

## **The OIC Conference Of The Ministers Of Endowments And Islamic Affairs**

Istana Hotel, Kuala Lumpur 7 May 2002

I would like to welcome all the delegates to this OIC Conference of the Ministers of Endowments and Islamic Affairs being held here in Kuala Lumpur.

2. Alhamdulillah we are grateful to Allah the Almighty for allowing Ministers from Muslim countries to again meet each other at this conference. This conference is only held once every three years, and I am sure there are many issues on the development and welfare of the ummah which must be discussed and shared among OIC member countries, so we may better serve the well-being of our people.

3. I am sure you have come here to discuss the religious, economic and social problems of the ummah with open minds and concerned about adhering to and implementing the true teachings of our religion. I believe that we all have to face the reality of the world of today, a world which has become smaller because of jet travel and real time communication of information, a world in which we the Muslims can no longer isolate and insulate ourselves from each other or the wider world of non-Muslim countries. Whether we like it or not we have to make adjustments to our way of life so as to maintain our faith intact, so as to give meaning to our belief that Islam is for all times and not just for the 1st century of the Hijrah or the 7th century of the Christian era only.

4. For 13 centuries the Islamic civilisation thrived. Muslims were supreme in every field; in the administration and development of their land, in the arts and the sciences, in industry and in trade. The world looked up to the Muslims and respected their military prowess and submitted to their rule. It was an empire that seemed destined to last forever.

5. But we know that it did not. In 1492 the last Muslim ruler of Granada was forced to surrender his country to the Spaniards and retreat to North Africa. In the 1920's the Turkish Muslim empire collapsed due to attacks by Anglo-French forces. Practically the whole of Asia Minor or Turkey as we know it today came under Greek occupation. If it had not been for Mustafa Kamal, the leader many Muslims love to condemn, there would not be any Turkey, secular or otherwise today.

6. Many Muslims accept the demise of the Muslim Empire as "takdir", as Allah's will. Muslims never really studied the role that they themselves played which brought about their

downfall. They never blame themselves. In insisting that it was Allah's will, Muslims are indirectly blaming Allah for their misfortunes. Yet the Al-Quran clearly states that the bad things that happens to us is due to ourselves, the good is from Allah. So how could Allah bring us misfortune? How could Allah be blamed? Surely the people to be blamed for the collapse of the Muslim Empire and the sad plight of the Muslims today are the Muslims themselves. They have done little to save their empire and civilisation, to save themselves from oppression, their religion from being dishonoured.

7. If it is all the will of Allah why do Muslims struggle at all? Why do they explode bombs on their bodies and why do they crash aircrafts against the World Trade Centre and the Pentagon, killing themselves and many innocent people, some of whom are not even their declared enemy. If they believe that this world is for the infidels then they should suffer oppression, indignities and killings even and not struggle against oppression. They should say it is Allah's will and as Muslims they cannot fight what is ordained by Allah.

8. To be very crude the fate of the Muslims today is of their own making. It is not ordained but it is basically because they ignore the true teachings of Islam, the injunctions of the Al-Quran and the guidance of the true Hadith. They quote the Quran often enough but only to explain away their wrong deeds. They can even explain why they as Muslims deny that all Muslims are their brothers as taught by Islam. And having declared certain Muslims are apostates they then kill these Muslims in the name of Islam. The result is that more Muslims are killed by brother Muslims than by the infidel enemies of Islam. The result is that Muslims and Muslim countries are weak and incapable of protecting themselves and their countries. The result is that Muslims live in poverty and misery. The result is Jenin.

9. Islam enjoins upon the Muslims to read, "Iqraq". You cannot read without learning and acquiring knowledge. In the early years of Islam the Muslims applied themselves diligently to reading. They did not read just the Quran and the Hadith but they read the works of the Greek and other ancient scholars and philosophers and elaborated and extended the knowledge that they acquired. The whole scholastic world in those days had to study Arabic in order to learn the teachings of the Greeks and other great scholars of history. Arabic became the language of mathematics, the sciences, philosophy, navigation etc.

10. Then came those Muslim scholars who condemn knowledge that was not about the religion of Islam. They formulated

Islamic jurisprudence which tolerated no opposition. Islam was all about sins and punishment. All the rest that is enjoined upon Muslims in the Quran and Hadith that was not about sins and punishment were ignored. With the advent of these Muslim jurists and their insistence that the only knowledge that Muslim should acquire was about Islam, the study of science, mathematics, philosophy and other so-called worldly knowledge were ignored. Muslims became more and more ignorant about the world in which they live, about engineering and development, about the advances in industry and the production of goods and services. The weapons of war that they used did not improve and they resorted to buying weapons from others, many of whom were their enemies.

11. They missed the Industrial Revolution completely. And they became client states of the non-Muslims. And now they are going to miss the Information Age, the revolution in communication and knowledge-based economy. They are likely to say that it is the will of Allah that they become even more backward and weak. Yet if they participate actively in the development and application of the new technologies they can become as strong as their detractors. And if that happens surely it will also be the will of Allah. Allah asks us to change ourselves before He will grant us success.

12. It is an important part of the teachings of Islam that we practise charity, that we give alms to the poor, that we endow a part or the whole of our wealth to Islam and the Muslim community. It is obvious that charity requires ownership of wealth in the first place. It is equally obvious that the more wealth and property that we acquire the more we can endow. On the other hand if we are poor there is not much or nothing that we can give as endowment.

13. Yet there is a belief among many Muslims that being rich is sinful. This belief is held despite the Islamic teaching that being poor is close to being kufur, being unIslamic.

14. There is jealousy and hate even of the rich, that somehow they are not good Muslims. Yet Allah has promised that He will raise some above others. In other words we can be either rich, or poor, elevated in stature and power above others without affecting our equality before Allah. We are only better in accordance to our submission or takwa before Allah, whether we are high or low, rich or poor. The rich who give to charity because he submits to Allah is as good as anyone else who submits to Allah, who obeys the injunctions of Allah.

15. If we can imagine all members of the Muslim ummah as being uniformly poor, then charity would not be possible and

the poor cannot benefit from the generosity that is enjoined by Islam upon Muslims. They would have nothing to give away. That is why it is important for Muslims to work hard to increase their wealth. We must work hard not just as labourers but in everything that we do which will contribute to our wealth. We must work hard to acquire the knowledge and the skills to rise to the highest level in our occupation, in our business and in our industries. And all the time as our income increases we must pay our zakat, practise sedekah, build schools and mosques and other facilities for the Muslim ummah and endow a part of our accumulated wealth to Muslims while we are alive or upon our death.

16. We must do all these systematically and without self-interest in this world if possible. Our motive must be charity and not so as to be hailed by the beneficiaries or the public as practitioners of the teachings of Islam. Allah will know that we have given and given with sincerity and we will, insyaallah get our rewards in the akhirat.

17. Rather than personally donating directly to the beneficiaries we can just pay zakat to the officials appointed to collect the zakat. The Governments have provided the Office of Muslim Affairs which is tasked with collecting the zakat and administering it. We know to whom zakat is due and the proportion to be spent on each. It is the duty of the officers to ensure that each will get the correct allocation. Thus the poverty and the needs of the Muslim ummah will be overcome. But the zakat is not meant for the able-bodied who are too lazy to work. There is no merit in receiving, only merit in giving. That is the teaching of Islam. And so everyone must try not to depend on charity but to work and earn their own upkeep when possible and then they too can donate and endow and receive merit for themselves in the afterlife.

18. It is sinful for a Muslim society not to strive to develop itself. Allah has showered us with all kinds of resources, not least of which is human resources. We are endowed with a strong body and a brain that can think and solve the problems affecting us. Some of us will depend on our hands and legs to perform numerous tasks and as we employ our limbs Allah will gradually increase our strength and our skills. We can become the finest craftsmen producing delicate works of art like the Moroccans and the Uzbeks. Somehow these skills will be inherited by our children through the generations.

19. It is the same with the brain, the acquisition of knowledge and reasoning skills. With repetition we will

acquire great thinking, deductive and reasoning skills. Through the generations we will become cleverer.

20. With these skills we can enrich ourselves and enrich our society. We can produce things and invent things, trade and manufacture. Muslims are great craftsmen and thinkers but for a long time they have stopped improving their production or their thinking. And so they keep on laboriously producing things by hand one by one. But the Muslim population and others has increased tremendously. Producing one by one by hand cannot supply the needs of the six billion plus people in the world. Because we do not know how to mass produce good products to meet the demand of a mass market, we have become poor. And because we are poor we are not as able as we should be to give alms and to endow towards the Muslim community.

21. We have not made use of what Allah has endowed us with the brains and the brawn and it would seem that we are ungrateful for what He has showered on us. On every occasion we pray for Allah's help but Allah will not help us because we have not helped ourselves. Those who say that it is Allah's will that we are poor have forgotten that the Quran has made it clear and I repeat, that all the bad things that happen to us are our own doing but all the good comes from Allah. If we are poor and oppressed, if we can expect no charity from Muslims who are all poor it is our fault and not Allah's will. If we want to fulfill the Islamic injunction that we be charitable then we must use our brains and brawn to enrich ourselves in order to be able to endow our wealth on the needy among us and to provide the amenities for the performance of what is obligatory (wajib) for us as Muslims. Mosques in particular should be endowed by the rich after they have paid their zakat and given alms to the poor. But we must also endow institutions of learning, research and development which can contribute to a better life for us and our capacity to defend ourselves.

22. It is clear that the teachings of Islam if followed by the ummah would result in an equitable and just society and a rich and powerful one. Islam does not preach absolute equality. The Quran is clear in this matter for Verse 21 Surah Al-Israa' states that Allah will elevate some people above others (in rank and in wealth). But the Quran also requires us to be charitable to the poor and to those below us by distributing our wealth through the zakat, alms and endowments. No one is prevented from acquiring wealth and through his own labour no one needs to be poor. But if he is poor despite his efforts to sustain himself then the charity of Muslims will ensure that he gets a share of the wealth earned by others. This Islamic system of managing the

inequities in human society is far better than any ideology invented by Man.

23. It is in order that Muslims can acquire halal wealth that they must acquire knowledge and the skills necessary to bring success to their enterprises. The quest for knowledge is the first step towards the fulfillment of the Muslim injunction to be charitable and to endow the wealth earned for the well-being of the Muslims and their need for institutions and facilities to perform their ritual and non-ritual obligations as Muslims. The acquisition of knowledge that can contribute to the well-being of the ummah is therefore a primary obligation. In addition of course the Muslim ummah would be rich and strong and capable of defending themselves. If today few Muslims can practise charity and they are often so oppressed and harassed by their enemies that they cannot even perform the solat, it is because the Muslims are poor in knowledge and skills, are unable to enrich their countries and strengthen them against aggression by their enemies. It is shameful and unIslamic that all we Muslims can do when the Israelis massacred the Palestinians in Jenin and elsewhere is to appeal to others for pity and for help. Clearly the Muslims have not been doing anything to change their own helplessness and they do not deserve to be helped by Allah. Remember that at Badar the small Muslim force fought against huge odds and Allah came to their help and gave them victory. The Muslim force did not fight because of anger. They did not just want to kill their enemy out of frustration. They fought as a force for Islam and they were victorious.

24. Equipping ourselves with knowledge and skills and using them to enrich ourselves and our countries is therefore the sine qua non of fulfilling the injunction of Islam to be charitable and to endow our wealth for the performance and propagation of our faith. The wealthier we are the more we can endow and the stronger will be the ummah.

25. I am ashamed that many among Muslims and non-Muslims have made fun of the OIC saying that it stands for Oh! I see. The implication is that we just see and we do nothing. Since its founding the OIC has not been remarkable for the things that it does. Indeed it is seldom that the members of the OIC can see eye to eye and agree on anything that needs to be done. Very often we are not even able to meet. Even the agencies we have created have not been able to deliver.

26. If I may be permitted to say it, we Muslims and our countries are not very Islamic. We cannot even regard each other as brothers. While the enemy is at the door we are busy trying to bring down governments and weakening ourselves in the process. The sad thing is that they do this in the name

of Islam. Yet if in the name of Islam we promote Muslim unity and if we act together even our weakness can be overcome.

27. In the pursuit of the teachings of Islam on charity we must at least agree to the process. There is much we can do by ourselves and much more that we can do together.

28. I hope that this Conference of Ministers of Endowments and Islamic Affairs can bring about greater cohesion and understanding of the aim of Islam and Endowment and the way we can fulfill this obligation of our religion. Islam is never wrong but the followers often are wrong in their interpretation and practice of Islam. Remember that the sad plight of the Muslims of today is our own doing, is due to our not really practising Islam.