

Organization of the Islamic Conference
34th Session of the Islamic Conference of Foreign Ministers

STATEMENT
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Your Excellency President Pervez Musharraf,
Excellencies,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

I would like to express our sincere gratitude to H.E. President Pervez Musharraf for having honoured the opening of the 34th session of the Islamic Conference of Foreign Ministers by his presence. I would also like to welcome today my eminent colleagues at this Session. I am grateful to the Government and brotherly people of the Islamic Republic of Pakistan for hosting this important event in their lovely capital, Islamabad. The excellent arrangements for this meeting, as well as warm hospitality extended to all delegates testify to the dedication of the Government of Pakistan towards ensuring the success of this Session.

I also thank the leaders of Malaysia, the current Chair of the Islamic Summit, for their continued support to the activities of the OIC.

I express my appreciation to OIC Secretary General Prof. Dr. Ekmeleddin Ihsanoglu and his team for their professionalism and dedication in preparation of this meeting.

Excellencies,

Our Session takes place one year after the 33rd ICFM Session held in my capital Baku, during which the OIC Ten-Year Programme of Action defining the Organization's vision for the 21st century was launched and a number of important resolutions aimed at implementation of reform and modernization of the OIC were adopted.

In 2006, my country in close cooperation with the OIC General Secretariat hosted two important events: the 33rd ICFM Session and the 5th Session of the Islamic Conference of Tourism Ministers.

As the ICFM Chairman, Azerbaijan has actively participated in all meetings within the OIC framework and offered its full support to the initiatives of the OIC Member States and the General Secretariat. These included chairing by Azerbaijan of the OIC Executive Meeting in New York to examine the current situation in Palestine, participation in the Special Meeting of the Extended OIC Executive Committee on the situation in Lebanon, annual Coordination Meeting of the OIC Foreign Ministers in New York, the first OIC Conference on the Role of Women in the Development of the OIC Member States in Istanbul, and the Expanded Emergency Meeting of the OIC Foreign Ministers on the situation around Al-Aqsa Mosque.

On September 3, 2006, President Ilham Aliyev of Azerbaijan together with the Speaker of the Turkish Parliament, the Prime Ministers of Turkey and Pakistan, the OIC Secretary General and other senior representatives from the OIC countries participated in the inauguration of the headquarters of the Islamic Conference Youth Forum for Dialogue and Cooperation in Istanbul, which was an accomplishment of one of the tasks established in the OIC Ten-Year Programme of Action.

In accordance with the 33 ICFM Declaration, on 26-28 April 2007, Azerbaijan hosted the OIC Conference on the Role of Media in the Development of Tolerance and Mutual Understanding. The Conference brought together officials from many governments and international organizations, members of parliaments, representatives of public and private media and NGOs from OIC and non-OIC countries, prominent experts in media development, inter-religious and intercultural communications. The Conference concluded that holding such OIC Media Conferences on a regular basis will enhance and promote the process of mutual understanding between religions and civilizations, peoples and cultures and emphasized the importance of the follow-up work to this end.

I would like to draw your attention to Azerbaijan's strong support to the positions of several OIC Member States in the framework of the UN Human Rights Council in Geneva, and to the work carried out by the OIC Group in New York under the

Azerbaijani chairmanship with regard to the grave situation around the Al-Aqsa Mosque.

In this context I would like to reiterate that establishment of the OIC Groups in non-OIC capitals and international organizations has been an important dimension for this Chairmanship. As you are aware, the OIC Groups in Vienna, Brussels and Washington have become fully functional, and they are already engaged in developing common positions of the Member States on a number of issues and presenting them to the host countries and the relevant international organizations.

Moreover, I would like to underline the establishment of the OIC-EU dialogue, which was carried out through these Groups. In general, strengthening the relations between the Islamic World and the West through further development of mutually beneficial dialogue has been one of the main priorities on this Chairmanship agenda.

Being aware of its obligations, Azerbaijan also joined the general agreement for economic, technical and commercial cooperation among the OIC Member States, the statute of the Standards and Metrology Institute for Islamic countries and the statute of the Islamic States Telecommunication Union.

On the basis of support expressed at the 33rd ICFM by the OIC Member States on the establishment of the OIC Conference of the Heads of Law-Enforcement Agencies, Azerbaijan is planning to host a meeting at the level of experts in preparation for this Conference.

I also would like to inform you that this June Azerbaijan as the Chairman of the Islamic Conference of Tourism Ministers is planning to host the OIC International Scientific Conference on the Role of Tourism in the Economies of the OIC countries.

By the initiative of First Lady of Azerbaijan, ISESCO Ambassador for dialogue among cultures and civilizations H.E. Mrs. Mehriban Aliyeva, Azerbaijan is intending to convene a forum in 2008 on the issue of literacy in the Islamic world from a global and comprehensive prospective, as well as to host the 4th Session of the Islamic Conference of Ministers of Higher Education and Scientific Research in September 2008.

During the period of its Chairmanship Azerbaijan together with many other OIC Member States participated in humanitarian assistance programmes through OIC and UN frameworks.

Excellencies,

Throughout its history, the Organization of the Islamic Conference has proved its immeasurable value, merging Islamic positions, strengthening Islamic solidarity and promoting better mutual understanding among OIC Member States. Its work in political, economic, social, cultural, information and other fields gained new momentum and importance in recent years. Sweeping changes around the political landscape of the world, emergence of new clusters of growing power often accompanied by heightened risks and threats, new paradigms of economic practices, reassessment of social values and major technological developments – all these demand OIC Member States to be united in meeting the challenges facing the Islamic Ummah. Towards this end, we need to reaffirm our commitment to Islamic solidarity, including support to the Member States who are facing threats, as mandated by the OIC Ten-Year Programme of Action.

Azerbaijan encourages all Member States to continue their efforts to reach conflict resolutions and dispute settlements in the Islamic world on the basis of the norms and principles of international law.

We witness that in recent years the values of our religion have been ignored by the extremists and terrorists and have been exploited by the enemies of the Islamic

world. We all have to assume our responsibility and meet our commitments in implementation of the Ten-Year Programme of Action, which marks the new era of joint Islamic action.

We should also encourage more active dialogue with other countries and their alliances and to develop new ways and means in order to show the true character of our great faith and to correct misconceptions. Preservation of the unity of the Ummah and avoidance of ideological conflicts among us is becoming indispensable in this context.

The economic and trade relations between the OIC Member States should become the focus of our attention as well. Economic and industrial integration, joint regional projects and initiatives, new investment opportunities for the benefit of our peoples would require further support and commitment from the OIC Member States.

Dear colleagues,

Taking this opportunity, I would like to reiterate our gratitude and appreciation to Custodian of the Two Holy Mosques King Abdullah Ibn Abdul Aziz of Saudi Arabia for his generous initiative and patronage to the agreement to set up a national unity government of Palestine.

Azerbaijan once again calls on the OIC Member States and international community to support and cooperate with the Palestinian national unity government. We are confident that it will enable the Palestinians to regain their inalienable rights to freedom, independence, and the establishment of an independent Palestinian State.

The dramatic situation observed in Iraq is absolutely intolerable and contradicts the principles of the Muslim brotherhood, and we must strengthen our joint efforts to immediately reverse this dramatic situation. To this end, we have to continue our support to sovereignty, independence and territorial integrity of Iraq and back the

Iraqi government in its efforts to provide security and stability throughout the whole of the country.

Azerbaijan has always been supportive for the important African dimension of the OIC. It is obvious that a lot still needs to be done in close cooperation with the OIC countries from this region. Let me express my sincere belief that the forthcoming Islamic Summit in Senegal will be an important event in this respect.

We are seriously concerned with the continuous grave situation in Afghanistan. The efforts of the OIC Member States to assist the people and government of this brotherly country should not be marginalised against the backdrop of the work of international community to provide security there. The OIC should increase its involvement in assistance to Afghanistan, in particular in the humanitarian field.

Availing myself of this opportunity, I would like to express Azerbaijan's sincere gratitude to the Islamic Ummah and the OIC Secretary General for continued support to the just cause of Azerbaijan to eliminate the consequences of the armed aggression by Armenia, which has resulted in the violation of our territorial integrity and occupation of 20 per cent of Azerbaijan's territory by Armenia. It is my sincere belief that the OIC's continued attention and support to Azerbaijan in this principled matter would be rendered to the full extent. In this context I would like to reiterate Azerbaijan's appreciation to the OIC General Secretariat for dispatch of the high-level OIC delegation to my country last year to assess the situation of nearly 1 million refugees and internally displaced persons, who fled their historic lands in Armenia and the occupied territories of Azerbaijan as a consequence of the Armenian aggression.

Excellencies,

The current process of reforms within the OIC initiated after the historic Extraordinary Makkah Summit of 2005 has to be continued and needs to be given a new impetus. The adoption of a new Charter of our Organization will serve this

cause, and it has to be stressed that deliberations around this issue are closely followed not only in our countries, but around the world. I am convinced that the adoption of the Charter has to be promptly followed by the general review of the procedures of our Organization. Focused attention to the increased efficiency of the Organization and other institutions belonging to the OIC family is also required. A more comprehensive process of restructuring of the Organization and the reform of the whole OIC system is being called for in order to modernize the Organization and promote the current causes of the Islamic world at this juncture.

Dear colleagues,

In conclusion, I would like to express our gratitude to OIC Secretary General Prof. Dr. Ekmeleddin Ihsanoglu and acknowledge his outstanding work done for the benefit of the Islamic Ummah. We all have witnessed his tiresome efforts, valuable contributions and timely initiatives on a wide range of issues important for the Islamic world, his meetings with leading politicians around the world to develop ongoing dialogue between civilizations, his contributions to the implementation of the OIC Ten-year Programme of Action. In particular, I would like to emphasize his work on preparation of the draft of new OIC Charter.

On behalf of my country I express my heartfelt gratitude to all OIC Member States and the OIC Secretary General for cooperation and support extended to Azerbaijan throughout the whole period of Chairmanship.

Finally, I would like to convey my best wishes of success to the incoming Pakistani Chairmanship and want to assure my brother, Foreign Minister of Pakistan H.E. Mr. Khurshid Kasuri of the willingness and determination of Azerbaijan to fully support the activities of Pakistan on this way.

Thank you.