



**MESSAGE OF
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ORGANIZATION OF ISLAMIC
COOPERATION
TO
THE 'AFRICAN INITIATIVE ON
EDUCATION FOR PEACE THROUGH
INTERRELIGIOUS AND INTERCULTURAL
DIALOGUE' SYMPOSIUM
COTONOU, 26 MAY 2015**

*Excellencies,
Distinguished Participants,
Ladies and Gentlemen,*

I would like to thank you all for inviting the Organization of Islamic Cooperation (OIC) to this august symposium on "*African Initiative on Education for Peace through Interreligious and Intercultural Dialogue*". The OIC attaches high importance to the issue. More so as it is being held at the initiative of the Republic of Benin, a key member state of the OIC.

During my recent meeting with the Hon'ble Foreign Minister His Excellency Prof. Nassirou Bako Arifari, in Jeddah at the OIC headquarters, I received detailed information on this laudable initiative, which is very important, not only to the African Region, but also to the world entirely. It is unfortunate that despite my sincere intention of attending the event, I am not being able to do so because of the 42nd OIC Council of Foreign Ministers, the annual decision making Council for the OIC. However, in order to register the OIC's presence and support for the event, I am sending this written message.

Excellencies,

We are in urgent need of intercultural and interreligious dialogue now more than ever before. For instance, if we consider the issue of Rohingya, the need would become more evident. I assume that each of us in this room is aware of what has been happening recently in Southeast Asia. Thousands of innocent Rohingya muslims had to flee their lands due to constant oppression and violence perpetrated by the Buddhist majority in Myanmar. Rohingya were oppressed on their land, many were reported to vanish in the wild sea while another thousands, starving and dying are now begging a pity from nearest lands they could reach. Certainly there are plenty of other examples such as those in Central African Republic, Nigeria, Sri Lanka, and so on, but the point that I wish to highlight is that from the perspective of multiculturalism, we should then pose questions to ourselves. Why should such calamity had to happen? Why should people, on the basis of perceived cultural and religious superiority, kill others simply because they are different? Why the state keep silent seeing the majority slaying the minority, again, simply because the government tends to represent the majority? Isn't there any better way to resolve and bridge such divergence?

Distinguished Participants,

We are now living in the 21st century, a century of identity, as it was called in Baku, Azerbaijan at the 3rd session of the World Forum of Intercultural Dialogue held on 17-18 May 2015. In this era of communication, internet and electronic mail, every one of us should admit that identities are not monolithic, since they reflect a multitude of collective experiences, memories, and references, which encompass differences of gender, class, race, and religion. Our current world has indeed made less and less sense

for any groups to dream of living exclusively within their boundaries of cultural or religious identities while failing other groups.

Therefore, I believe we need to educate people for peace through intercultural and interreligious dialogue as rightly reflected through the title of this symposium. Dialogue opens windows for mutual understandings. When undertaken with sincerity and mutual respect, it would generalize mutual acceptance among people coming from different cultural, ethnic and religious backgrounds. Eventually, mutual acceptance can lead to a more tolerant and receptive attitude that would restrain one party from attacking another.

Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen,

In the world marked by increasingly intermingling of cultures, efforts to safeguard peace through intercultural and interreligious dialogues assumes particular importance for national governments as well as for international community. Therefore, creating the culture of tolerance must be the responsibility of all, governments and non-governments, including international organizations; at national, regional, as well as international levels.

Complying with such responsibility, the OIC is now forging its follow up strategy of the OIC Ten Year Program of Action, which is called 'OIC 2025' to meet the challenges of the present and to formulate the vision for the future. This is a renewed commitment to increase the role of the organization in the promotion and maintenance of peace and security as well as conflict prevention and resolution. This new vision also underscores the centrality of intercultural dialogue as an effective means towards engendering a culture of peace, tolerance and mutual respect among peoples of different backgrounds and beliefs. The vision also aims to combat intolerance and promoting mutual coexistence. Dialogue, therefore, is part of the OIC's main approach for addressing key issues in international relations.

The OIC has also undertaken a wide variety of initiatives in this regard. A significant one would be in June, 2015 when on the sidelines of the 5th Session of Istanbul Process, which is an OIC initiative to promote tolerance and understanding on the basis of the Human Rights Council resolution 16/18 to combat intolerance, hatred, racial discrimination based on religion and faith, the OIC is going to sign off a Memorandum of Understanding with the Vienna-based institution specialized in interfaith and intercultural dialogues: the King Abdullah bin Abdulaziz International Centre for Interreligious and Intercultural Dialogue (KAICIID) with an aim to implement a series of programs and activities to promote interfaith, intercultural, and inter-civilizational dialogues around the world.

Finally, I wish to close this statement by reiterating my confidence that this symposium would be a step forward towards building desired narrative and discourse on the relevant area, and more particularly to reflect the African perspective on Interreligious Dialogue.

Wishing you all successful deliberations, I thank you.