

OIC summit declaration promising and progressive

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AFTER its second and final day, the 10th Session of the Islamic Summit Conference has produced a ringing declaration firmly set on the future. The Putrajaya Declaration on Knowledge and Morality for the Unity, Dignity and Progress of the Ummah is a sensible, realistic and forward-looking document that now awaits implementation.

If the declaration goes the way of many previous resolutions of the Organisation of the Islamic Conference (OIC), there are few reasons to be hopeful. But if it is managed by the new Malaysian chairmanship of the OIC, with all the administrative skills and experience that have seen Malaysia's social harmony and rapid development, there is scope for optimism.

The first thing about the declaration is its comprehensiveness: after the obligatory preamble as summary, it begins with the section Knowledge and Morality, that acknowledges past achievements and stresses ethical conduct. The following section, Unity and Dignity, emphasises solidarity among member states based on shared values.

This leads to the next section, Revitalisation of the OIC, an area which if allowed to remain neglected would render everything else in the declaration pointless. The final section is, handily, a Plan of Action that with its 12 sub-sections is more detailed than the rest.

Another feature of the declaration is its timeliness: there is recognition of the need to develop better infrastructure, trade links and networking. Dialogues among scholars and policymakers through the Fiqh Academy would be enhanced, and use of the Gold-based Trade Payment Arrangements encouraged.

The declaration also understands the need for Islamic education to go beyond the strictly theological. Education is seen to serve such ends as promoting peace, understanding and tolerance, as well as economic development and modernisation.

Yet another feature of the document is its inherent sense of realism. It resolves to be more resolute in acting on its convictions to realise its stated goals and fulfil specific objectives.

Mechanisms to help member states emerging from conflict would also be improved, a better option to blindly endorsing unilateralism and just throwing cash at a problem.

And in case cynics feel the OIC might become too presumptuous, the declaration also underscores its adherence to multilateralism, international law and "the centrality of the United Nations."

There are other features of the document reflecting the progressive quality of the membership's consensus at Putrajaya. The dignity of women and their role in society would be promoted and upheld, consonant with true Islam.

Overall, the Putrajaya Declaration covers much ground without being too detailed, while taking a positive stand and constructive approach to the major issues of the day. It amounts to progressive reform in member states, so it may be applied no more than unevenly across the membership.

It also happens to spell out the need to engage the non-Muslim "other," reflecting a point made in the keynote speech of Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad as summit chairman.