

**Statement by Dr. Iftekhar Ahmed Chowdhury, Hon'ble Adviser for
Foreign Affairs of Bangladesh at the 34th Session of Islamic Conference
of Foreign Ministers (ICFM)
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Mr. Chairman
Secretary General
Distinguished delegates
Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen

I bring to all of you greetings from the Head of Government of Bangladesh, Chief Adviser, Dr. Fakhruddin Ahmed.

May I join my other colleagues in warmly congratulating the Chair, Mr. Mahmud Kasuri, upon the assumption of your responsibilities. I have not doubt that under your able stewardship our efforts to strengthen this organization and render it more effective will find fruition. I wish to make a particular reference to the special warmth in the bilateral relationship that Bangladesh and Pakistan enjoy. I should also place on record our deep appreciation to the Government of Pakistan for their most generous hospitality. Also, for making such excellent arrangements for our meeting, I would specially commend the Secretary General and his team. Azerbaijan's dynamic leadership of our body during her term was truly praiseworthy. We owe them a debt of gratitude. This is for their tireless endeavours, not just for the success of this conference though also that, but also for their leadership in guiding the work of the OIC. President Pervez Musharaf's inaugural words have set high standards for us. We hope to be able to meet his aspiration and ascend from the morass of degradation as he urged us to do.

The Muslim Ummah is passing through a critical phase. These are difficult times. The challenges we confront are multi-pronged. They are also daunting. It is almost as if parts of the world are gripped by a sense of 'Islamophobia'. This is an irrational fear of Islam and the Muslims. Even those who claim to be enlightened are not free from the influence of

such unmerited apprehensions. These flow from an ignorance of our religion. Also, of our peoples. Often Islam has been perceived to be equal to terrorism. This is both unjust and unfair. But this unfortunate and burgeoning phenomenon must be stopped in its tracks. It is for the OIC and other Islamic Organizations to coordinate actions to meet these challenges. They must be able to explain to the rest of the world that Islam and its adherents stand for good governance, rule of law, freedom of expression, human rights, transparency in economic and financial spheres, equality of women and justice for all.

As if these advertise were not enough to threaten the fabric of our societies, there are several political issues that have added enormously to our problems. Take for instance the subject of Palestine, which is by every rational calculation the core problem of the Middle East. We have been grappling with it since the inception of the OIC, but to little effect. Palestinians continue to suffer, and Israel continues to carry on its acts of aggression. There can be no resolution of this problem without a free sovereign and independent state for the Palestinians with Jerusalem as its capital. The Hamas led government in Palestine is legitimate. We are beholden to His Majesty King Abdullah, the Guardian of the two holy shrines for his contribution in this regard. It deserves recognition in consonance with the principle of democracy. They must forge the kind of unity among themselves that is absolutely a prerequisite for their success. We would urge upon the international community, especially the Quartet, to exert pressure on Israel to conform to acceptable behaviour pattern in conformity with the key UN resolutions. The construction of settlements and the Wall, or the Barrier of Shame, must stop forthwith. Israel must also render the Palestinians revenues that are rightly theirs. The refugees must be allowed to return. There must be a total and negotiated solution based on the Road Map and on the Land for Peace formula.

As we are gathered here, Iraq continues to bleed. An entire civilization, one of the greatest the world has ever seen, is threatened as it being, is laid in ruins. The hopes of the Iraqis once raised, are shattered to smithereins. The wealth and resources of the Iraqis are being drained. Iraqis must, themselves, take over the control of their own destiny. Only

then can they secure the political reconciliation, territorial integrity, sovereignty, security, peace and development so crucial to the reconstruction, rehabilitation and stability of their society and country. The OIC should create a cell specifically devoted to the resolution of the crisis in Iraq.

In Afghanistan we support President Hamed Karzai in his praiseworthy efforts to bring his people out of strife and terror. Bangladesh has assured him that we stand solidly behind his government and people. Recently we were delighted to welcome Afghanistan to its rightful place in SAARC. The Bonn process must continue. We will spare no efforts to partner the Afghans in their development activities. This is a pledge to make efforts not only through our government but also through our NGOs and civil society. Already some workers of BRAC are working deep inside Afghanistan. We welcome the Ankara Declaration as well as Turkey's Efforts in bringing it to fruition. In similar vein, in the new emerging spirit of South Asia, we hope there will be sustainable peace between Pakistan and India.

Mr. Chairman,

Let me announce unequivocally that Bangladesh condemns terrorism on all its forms and manifestations. Terrorists have perpetrated brutality in every part of the World. Bangladesh, too, has not been spared. There can be no trafficking with their ilk, and the menace must be combated across the broadest possible spectrum. OIC can and must cooperate with the UN in this regard. But no stone must be left unturned in ensuring that this evil is not being allowed to be linked to religion. Nor to legitimate struggles for national liberation. We cannot encourage the flourishing of a political culture where only the inconvenient opponent is dubbed a terrorist only to demonize him.

Bangladesh, as a signatory to international conventions against terrorism, both globally and regionally, is in the process of enacting and modifying relevant domestic laws for their effective implementation at the national level. We are also carefully examining the OIC Convention on the subject with a view to become a party to it. We hope that OIC will

be able to act in line with its commitment to totally eliminating terrorism in all its dimensions.

OIC needs to be reformed, and recharged. Bangladesh enthusiastically supports the initiative to revise its charter. Also to revamp its image. It is our belief that it will enable our organization to respond better to our changing times and new circumstances. We anticipate that the expansion of activities of the organization will reflect the altered Charter. For instance we must redouble our cooperation to address corruption, the evil that is haunting us. As to the name, we favour Organization of Muslim countries. We believe it will project a more moderate image for the organization. It will be the acknowledgement of the great contributions Muslims have been making throughout the ages to the evolution of human civilization.

Mr. Chairman,

There is no denying the fact that today Science and Technology demand priority. But sadly within the Ummah we appear to be lagging behind on this score. Vision 1441 adopted by the 10th Islamic Summit in October 2003 emphasizes our commitment to knowledge and to using science and technology to advance the well-being of our peoples. It is a worthy initiative, deserving of our whole-hearted support. In this connection allow me to make a mention of the Islamic University of Technology in Bangladesh. We deeply appreciate the support we have received to-date, and hope for the early clearance of unpaid contributions. We also expect that degrees accorded by it receive due recognition throughout the Muslim world. We look to your cooperation in furthering strengthening its stature as a centre of excellence for scientific learning.

There is an important point I wish to make before I conclude. It often appears that our organization has a disproportionate tilt in favour of political issues. Even if this be a mere perception it must be corrected, and the way to do it would be to underscore its economic and social programmes. We welcome Malaysia's initiations on the World Islamic Economic Forum. Development must be brought to the central core of the OIC's economic activities. Those who have the means and

wherewithal should come out with a more structured support to the development of the more under-privileged among us. Take the LDCs among the OIC Members for instance. There should be special programme designed to enhance their supply-side capacity and accord their products free and unimpeded access into the more affluent OIC Member States. Disparities between Muslim nations are unislamic. The Secretariat should also establish a mechanism to assess the achievement of MDGs by the Islamic countries. Bangladesh wholeheartedly supports the setting up of an Islamic Common Market. We believe it would

Ideas emanating from many OIC countries are helping transform positively the landscape of many developing countries. Take micro-credit and non-formal education for women, leading to their emancipation of mainstreaming, two concepts that have originated mainly in Bangladesh. We have ourselves profited immensely from it as have many others of comparable standing. We want to share these “best practices” with our Islamic brethren everywhere and would be happy to have the OIC act as a conduit. We should also develop a methodology to put our intellectual and material resources in an organized manner to advance our economic and social progress. To go beyond the rhetorics, and translate these lofty sentiments into practice, in our view it would be a good idea for the Chair to establish a Group of Eminent Persons from the Muslim world to evaluate our assets and capabilities in this regard and press them into the service of the Ummah. The call of the time is for modernization. We must respond effectively to it or risk withering away. Failure in this regard cannot be an option. The sooner we became aware about this reality the better for all of us. Our peoples deserve to relive the wondrous glory which our forefathers had justly earned. And to which we can indeed claim to be successors.