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Implementing the OIC Declaration

THE high-profile 10th Summit of the Organisation of the Islamic Conference is now over. Its leaders have reached agreement on a 12-point plan of action. They have condemned American sanctions on Syria. They have agreed to draw up appropriate strategies to strengthen its unity on international issues. They have agreed to hold dialogues among themselves and with other cultures. They have agreed to strengthen trade between member countries and to collaborate in the development of ICT. Institutions such as the Islamic Fiqh Academy and the General Secretariat are to be revamped. Based on the broad areas of agreement and the international coverage engendered, the Summit must be counted as a success.

However, they also agreed on a lot of things during previous OIC Summits. The problem has been that once the leaders and the delegates return home, the resolutions remain no more than ink on paper. If it is to shed its image as an international talk-shop of little consequence, the OIC has to put in motion concrete steps to deliver on what they had agreed upon in Putrajaya.

To begin with, the review of the General Secretariat has to be carried out as soon as possible. Once the enabling mechanisms are in place, practical measures to enhance inter-OIC financial services, shipping, aviation, trade and investment can be implemented.

The dearth of substantive action from the OIC in the past has been due to a lack of resolve among its member states. Since the OIC is an inter-governmental organisation, the onus is on the member governments to make it work. As Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said at the official opening of the 10th OIC Summit, Muslims expect their leaders "to do something, to act. We cannot say we cannot do anything".

This is why it is crucial to implement the plan to hold regular dialogues and conferences among scholars, intellectuals, businessmen, entrepreneurs and policy-makers. The traditional ulama in the Muslim world have grown increasingly conservative and have not adapted their thinking to the needs of the times. They have no answer to the contemporary problems of poverty, unemployment, illiteracy, and disease that millions of Muslims face. There is a need for the Muslim world to break free from the dogmas of the past and develop imaginative and critical thinking within itself.

The inclusion of dialogues with other cultures and other international organisations in the Putrajaya Declaration is a recognition that the militant approach which draws a clear distinction between the Muslim world and the rest is not only irrational and futile, but also contrary to the universal values of peace and justice that Islam espouses. Although there are 1.3 billion Muslims in the world, the reality is that the vast majority of the world population is not Muslim, and in many countries Muslims constitute a minority. Of the 191 nations in the United Nations, only 57 are Muslim.

There are high expectations that as chair-member Malaysia will be able to transform the OIC into a result-oriented rather than a resolution-oriented organisation. It is time for those who have been saying that the OIC needs to be restructured and rejuvenated to translate their words into deeds and support Malaysia's efforts to make the OIC more relevant to the needs of the Muslim world and a respected voice in international affairs. Without their support, the Putrajaya Declaration will remain just that - a

declaration. They must act now.