the whole international community. And therefore, we must strike back in kind. The international community should act in full unity in ridding the world of this scourge, and should make no distinction between its different forms and manifestations.

Mr. Chairman,

We appreciate the valuable support and solidarity, shown to the Turkish Cypriot people by the OIC. One of the main obstacles towards the lasting settlement in Cyprus has been the lack of confidence between the two peoples. The Turkish Cypriot President Denktaş, with a view to addressing this shortcoming, has, on April 2, made a new and constructive opening, designed to contribute to the normalization of relations.

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The Turkish Cypriot Government began implementing its package of confidence building measures unilaterally and facilitated both the trade and the movement of persons between the two sides of the island. To date, more than 300,000 Greek Cypriots visited the north and 150,000 Turkish Cypriot visited the south. We hope these steps will serve as a new impetus towards a comprehensive settlement. The Turkish Cypriot side continues to take further positive steps to normalize the relations. My Government encouraged this process and contributed to it by facilitating travel of Greek Cypriots to Turkey. We expect others to follow this initiative and move to lift inhuman embargoes that the Turkish Cypriot people are subjected to. We believe the OIC members can support the Turkish Cypriot people in this respect.

The Turkish Cypriots have been participating in all the activities of the OIC since 1990. In view of the past and present OIC resolutions on Cyprus that call for the recognition of the equal political status of the two parties in the island, it is our firm conviction that the issue of proper representation of the Turkish Cypriot people in the Organization should be in line with and reflect the letter and spirit of the said resolutions. I would like to renew on this occasion our longstanding request that the Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus's observer status be upgraded to that of a full member. This would level the ground by reducing the imbalance created by the unilateral EU membership of the Greek Cypriot administration, and thus constitute an important contribution by the Islamic world to the solution of the Cyprus issue.

Mr. Chairman,

The Turkish Muslim Minority of Western Thrace have vested minority rights emanating from the provisions of the Treaty of Lausanne, and from a host of other multilateral and bilateral instruments. Under the Treaty of Lausanne, they have equal rights to establish, manage and control any schools and other establishments for instruction and education, with the right to use their own language and exercise their own religion freely therein.

However, Greece's record in honoring her contractual obligations has been poor. That is why the OIC too felt the need to focus on the conditions of this minority. There have lately been a gradual rehabilitation of the physical conditions of the Turkish minority, but we have yet to see a real change of heart on the part of Greece so that this minority can fully enjoy their statutory rights.

Mr. Chairman,

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The economic and commercial activities of the OIC constitute one of the main pillars of our cooperation. In this respect, the Standing Committee for Economic and Commercial Cooperation (COMCEC) has been a highly effective instrument for the OIC community in helping materialize our common economic and social development targets. The COMCEC, after 19 years in existence, has attained a recognizable maturity. However, we know that we have to work more. We must bring the implementation of the Plan of Action for Economic and Commercial Cooperation in line with our set targets. I am confident that the member countries will not spare their support in taking appropriate action to accelerate the implementation of the Plan of Action.

This year has seen the entry into force of the Framework Agreement for the Trade Preferential System among the member countries of the OIC. We are now looking forward to the successful conclusion of the First Round of the Trade Negotiations that will be launched in Turkey next year within the framework of this Agreement.

In this respect, I would also like to express my Government's continued support for the activities of the two successful subsidiary organs of the OIC in Turkey, namely IRCICA and SESTRIC.

Mr. Chairman,

We remain committed to the important work of our Organization. And we are willing to host the 31st Islamic Conference of Foreign Ministers in Turkey.

Thank you.