

By : DATUK SERI SYED HAMID ALBAR
Venue : PUTRAJAYA
Date : 27 JANUARY 2005
Title : WELCOMING REMARKS AT THE OPENING SESSION OF THE MEETING OF THE OIC COMMISSION OF EMINENT PERSONS

The Honourable Dato' Seri Abdullah Ahmad Badawi
Prime Minister of Malaysia

Honourable Ministers, Deputy Ministers,
His Excellency Professor Dr. Ekmeleddin Ihsanoglu
Secretary General of the OIC

Excellencies, Distinguished Guests, Ladies and Gentlemen

Asalamualaikum Warahmatullahi Wabarakatuh and Good Morning

I would like to express my profound thanks and gratitude to the Honourable Dato' Seri Abdullah Ahmad Badawi, Prime Minister of Malaysia for his presence to officiate the Inaugural Meeting of the OIC Commission of Eminent Persons (CEP), this morning. Your presence, Sir, is indeed very significant and means a great deal to the members of the Commission. It certainly reflects Malaysia and your own personal commitment to the OIC.

2. I would also like to take this opportunity to welcome the illustrious scholars and intellectuals from fourteen OIC member countries who have been nominated by their respective governments as Commissioners. My warm welcome also goes to His Excellency Dr. Ekmeleddin Ihsanoglu, Secretary General of the OIC General Secretariat, who is here for the first time since assuming office in early January 2005.

3. Last but not the least, I would like to thank all the guests for your kind attendance at this opening ceremony this morning.

Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen

4. The Muslim world in the early 21st Century remains confronted with a range of challenges, including political-security matters to economic and technological. Globalization has indeed exacerbated these challenges, with its impact acutely felt on the Ummah. World- wide, the image of Islam and Muslims has suffered, primarily as a result of the perception of association with terrorism and poverty. These negative developments do not contribute to creating a climate of confidence in the world, which is vitally necessary for all of us, regardless of different faiths and beliefs, to live in peace and harmony.

5. Islam, as we all know is a religion of peace and justice. Islam is a truly universal religion which indeed promoted and thrived on globalization in its heydays. Indeed, it recognized no borders. Yet, today, as we witness another phase of globalization, the Muslims are perceived to be extremist, intolerant, and parochial. We remain bystanders to the process of change, rather than leading the process with clarity of thought and confident of the direction.

6. We, as part of the Ummah need to reflect on the profound challenges of our times. In fact, we need to understand the causes which ails the Ummah, within and in its relations with the rest of the world. We must address these impediments to our unity and the tensions and conflicts with those outside the Ummah. In an increasingly interdependent and pluralistic world, we have to strengthen our unity as well as remain fully engaged with the rest of the world. It is in the collective interest of the Ummah to work towards a world characterized by peace, justice and equitable development.

7. The Honourable Prime Minister of Malaysia has remained and fully seized with this matter. This is a matter close to his heart and ever in his thoughts. Later this morning, he will share with us his assessment of the situation and recommendations as to how we could respond to the needs of our times, consistent with the teachings of the Holy Book of Koran and the Hadith.

8. We are also grateful to the President of Pakistan, His Excellency General Pervez Musharraf for his initiative to sponsor the resolution on "Islam and the Muslim World in the 21st Century- the Path to Enlightened Moderation", a resolution which brought about the birth of the Commission.

9. At the 10th Session of the OIC Summit here in Putrajaya on the 17 October 2003, the OIC leaders, in recognition of the gravity of the challenges, agreed to the establishment of the Commission of Eminent Persons from OIC member countries. Today's inaugural session marks the fulfillment of the decision taken at Putrajaya. The Commission is expected to give fresh ideas, concrete proposals and viable plan of action to the OIC by the next Islamic Conference of Foreign Ministers, to be held in Yemen this year.

10. In accordance with the mandate given, the Commission has been tasked to look into three specific issues of concern, namely:

- To prepare a strategy and plan of action enabling the Islamic Ummah to meet the challenges of the 21st century;
- To prepare a comprehensive plan for promoting universally and in particular within Islamic societies policies and programmes for promoting enlightened moderation in true consonance with the injunctions of Islam and its principles of tolerance, emancipation and exaltation of humankind; and

- To prepare recommendations for reform and restructuring of the OIC system taking into account the efforts already initiated in this regard, as well as on the question of voluntary financing of OIC's activities and programmes.

11. The overall membership of the Commission is equally represented from African, Arab and Asian member states. At the beginning of its selection, the size of the Commission was restricted to 9 with 3 member states from each region. However, due to the overwhelming response and interest from other states to participate as well, the membership of the Commission has been increased to 18 including the Secretary General of the OIC. The composition of the Commission based on regions are Burkina Faso, The Gambia, Nigeria, Senegal and the Sudan, representing the African region; Egypt, Morocco, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, Yemen representing the Arab region; Iran, Indonesia, Kazakhstan, Malaysia, Pakistan and Turkey representing the Asian region.

12. As the host of the First Meeting of the CEP, Malaysia is indeed gratified and honoured at the high level of participation from such eminent personalities representing the intelligentsia of the Ummah. This clearly demonstrates our continued and abiding faith and commitment to our Organization and our desire and determination to better serve the Ummah.

13. With those brief remarks, I would like to thank the Honourable Prime Minister, once again, for his presence. I am confident, Sir, that the important address you are about to make to us this morning will guide the deliberations on this important subject of empowering the Ummah in meeting the challenges ahead.

14. May I conclude by wishing the Commission all success in achieving the mandate entrusted by our leaders.

Thank you.