

# OIC

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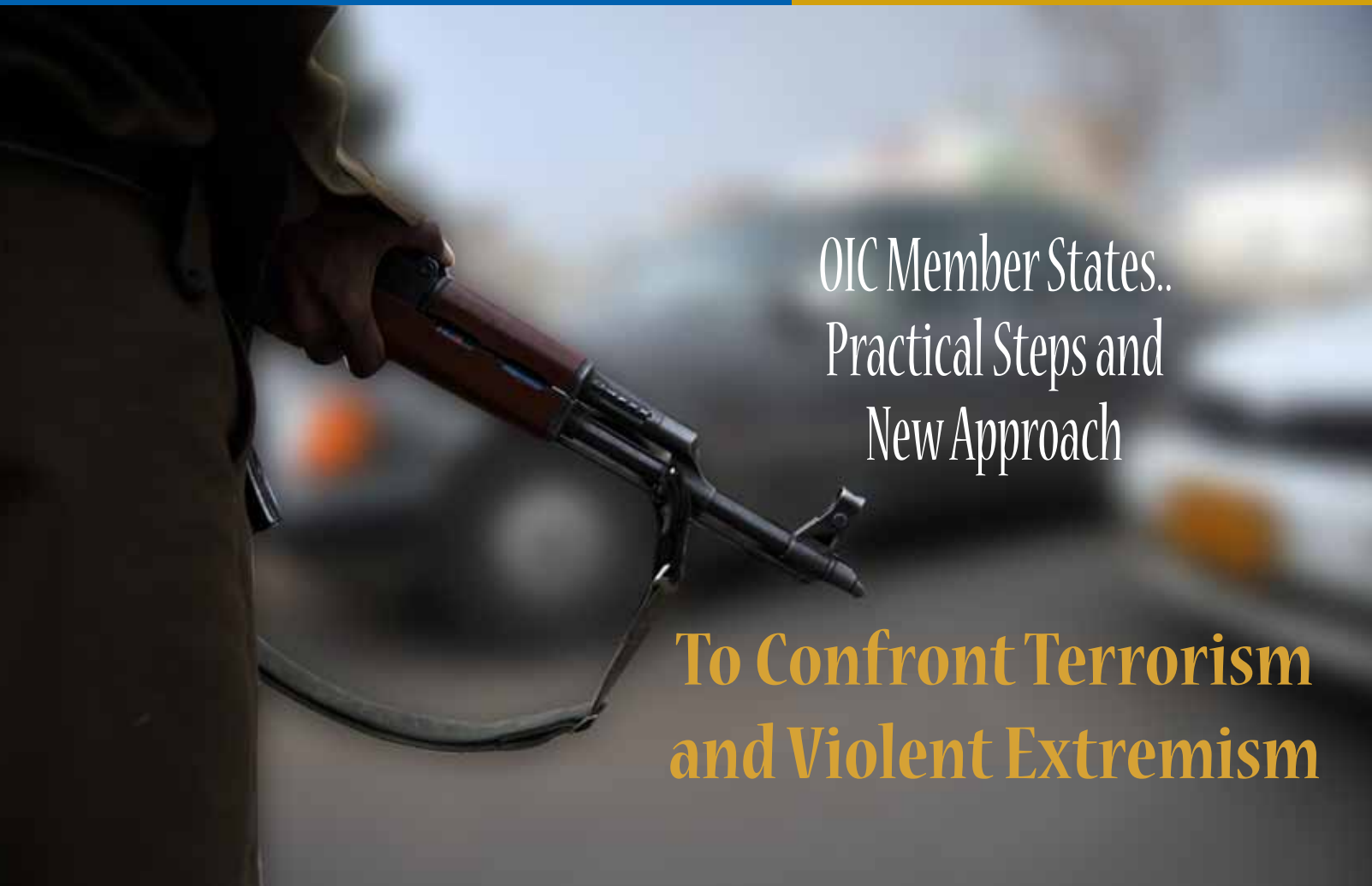
Issue No. 29

# Journal



International Islamic Fiqh Academy  
Visiting Al-Quds  
Permissible and Recommended

The World Turns its Back on  
**Syrian Refugees**  
and Displaced



OIC Member States..  
Practical Steps and  
New Approach

**To Confront Terrorism  
and Violent Extremism**

# About OIC

The Organization of Islamic Cooperation (OIC) is the second largest inter-governmental organization after the United Nations with a membership of 57 states spread over four continents. The Organization is the collective voice of the Muslim world. It endeavors to safeguard and protect the interests of the Muslim world in the spirit of promoting international peace and harmony among various peoples of the world.

Originally named The Organization of the Islamic Conference, it was established pursuant a decision adopted by the historical summit which took place in Rabat, Kingdom of Morocco, on 12th Rajab 1389 AH/ 25 September 1969 AD, following the criminal arson of Al-Aqsa Mosque in occupied Jerusalem.

In 1970 the first ever meeting of Islamic Conference of Foreign Minister (ICFM) was held in Jeddah which decided to establish a permanent secretariat in Jeddah headed by the organization's secretary general. Mr. Iyad Ameen Madani is the 10th Secretary General who assumed the office in January 2014.

The first OIC Charter was adopted by the 3rd ICFM Session held in 1972. The Charter was amended to keep pace with the developments that have unraveled recently across the world. The 11th Islamic Summit held in Dakar in March 2008 endorsed the new Charter, which has become the pillar of the OIC future Islamic action in line with the requirements of the 21st century. The new Charter provides for the dissemination and safeguard of Islamic teachings and values based on moderation and tolerance, as well as the need to strive for the projection and defense of the true image of Islam. The new Charter also called for encouraging inter-civilizational and interfaith dialogue. Over the last 40 years, the OIC membership has grown from its founding members of 30 to 57 states. In 2011 in Astana, Khazakhstan, the 38th Council of Foreign Ministers endorsed changing the emblem and name to Organization of Islamic Cooperation.

The Organization has the singular honor of galvanizing the Ummah into a unified voice and representing Muslims by espousing all causes close to the hearts of over 1.5 billion Muslims in the world. The Organization has consultative and cooperative relations with the UN and other inter-governmental organizations to protect the vital interests of the Muslims and to work for the settlement of conflicts and disputes involving Member States. In safeguarding the true values of Islam and Muslims, the organization has taken various steps to remove misperceptions and have strongly advocated elimination of discrimination against Muslims in all forms and manifestations. It has also engaged in fighting Islamophobia by setting up a dedicated observatory to track and monitor the phenomenon and its disturbing manifestations .

The Member States of the OIC face many challenges in the 21st century. To address these challenges, the 3rd Extraordinary Session of the Islamic Summit held in Makkah in December 2005, laid down a blue print called the Ten-Year Program of Action (TYPOA) which envisages joint action by the Member States, promotion of tolerance and moderation, modernization, extensive reforms in all spheres of activities including science and technology, education, and development of trade. It also emphasizes good governance and the promotion of human rights in the Muslim world, especially with regard to the children's and women's rights as well as family values enshrined in Islamic Shariah [law].

One of the outstanding achievements since the adoption of the Ten-Year Programme of Action (TYPOA) has been the recent reinvigoration and restructuring of the various OIC bodies. Among the OIC's key bodies the Islamic Summit, the Council of Foreign Ministers (CFM), the General Secretariat, in addition to the Al-Quds Committee chaired by the king of the Kingdom of Morocco, as Al-Quds remains the paramount issue on the OIC's agenda, and three permanent committees, one of which is concerned with science and technology (COMSTECH) that is chaired by the President of the Islamic Republic of Pakistan, the second committee is concerned with economy and trade (COMCEC) which is chaired by the President of the Republic of Turkey, while the third one is concerned with information and culture (COMIAC) which is chaired by the President of Senegal.

The OIC has subsidiary organs, notably Statistical, Economic and Social Research and Training Centre for the Islamic Countries (SESRIC), the Research Center for Islamic History, Art and Culture (IRCICA), the International Islamic Fiqh Academy (IIFA) and the Islamic Center for the development of Trade (ICDT). Other specialized organs operating under the OIC include the Islamic Development Bank (IDB) and the Islamic Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (ISESCO). There are also affiliated organs such as the Islamic Chamber of Commerce and Industry (ICCI) and the Islamic World Academy of Sciences (IAS). The OIC subsidiary, affiliated and specialized organs play a vital role in boosting cooperation in various fields among the OIC Member States.

*For more details, visit the OIC website at*  
[www.oic-oci.org](http://www.oic-oci.org)



نظام التعاون الإسلامي  
OIC - OCI

# OUR MESSAGE



**Iyad Madani**

*OIC Secretary General*

*There is a strong rationale for scientific and technological collaboration between the OIC countries given its benefits in terms of pooling of expertise, facilities and resources as well as strengthening cooperation and collaboration.*

## Collaboration in science and technology is a strategic imperative

Science, Technology and Innovation are key drivers for socio-economic development in the 21st century. Development and application of new technologies will be crucial for addressing the contemporary challenges of poverty, disease, water, energy and food security, climate change and environment. Better, cheaper and smarter techniques will be required across all sectors if we are to raise the living standards of our people in a sustained manner, feed our growing populations, keep our children healthy and protect the environment.

The OIC Vision 1441H on Science and Technology, adopted by the 10th Islamic Summit Conference held in Putrajaya, Malaysia, and the OIC Ten year Program of Action, adopted by the 3rd Extraordinary Islamic Summit Conference held in Makkah in 2005, attach high premium to the promotion and advancement of science and technology, higher education, health issues and protection of environment.

The thrust of OIC science agenda is on providing a platform for S&T collaboration among the member states and international partners. However, it is a well-known fact that strategic partnerships in S&T cannot be sustainable without a supportive eco-system on science, technology and innovation (STI). The OIC programs and activities in science and technology therefore place special emphasis on creating and strengthening the STI institutional framework in member states, building capacities of scientists and science policy makers, assisting in the development of educated work force and promoting linkages between public and private innovation actors, enterprises committed to research and development.

OIC institutions including COMSTECH, SESRIC, ISESCO, IAS and IDB are running several capacity building programs that focus on capacity-building in specialties ranging from science policy and management, technology absorption, science teaching, and frontier technologies such as nano and biotechnologies, information and communication technologies. OIC institutions have been assisting member states in the establishment of S&T bodies such as national science commissions, academies of sciences, and S&T parliamentary committees that can contribute to the development of science and technology as a matter of government policies.

Another crucial pre-requisite for fostering meaningful STI collaborations among member states is identification of areas of strengths, and linking technology with the required knowledge and skills. STI mapping and foresight therefore becomes crucial in terms of identifying opportunities for collaboration and selection of the right partners. With a view to facilitating this objective the OIC, in collaboration with the Royal Scientific Society of UK and other international partners, has implemented a project on Atlas of Islamic World Science and Innovation project. Under this project key trends and trajectories in science and technology-based innovation in selected OIC Member States were mapped. Country reports on Egypt, Indonesia, Jordan, Kazakhstan and Malaysia have been published. A follow up program is being initiated to cover all OIC member states.

In collaboration with the IDB and IAEA, the OIC General Secretariat is pursuing projects for the strengthening and establishment of cancer radiotherapy facilities in the OIC member states in Africa, where cancer has become one of the major causes of death. Likewise, projects on isotope hydrology and mosquito sterilization are being pursued in earnest in collaboration with the IDB and IAEA. These projects highlight the potential of regional cooperation in tackling the challenges of disease, access to safe drinking water and other developmental issues.

There is a strong rationale for scientific and technological collaboration between the OIC countries given its benefits in terms of pooling of expertise, facilities and resources as well as strengthening cooperation and collaboration.

The OIC Summit on Science and Technology, which will be the first ever heads of state/government meeting dedicated to S&T, will provide an opportunity to the member states to collectively articulate our priorities and agree on a roadmap for reinvigorating the OIC agenda on science, technology and innovation. It is hoped that the event, scheduled for later this year, will become a milestone in terms of our objective to revive the golden age of science in the Islamic World.

Our endeavor is to focus on the utilization of science and technology to solving the daily life problems of the common people. This will not only make OIC more relevant to its people but will also directly contribute to the promotion of culture that values science.

Furthermore, reviving our scientific and technological advancement and the lost heritage of the Muslim world, which was known for its pursuit of knowledge and fertility in innovation, will help shatter the negative stereotypes about Muslims. Technological collaboration also yields political dividends in terms of opening up new channels of communications and bringing communities together, fostering bonds of solidarity and paving the way for the resolution of more intricate political issues. Intra-OIC collaboration in science and technology is a strategic imperative.

# OIC Journal

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## OIC Related Links

### Subsidiary Organs

The International Islamic Fiqh Academy (IIFA) [www.fiqhacademy.org](http://www.fiqhacademy.org)  
The Statistical, Economic and Social Research and Training Center for Islamic Countries (SESERIC) [www.sesertic.org](http://www.sesertic.org)  
The Research Center for Islamic History, Art and Culture (IRCICA) [www.ircica.org](http://www.ircica.org)  
The Islamic Center for the Development of Trade (ICDT) [www.icdt-oic.org](http://www.icdt-oic.org)  
The Islamic University of Technology (UIT) [www.iutoic-dhaka.edu](http://www.iutoic-dhaka.edu)

### Specialized Institutions and Organs

The Islamic Development Bank (IDB) [www.isdb.org](http://www.isdb.org) International Islamic News Agency (IINA) [www.islamicnews.org.sa](http://www.islamicnews.org.sa)  
The Islamic States Broadcasting Organization (ISBO) [www.isboo.org](http://www.isboo.org)  
The Islamic Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization in Rabat (ISESCO) [www.isesco.org.ma](http://www.isesco.org.ma)  
Islamic World Academy of Sciences (IAS) [www.ias-worldwide.org](http://www.ias-worldwide.org)

### Affiliated Institutions

Islamic Chamber of Commerce and Industry (ICCI) [www.icci-oic.org](http://www.icci-oic.org)  
Organization of Islamic Capitals and Cities (OICC) [www.oicc.org](http://www.oicc.org)  
Organization of the Islamic Shipowners Association (OISA) [www.oisaonline.com](http://www.oisaonline.com)  
World Federation of Arab Islamic International Schools (WFAIS) [www.wfais.org](http://www.wfais.org)  
Islamic Conference Youth Forum for Dialogue and Cooperation (ICYF-DC) [www.icyf.com](http://www.icyf.com)  
Islamic World Academy of Sciences (IAS) [www.ias-worldwide.org](http://www.ias-worldwide.org)

## OIC Calendar: May – August 2015

- 3-5 May:** 10th Board of Directors Meeting, 8th General Assembly of SMIIIC, SMIIIC Forum 2015 – Dubai, UAE
- 6-7 May:** OIC Intergovernmental Experts Group Meeting on OIC-2025: Programme of Action – Jeddah, OIC Headquarter, Saudi Arabia
- 12-14 May:** 2nd Meeting of Vaccines Manufacturers Group – Tunisia
- 19-20 May:** Third Humanitarian Forum – Doha, Qatar
- 27-28 May:** 42nd Session of the Council of Foreign Ministers – Kuwait City, Kuwait
- 3-5 June:** First Meeting of National Focal Points on Water Affairs – Istanbul, Turkey
- 3-5 June:** Meeting of Focal Points for OIC Water Vision – Istanbul, Turkey
- 3-4 June:** 5th Session of Istanbul Process for Implementing UNHRC Resolution 16/18 – Jeddah, OIC Headquarter, Saudi Arabia
- 10-11 June:** 40th Session of Board of Governors of the IDB – Maputo, Mozambique
- 9-10 October:** 6th Islamic Conference of Environment Ministers – Rabat, Morocco



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## Combating Terror and Violent Extremism in OIC Member States Discussed at OIC Executive Committee Meeting

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### Condemning attacks and killings by DAESH, Boko Haram, Al-Shabab group and Al-Qaeda



Prince Turki bin Mohammed bin Saud Al-Kabeer enter the meeting room with Secretary General of the Organization of Islamic Cooperation Iyad Ameen Madani

JEDDAH: An agreement on implementing urgent measures to combat terrorism in OIC Member States and ward off the threats posed by violent extremism in the Muslim world was reached at an OIC Executive Committee meeting at the Ministerial Level. The meeting on "Combating Terrorism and Violent Extremism" was called for by OIC Secretary General Iyad Ameen Madani and held on Feb. 15 at the OIC General Secretariat Headquarters in Jeddah.

During the event, the OIC Executive Committee called for a meeting of legal experts to revise the OIC Convention of 1999 and introduce mechanisms to counter new types of terrorism in OIC Member States. The Committee also requested more discussions on cross border terrorism through conferences, seminars and workshops with the participation of politicians and religious and community leaders. It further called for an urgent meeting of experts to seek ways

to confront threats to cyber security, and to work with Member States in confronting and remedying the causes of sectarian violence.

In the fight to counter terrorism, the OIC was urged to partner with regional and international organizations. The “International Counter Terrorism Center of the UN” was also highlighted as an important development in coordinating global counter-terrorism efforts. The Committee further commended the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia for contributing \$110 million to support the center.

The group also urged the OIC to work with Member States to seek ways to empower the youth and those at risk of being exploited by terrorist groups to make them less susceptible to becoming radicalized. It also called for a series of meetings, workshops, symposia and conferences of religious scholars, academics and social scientists to study and dismantle extremist and sectarian discourse.

Commenting on the situation in Occupied Palestine, the Committee condemned the continuous violations of the basic rights of the Palestinian people and state-orchestrated Israeli terror, especially in Al-Quds. It also condemned the blockade of the Gaza Strip which it said was in total disregard for international law.

The so-called Islamic State (DAESH) was further earmarked for condemnation, especially its barbaric immolation of Jordanian pilot Mo’az Al-Kasabab. The Committee also highlighted that OIC Member States stood in solidarity with Jordan’s king, government and people in efforts to counter terrorism and extremism; it further expressed appreciation for the sacrifices of the Jordanian Armed Forces and urged the international community to work closely with authorities in Jordan to bring DAESH militants to justice.

Terrorism across the world perpetrated by DAESH, Boko Haram, Al-Shabab, Al-Qaeda and other similar terror groups was also condemned. Acts of terror particularly noted for condemnation included: the Nov. 24 attack on a volleyball stadium in the Yahyakhail district of Afghanistan, the Dec. 16 attack on a school in Peshawar, the Jan. 28 attack on the Corinthia Hotel in Tripoli, ter-

rorism in Egypt including the Jan. 29 attack in the Sinai Peninsula, and the actions of Boko Haram, especially the kidnapping of hundreds of schoolgirls in Chibok.

The Committee also stressed that terrorism stands contrary to both Islamic and universal human values, adding that these groups follow radical extremist ideology and are involved in the flow of arms and fighters. The OIC Executive Committee further commended the efforts of Member States in confronting terrorism in line with the OIC Charter and other relevant international agreements.

The worsening political and security situation in the Republic of Yemen was also discussed at the meeting. The OIC Executive Committee called on all sides to peacefully resume the political process in line with the terms of reference of the GCC Initiative and to implement UNSC resolution 2140 (2014). It further rejected the unilateral actions of the Houthi militia and their attempts to alter the structure and nature of Yemeni society. The group further announced its support for Yemen’s legally recognized government.

The OIC Executive Committee also expressed its solidarity with Nigeria and countries in the Lake Chad Basin in the face of problems associated with Boko Haram. It also welcomed efforts to establish a Multi-National Joint Task Force as a platform to coordinate actions to combat the group which continues to pose a threat to the region’s peace and stability.

The meeting was opened and chaired by His Highness Prince Turki bin Mohamed bin Saud Al-Kabeer Al Saud, who is also the undersecretary of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs for Bilateral Relations. In his opening speech, Prince Turki outlined the importance of the meeting as a venue to discuss terrorism from all angles, including its roots and causes, as well as concluding with a unified vision to combat and address the problem politically, militarily, academically, socially and economically, and in terms of security and intelligence.

Prince Turki also spoke about Saudi Arabia’s efforts to effectively tackle terrorism, including convening the first international counter-terrorism conference in the Kingdom in February 2005 and in which it proposed the

establishment of the “International Counter Terrorism Center of the UN.”

OIC Secretary General Iyad Ameen Madani said that combating terrorism cannot be realized through security and military means alone and that it is necessary to develop a robust plan that addresses economic deprivation, exclusion, alienation, separation and marginalization.

Madani called for undermining the rhetoric of terrorists and extremists who attempt to legitimize violence by citing religion and claiming cultural superiority. He also called for the problem of sectarian violence to be addressed and the need to counter attempts to politicize sectarian differences.

The Secretary General also called for taking into consideration the potential of external actors penetrating terrorist and extremist groups for the purpose of serving their own political agenda. Furthermore, he stressed on the need to understand the role of media and the emergence of cyber terrorism with terrorist groups using new information and communication technologies.

The Executive Committee Meeting was held following an invitation from the OIC Secretary General to discuss terrorism in light of an increase in the problem in some OIC Member States. The OIC Executive Committee is composed of the troika of the Islamic Summit (Egypt, Senegal and Turkey), the troika of Foreign Ministers (Saudi Arabia, Guinea and Kuwait) and the OIC Secretary General.



## OIC Delegation Calls for Activating the Quartet and Stresses that Al-Aqsa is Under Attack OIC Delegation Visits Oslo, Moscow and Beijing to Mobilize Support for Palestine



A ministerial delegation set up by the OIC Foreign Ministers visited several countries in February to raise awareness about the Palestinian issue and deliver the message of the OIC regarding Israel's aggressions against the Palestinian people, their land and sanctities and its violation of international conventions.

Within a matter of weeks, the group visited Oslo, Moscow and Beijing, and are to visit other countries in the near future. On the first leg of its mission, the delegation—led by Egyptian Foreign Minister Sameh Shoukry—visited Norway on Feb. 5 and met Norwegian Foreign Minister Borge Brinde. Other members of the delegation included Palestinian Foreign Minister Riyad Al-Malki, Guinean Foreign Minister Lounceny Fall, OIC Secretary General Iyad Ameen Madani and the Special Envoy of the Foreign Ministry of Azerbaijan.

Members of the delegation spoke about Israel's actions that have led to the failure of the peace process that is nearly 25 years old. They added that successive Israeli governments have changed the facts on the ground, intensified the Judaization of Al-Quds, built settlements, doubled the number of Jewish settlers in the West Bank to 600,000, constructed the Apartheid wall and indiscriminately attacked Palestinians.

The delegation emphasized that the situation in Palestine cannot continue as it is and that future negotiations or peace processes must be based on clear political terms, timeframes and international guarantees.

The group also expressed its appreciation for Norway's positions and close ties with OIC Member States, adding that it hopes Norway will play a role in supporting the Palestinians to end the occupation and achieve independence.

Issues discussed included the Judaization of Al-Quds, desecration of Muslim and Christian holy sites, the position of Al-Aqsa Mosque in Islam and for Muslims the world over, and the risk of drawing the entire region into a religious conflict with dire consequences because of Israel's actions.

Brinde expressed an understanding and appreciation of the messages, and pledged that his country will continue playing a his-

torical role in building peace and stability in the region. He also reiterated Norway's support for the two-state solution and the Arab Peace Initiative, and stressed that settlements are illegal and undermine peace.

Al-Maliki said the Palestinian's patience for Israel has been exhausted and that condemnation from the international community is no longer sufficient. He added that this visit and future visits are aimed at sounding an alarm and calling for action before it is too late. He also called on the international community to assume responsibility to end the occupation.

In the second leg of its tour, the delegation met Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov in Moscow on Feb. 25. Talks were held over two days. The delegation expressed appreciation for Russia's support for the Palestinians, and calls for ending the occupation, resolving the

conflict and establishing a Palestinian state.

The delegation reiterated the important role Russia can play to ensure stability in the Middle East, and called for the role of the Quartet and the Security Council to be enhanced to end Israel's violations and achieve a just and comprehensive political solution to the problem.

Lavrov reaffirmed that Moscow would do its best to restart the work of the Quartet, and also pledged his country would continue its historical role in building peace and stability in the region.

The delegation also visited Beijing where a meeting was held with Chinese Vice President Li Yuanchao who commended the strong relations, shared positions and common goals that China shares with OIC Member States. Yuanchao also reiterated China's support for the legitimate rights of Palestinians and noted China's readiness to enhance its cooperation with the OIC and investing in peace-making.

Yuanchao also drew attention to China's proposed initiative for settling the conflict; this included supporting Palestinian rights to establish a completely sovereign and independent state along the 1967 borders with East Al-Quds as its capital, and ending settlements and Israel's illegal actions against Palestinians.

During the discussions, Yuanchao highlighted the close and long-term cooperation between China and the OIC member states, China's constant support for the Palestinian cause and its recent vote in support of an Arab resolution at the UN Security Council calling for a timeline ending Israeli occupation. He added that China will spare no effort to support the legitimate rights of Palestinians and an independent Palestine with East Al-Quds as its capital.

Yuanchao also reaffirmed China's condemnation of Israeli actions, especially illegal settlements, and calls on Israel to stop its negative behavior, including its blockade of the Gaza Strip. He added that China is willing to join the Quartet, supports approaching the Security Council to assume its responsibilities and will continue supporting Palestinian rights in international forums.



## **OIC Condemns the Construction of 450 New Settlement Units, Calls on the International Community to Assume Its Responsibility**

The Organization of Islamic Cooperation (OIC) condemned on February 3, 2015 in the strongest terms the decision of the Israeli occupation authorities to approve the construction of 450 new settlement units on the Palestinian occupied territories.

The OIC considers that the continuation of the policy of expansion and construction of Israeli settlements on the territories of the State of Palestine occupied since 1967, including East Jerusalem, is a war crime and a flagrant violation of the international law and international legitimacy resolutions. It called on the international community, particularly the UNSC, to put pressure on Israel, the occupying power, in order to compel it to halt all settlement activities in the Palestinian occupied territories, including the occupied city of Al-Quds.

## **Belgium Parliament's Resolution Recognising the State of Palestine Welcomed**

The Secretary General of the Organization of Islamic Cooperation (OIC), Iyad Ameen Madani, welcomed on February 8, 2015 the decision by the Belgian parliament to recognize the State of Palestine. He described it as an important move that would contribute to peace and stability in the region, even as it constitutes a support for the legitimate national rights of the Palestinian people including the establishment of sovereignty of their independent state on the 1967 borders with Al-Quds Ash-Sharief as its capital.

The Secretary General expressed his hope that the Belgian government would take the initiative to recognize the State of Palestine in accordance with the United Nations General Assembly resolution of 29 February 2012.

## **Madani Reviews with Dr. Mahmoud Al Habbash Developments in the Holy City of Al-Quds**

Iyad Ameen Madani, Secretary General of the Organization of Islamic Cooperation (OIC) met on February 24, 2015 in his office with Dr. Mahmoud Al Habbash, Attorney General and Advisor to the Palestinian President on religious affairs and Islamic relations. The two parties discussed the developments relevant to the Palestine cause and in particular the Israeli occupant's exactions in terms of violations and aggressions in the City of Al-Quds, and ways and means to support and consolidate the Palestinian citizens' steadfastness there.

## **OIC Secretary General Condemns Attacks on a Mosque and Church by Settlers**

The Secretary General of the Organization of Islamic Cooperation (OIC), Iyad Ameen Madani, strongly condemned on March 1, 2015 the torching of Al-Huda Mosque, west of Bethlehem and of a Greek Orthodox Church building in occupied Al-Quds (Jerusalem) by a group of extremist settlers. He stated that these attacks on Islamic and Christian holy sites are an organized terrorism carried out by Israeli settlers against the Palestinian people, their property, and holy sites.

Madani added that this heinous crime is taking place in the context of continuing attacks and aggression against the Palestinian people and their holy sites. He held the Israeli occupation fully responsible for the consequences of the continuation of these grievous acts, which are a flagrant violation of international norms and charters. The Secretary General stressed that the OIC would continue to expose and counter the occupation's criminal and racial policies against the Palestinian people, territory and holy sites. He called on the international community, particularly the Security Council, to act to stop these violations, provide protection for the Palestinian people, prevent recurrence of these Israeli crimes which fuel violence and tension in the region, and bring its perpetrators to account.

## **OIC Secretary General receives Jordanian Minister of Awqaf, Islamic Affairs and Holy Places**

The Secretary General of the Organization of Islamic Cooperation (OIC), Iyad Amin Madani, received in his office on 24 February 2015, the Minister of Awqaf, Islamic Affairs and Holy Places of Jordan, Dr. Hayel Abdul-Hafeez Dawood. They reviewed the excellent relations between the OIC and the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan and the OIC efforts to consolidate the steadfastness of the City of Al-Quds Ash-Sharif.

Madani expressed the OIC deep gratitude for the efforts of the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan in maintaining the Islamic holy places in Al-Quds Ash-Sharif and the Blessed Al-Aqsa Mosque.

On his part, Dr. Hayel asserted the Jordanian support to the OIC efforts and all the initiatives launched in favor of the City of Al-Quds Ash-Sharif and the steadfastness of Maqdisites.

## **Madani Welcomes Palestine's Accession to the International Criminal Court**

The Secretary General of the Organization of Islamic Cooperation (OIC), Iyad Ameen Madani, welcomed the decision of the official accession of the State of Palestine to the International Criminal Court (ICC) on April 1, 2015. He stated that Palestine's accession is its natural right and a reflection of the legal personality of the State of Palestine at the international level.

The Secretary General expressed his hope that this important step would be a legal prelude to the accountability of the Israeli occupation and Israeli officials for their crimes in the aggression on the Gaza Strip and the entire Palestinian territory, in particular the continuation of the settlement and occupation policy and the seizure of the Palestinian tax funds for punitive reasons and without any legal justification.

Madani renewed his support for the accession of the State of Palestine to the Court in the light of Israel's intransigent positions, its rejection to abide by its commitments, and flagrant violation of international law. This is in line with the previous position of the OIC announced at the meeting of the Council of Foreign Ministers last May and other subsequent meetings which affirmed the right of Palestine to accede to the International Criminal Court and to complete its accession to other international institutions.



## Right-wing Israeli Settlers Eye Palestinian Real Estate Israel using Right-Wing Settlers to Judaize Al-Quds

In the fight to protect their homes and property, Palestinians in occupied East Al-Quds (Jerusalem) are finding themselves ever besieged by extremist Israeli settlers who entertain aspirations to make the holy city completely Jewish.

Right-wing settlers have, in recent years, been escalating pressure on Palestinians with the aim of Judaizing the city by taking control of their land and homes and emptying it of its Palestinian inhabitants, particularly in the areas close to the Al-Aqsa Mosque.

"The settler groups which engage in the usurpation of Palestinian property are in fact a cover for the Israeli government which is directly involved in the planning and funding of these acts of usurpation," said Fakhri Abu Diab, a member of the Palestinian Committee for the Defense of the Salwan Land Property in Al-Quds.

He added that Israel "is seeking to create an anomaly that smoothes the way for settler groups in the township of Salwan with the ultimate objective of misappropriating the area around the Al-Aqsa Mosque, the Old City and all the expanses of East Al-Quds." Abu Diab said that Israel "is imposing a fait accompli in East Al-Quds through the confiscation of land and homes by all means, legal and illegal, to make it difficult in any future agreements to relinquish these properties that lie within what Israel has come to tag as 'the holy perimeter.'"

This is being carried out, he said, through the imposition of extreme hardship on Palestinian inhabitants, who already live in abject poverty and suffer severe unemployment, with a view to manipulate events to force them out.

Abu Diab said that the settlers have so far only taken control of a dozen or so houses out of over 22,000 in Salwan.

According to the "Wadi Hilwan Data Centre" which operates in Al-Quds, the number of settler posts in the township of Salwan has risen to 29 due to the forcible takeover of buildings. 26 of these are in the Wadi Hilwan district surrounding the Al-Aqsa Mosque.

Israel has been escalating its settlement activities for a number of years and confiscating land in Al-Quds under various pretexts, including security and the protection of historic landmarks. Over 60 percent of the Holy City has been encroached on so far.

Some Palestinian officials say that over 70 percent of Palestinian property has been forcibly taken over from their rightful owners through the law on absentee properties that Israel has been implementing for several decades now, frequently resorting to fraud and manipulation to realize its objectives.

"The confiscation of Palestinian property is no more than acts of piracy perpetrated by settlers under the protective eye of the Israeli security forces, which represents a vicious aggression against Al-Quds and the Palestinian property there," said Ahmed Al-Rouidi, advisor at the Palestinian presidential cabinet.

Al-Rouidi said that Israel is focusing on confiscating Palestinian property within a 200 to 300 meter radius of the Al-Aqsa Mosque. "This falls within its designs to Judaize the mosque with the cooperation of many settler organizations," he said.

Al-Rouidi said that what is taking place is part of a scheme to drive out the city's original Palestinian inhabitants and facilitate the building of the Third Jewish Temple with the support of the Israeli government.

"These exactions represent an unlawful and unjustified forcible evacuation of the original Palestinian inhabitants, even in those in-

stances where it is claimed that the houses were purchased in a regular way," he said.

"The tribulations meted upon the Palestinians in Al-Quds in order to confiscate their properties amount to fierce and barbaric pressures exercised against them in multiple forms," he added.

Last October, Israeli settlers stormed and forcibly took possession of a building consisting of six apartments and its adjoining land and a neighboring residence in Salwan, south of Al-Aqsa Mosque," he said. On Sept. 30 last year, Israeli settlers forcibly took possession of dozens of Palestinian buildings consisting of 23 apartments in the Wadi Hilwa district of Salwan.

In both cases it is believed that the buildings were passed on to Israeli settlers through irregular sales transactions with no information whether the sale was direct or carried out in an underhand way through middlemen.

As a result, Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas issued a decree imposing perpetual hard labor on anyone found guilty of aiding the transfer of real estate to a hostile state. The decree alters a former Jordanian law issued in 1960 that condemned to temporary hard labor anyone found guilty of facilitating the transfer, lease or sale of property to a hostile state or any of its citizens.

In addition to the harsh sanctions, the Palestinian authorities have also initiated action to encourage Arab and Islamic groups to visit Al-Quds to promote religious tourism and provide moral support to the Palestinians. "The official Palestinian policy seeks to encourage and facilitate visits of Arabs and Muslims from everywhere to Al-Quds," said Adnan Al-Husseini, minister of Al-Quds affairs at the Palestinian Authority.

He added that a large number of Arabs and Muslims have been visiting the city in recent



months and that the trend is growing. He also pointed out that delegations from Bahrain, Oman, Morocco, Tunisia, Egypt and Jordan, along with other public and civil society groups, have also visited the city over recent months.

He further emphasized that these visits do not constitute normalization of relations with Israel. "True, the gates of Al-Quds are under the control of the occupation and this represents a form of piracy which commands indeed that we do not recognize

these Israeli measures. But this should not imply that we leave the city and its inhabitants to their own devices and deprive them of Arab and Islamic support," he said.

"Actually, the coordination procedures for the Arab and Islamic group visits are in the hands of well-defined Palestinian organs, such that the said groups take no part in the coordination process and this in itself clearly refutes the idea of any normalization," he added.

The Palestinian authorities launched a campaign in 2011 to encourage Arabs and Muslims to visit Al-Quds. The campaign is based on the view that "visiting an imprisoned person does not equate to recognizing the jailer or indicate normalization, but rather offers some comfort and support for the jailed."

The launch of the campaign has resulted in a rise in the numbers of visitors to the holy city in spite of the broad controversy the visits have caused with some viewing the call with suspicion and an attempt to normalize relations with Israel which has been occupying the Al-Quds and the West Bank since 1967. (dpa)

## OIC Affiliate Organization Spent \$24 Million on Projects in Al-Quds between 2010 and 2014

ANKARA: The Bayt Mal Al-Quds Al-Sharif Agency, an affiliate of the OIC, spent \$24 million on projects within Al-Quds between 2010 and 2014.

Mohammed Salem Al-Sharqawi, director of public affairs and media at the Agency, said that Morocco funded some 84 percent of these projects.

These figures were revealed during a speech that Al-Sharqawi delivered at a conference entitled "Al-Quds, City of Peace" on March 21. The event was organized by the Turkish Industrialists and Businessmen Association (TÜSIAD) in Ankara in cooperation with Arab academics.

Al-Sharqawi said that the projects covered education, health, housing, the youth, sports, women, children, social affairs and heritage. He also stressed the importance of supporting Al-Quds and its inhabitants in the face of challenges posed by the occupation. He suggested this be done by "supporting social work ... through funding projects that have direct and tangible impacts in the lives of the people of Al-Quds." He also said that the Bayt Mal Al-Quds Al-



Sharif Agency plays a pivotal role on the ground on behalf of the Al-Quds Committee and the OIC, and that the body has adopted a five-year plan for projects worth \$30 million to be delivered between 2014 and 2018 and covering housing, health, education, women's empowerment, the youth and child care.

He also praised the speech that King Mohammed VI, chairman of the Al-Quds Committee, delivered at the opening of the 20th Session of the Al-Quds Committee in January 2014 in Morocco. In his speech, King Mohammed said there is a need to

consolidate joint Arab and Muslim action, unite and adopt innovative methods to contribute to building peace and developing a practical and effective strategy in which the Al-Quds Committee plays a decisive role as a permanent arm of the OIC.

He also said that the Agency is focusing on social action in accordance with the explicit instructions of King Mohammed VI who personally oversees its work. He said this stems from the firm conviction of the importance of field work to limit problems in the holy city, especially in terms of education, health and housing.

Al-Sharqawi further stressed the importance of the social work that the Agency delivers Al-Quds which allows the population to endure the oppressive occupation which is trying to undermine the Arab and Muslim presence in the city, and change the city's demographics and legal status. He further called on charities, economic institutes and business associations to cooperate with the Agency to achieve its objectives in protecting the holy city, preserve its religious and culture heritage, and support its residents.



## Conditions in Gaza Worsen Six Months after Attacks and Delayed Reconstruction

GAZA (DPA): Palestinian and international organizations have warned about the dangers of unprecedented growth in poverty and unemployment, and worsening conditions among residents of the Gaza Strip six months after last year's devastating attacks by Israel.

For the area's residents, hopes of succor in living and economic conditions disappeared after the last wave of violence amid an existing state of botched reconstruction efforts. This remains so despite international pledges to provide necessary financial support.

Following the latest ceasefire announcement, it was hoped that the Israeli blockade imposed on the Strip would be lifted, especially the opening of border crossings and the moving of goods.

Palestinian officials have, however, stated that Israeli restrictions continue and that the two crossings linking the Gaza Strip to Israel have only witnessed limited easing, something that has not contributed real relief to the heavily deteriorated economic conditions.

Independent Palestinian Member of Parliament Jamal Al-Khudri, who heads the Popular Committee Against the Blockade, described the situation as "frightening and catastrophic at the humanitarian, economic, health, environmental and social levels, particularly in light of the moribund reconstruction processes to build what was destroyed by the Israeli attack."

He said that more than two-thirds of the Gaza Strip population of about 1.8 million

are currently living on assistance amid an average per capita income of no more than \$1 a day.

Al-Khudri hinted that 70 percent of the population of Gaza lives below the poverty line while the rate of unemployment is more than 60 percent. Additionally, more than 95 percent of water is unfit for drinking and thousands of displaced people continue to live in collective shelter centers.

The continued failure to reconstruct the Gaza Strip after the demolition of thousands of homes and extensive damage to infrastructure has led to serious economic hardship. More than 500,000 economic facilities were affected. Of this, 500 were completely destroyed by Israel in 50 continuous days of military attack last July and August.

During the international conference held in Cairo last month, donor countries pledged to collect \$5.4 billion for Palestine, half of which is to be allocated for the reconstruction of the Gaza Strip.

In practical terms, however, the reconstruction projects have not commenced except for partial renovation of affected homes. Palestinian officials and international organizations have said that no more than 2 percent of the international financing for the reconstruction of the Gaza Strip has arrived.

Maher Al-Tabaa, a Gaza Chamber of Commerce official, said that the Gaza Strip faces "an unprecedented economic downturn and an almost total shutdown of all economic activities because of the continued

blockade and the stalling of the reconstruction efforts so far to ensure resumption of operations of affected economic facilities." He also noted Israel's continued imposition of tough restrictions on Gaza's crossings; Israel makes it difficult for building materials and raw materials to enter the area and prevents only a bare minimum of Gaza's exports to leave.

Al-Tabaa cautioned that the lack of purchasing power and the crisis in a shortage of basic services threaten economic depression and slow growth in the Gaza Strip by, according to IMF data, up to 15 percent.

The financial crisis that the Palestinian Authority is experiencing at present has further aggravated the economic situation in Gaza, especially for the Authority's approximate 70,000 employees. The Palestinian Authority has only been able to pay 60 percent of their salaries for the past two months because of Israel's seizure of tax funds since the beginning of the year.

The deterioration in conditions in Gaza caused 30 international organizations to warn that a resumption of violence would be inevitable if the lack of progress in reconstruction were to continue and the root causes of the conflict with Israel remain unaddressed.

Those organizations, including the United Nations' specialized agencies, have expressed their concerns in a joint press release about the "limited progress" in the reconstruction of Gaza six months after the end of the latest Israeli aggression on the city.



By Shaher Awawdeh

*Shavit describes Lydda as "our black box. In it lies the dark secret of Zionism. The truth is that Zionism could not bear Lydda."*

## St. George's Town Slain by the Israeli Dragon

**H**agiography has carved a special place for Lydda by associating it with St. George who is immortalized in mythology as the hero who used his spear to slay a dragon. The typical iconographic interpretation of the story of St. George slaying the dragon is that the battle pits good against evil. St. George, who lived and buried in the Palestinian city of Al-Lydd (Lydda in Latin) in the fourth century, is widely venerated throughout the Middle East. Being the patron of so many churches and nations, sculptures of St. George exist in different parts of the World, including in front of the North Lawn Building of the United Nations in New York.

In 1948, the story was reversed and the monster, charged with vengeful desire, got revenge on Lydda.

Ari Shavit's book, *My Promised Land*, sheds plenty of light on how the cozy city of Lydda became the prey of the Zionist project in the summer of 1948. The author describes the pre-1948 Lydda as a vibrant urban center at the heart of Palestine.

As a major railway hub and home to an international airport, Lydda provided good employment opportunities for its citizens and for jobseekers from nearby towns. Electricity and running water were in abundance. Two public schools and an Anglican school provided education for the boys and girls of the city. Two clinics and two pharmacies provided decent medical service to the population. The mortality rate was as low as twelve out of a thousand.

Nonetheless, the year 1948 sounded a terrible fate for Lydda. As Shavit puts it, "Lydda suspected nothing (and did) not imagine what was about to happen. For forty-years, it watched Zionism enter the valley: first the Atid factory, then Keryat Sefer school, then the olive forest, the artisan colony, the tiny workers' village, the experimental farm, and the eccentric German doctor (Dr. Lahmann). The people of Lydda did not see that Zionism would turn into a modern-day dragon".

Shavit describes Lydda as "our black box. In it lies the dark secret of Zionism. The truth is that Zionism could not bear Lydda. From the very beginning there was a substantial contradiction between Zionism and Lydda. If Zionism was to be, Lydda could not be. If Lydda was to be, Zionism could not be". It is all clear in retrospect. Operation Larlar was initiated to conquer Lydda. With the approval of Israel's first Prime Minister, David Ben Gurion, the Israeli army captured the villages around Lydda on July 10, 1948. One day later, the entire city of Lydda was taken by the modern-day dragon.

Between 10 and 13 July 1948, the entire population of Lydda was either brutally butchered or forcefully evicted by ruthless Israeli uniformed beasts. "In forty-seven minutes of blitz, more than a hundred Arab civilians are shot dead—women, children, old people". Within hours, thousands of panicky Palestinians took refuge in the great mosque, the small mosque and the St. George cathedral. They naively believed that houses of worship have immunity. They did not realize that dragons recognize no sanctity for any structure.

What an easier target a dragon can find more than thousands of unnerved women, children and old people packed in three worship houses. The order came from the commander to open indiscriminate and ruthless fire.

As if the massacre itself was not enough, the Palmach (the elite fighting force of Haganah) was explicitly instructed to sweep away all Palestinians from Lydda. The order was initiated by David Ben Gurion and written by Yitzhak Rabin: "The inhabitants of Lydda must be expelled quickly, without regard to age".

The "modern-day dragon" who intruded the life of Lydda and turned the life of its people into hell climbs the tall minaret of the Great Mosque to make sure that the expulsion order is fully implemented." There was no Jeremiah among the evicted to lament their calamity and disgrace. Instead, Nero, who set Rome ablaze two thousand years ago, was watching them from the top of the mosque's minaret.

"Then, in three days in the cataclysmic summer of 1948, Lydda was no more", Shavit says. The Dragon's vengeance was horrific, and St. George lost his beloved city.

## 2014: The Worst Year in the Syrian Crisis

The crisis in Syria entered its fifth year on March 15. It is a crisis which began in 2011 as a peaceful popular uprising that spiraled into a bloody civil war, leaving destruction and a growing humanitarian crisis in its wake.

According to the UN and other international organizations, Syria has over the past few years gone back 40 years, while the number of those killed exceeds 230,000. With the civil war in its fifth year, further losses are expected.

Statistics on Syria are shocking—there are some 7.6 million displaced people, 3.3 million refugees and 12 million in need of humanitarian assistance. Illnesses such as typhoid, cholera and polio are widespread, and some 3 million Syrian children are not in education.

Needs are increasing, especially as funds are not enough to meet the scale of the tragedy; only 57 percent of funds needed to support civilians and refugees was available in 2014 compared to 71 percent in 2013. The UN says it requires \$8.4 billion to help Syrians next year.

Speaking at the UN Security Council in April, UN Secretary General Ban Ki-moon called for decisive action to end the conflict. He also called on the Security Council to address the issue of explosive barrels being dropped on civilians, bringing a halt on the blockade and measures to ensure services reach people.

Three UN resolutions were issued in 2014 called for all sides in the conflict to protect civilians and allow millions of Syrians to access humanitarian aid. Syria was considered the world's deadliest conflict last year; some 76,000 people died last year alone and some 210,000 had been killed since the beginning of the conflict in March 2011.

To highlight the dire situation in Syria, several UN entities launched a joint social media campaign, #WhatDoesItTake, to give the public, Member States and the wider international community an opportunity to express their frustrations and urge support. A number of NGOs said that the international community bears partial responsibility for the "darkest years" in the Syrian conflict.

In a report, entitled "Failing Syria: Assessing the Impact of UN Security Council Resolutions in Protecting and Assisting Civilians in



Syria," 21 human rights organizations criticized the inability of countries to implement UN resolutions to protect civilians whose lives were destroyed in the war.

Within Syria, the provinces of Homs, Daraa, Aleppo, Idlib, Raqqa, Al-Hasakaa and Deir al-Zour have been the most affected—these provinces account for almost two-thirds of the country and are completely destroyed.

According to reports by international organizations, the Governorate of Rif Dimashq and the districts on the outskirts of the capital topped the list of displaced people. The number of displaced people has exceeded 3 million with the majority from the southern neighborhoods of Damascus, the Yarmouk Refugee Camp, the highly-dense Al-Asali and Al-Hajar Al-Aswad districts known as the "Poverty Belt", and the neighborhoods of Al-Qaboun and Barza which have become ghost towns due to the government siege and systematic widespread destruction.

The majority of residents in those districts that have revolted in Homs and the smaller towns towards Qalamoon in the Governorate of Rif Dimashq, Tartus and Hama have left. As a result, 10 districts in Homs—such as Old Homs, Qusour, Baba Amr, Khalidiya and Jouret el-Shayah—are devoid of people and buildings have been completely destroyed. Residents of the Province of Idlib and the Province of Aleppo have taken refuge in Latakia on the Syrian coast. Likewise,

those displaced in Ghouta and Daraa have headed to Al-Suwayda.

Human rights organizations estimate that 45 percent of the displaced are children with a huge number of them living in parks and government shelters which are usually abandoned schools buildings that are unsuitable for living, unsafe and lack necessary amenities. Displaced people who rented homes in safer areas are subject to poverty due to the high costs of living, depletion of savings, and loss of livelihood due to death or absence of breadwinners. Most of the displaced, even those who are able to find minor jobs, receive help in one form or another from local bodies or relatives abroad.

The situation of 5.6 million children within Syria remains miserable, and around 2 million children who live in isolated areas are greatly in need of humanitarian aid as a result of fighting and other factors. Some 3 million Syrian children are also not in school. UNICEF posted a series of images on the Internet that tell numerous real stories of children affected by the conflict but also shine some rays of hope. There is the story of Alaa, a 16-year-old who left his home in Homs after it was destroyed. He completed his studies and now delivers courses to other children. There is also the story of 10-year-old Christina who lives in a shelter in northern Iraq. Aside from studying, she also helps young children with their lessons. Anthony Lake, UNICEF's executive director, said, "Despite the harm they have suffered, the wrongs they have endured, and the apparent inability of adults to bring an end to this horrific conflict, the children affected by this crisis still have courage and determination to build better lives."

He added, "Seeing their determination, how can we be any less determined to help them? Knowing that they have not given up hope, how can we?"

UNICEF further called on international organizations concerned with children to find ways of providing formal and informal education to children affected by the conflict, and devise methods of providing them with formal qualifications to help them progress in the future.

# The Houthis Coup

## Against Legitimacy in Yemen



SANAA: Following clashes with Yemeni government forces that lasted for several days and resulted in 270 deaths, the Houthi militia seized government headquarters in Sanaa on Sept. 21 last year.

The next day, political parties in the country, including the Houthis, signed a UN-sponsored agreement that became known as the Peace and National Partnership Agreement. The agreement was signed in the Yemeni Presidential House and allowed President Abd Rabbuh Mansur Hadi to hold talks to form a government that included representatives of all of Yemen's different political players.

With all parties agreeing, the Houthis began strengthening their hold over Yemen's northern regions and state institutions until the coup in January 2015. Government figures were subsequently placed under house arrest, including the president who escaped to Aden where he resumed exercising presidential powers and withdrew the resignation he had tendered following the coup.

The Houthi coup was achieved with the direct and indirect support of Yemen's former president, Ali Abdullah Saleh, and forces loyal to him. With such dramatic developments, Yemen was at risk of slipping into a civil war, especially with many governmental institutions in the Houthis' hands, the expanding role of Al-Qaida and the failure of the mission of the UN special envoy to Yemen, Jamal Benomar.

On Feb. 6, the Houthis issued a constitutional declaration that isolated President Hadi, suspended the constitution and formed a revolutionary, or presidential, council. The Houthis subsequently broke into the Yemeni Presidential House and began imposing their policies by force of arms, undermining Yemen's political process, thwarting the national dialogue and the Peace and National Partnership Agreement, as well as disrupting the process of peaceful

transition sponsored by the GCC, the OIC, the UN and the international community.

GCC states rejected and condemned the coup, and gave their support to Yemen's legitimate government represented by President Hadi. Most of them also transferred their embassies to Aden which became the country's temporary capital. Events then began to escalate after Mar. 19 with the Houthis carrying out an aerial bombardment of the presidential palace in Aden.

The Houthis also began mobilizing forces and, with the support of forces loyal to former President Ali Abdullah Saleh, managed to take control of Taiz province, the entrance to Yemen's southern provinces and ultimately Aden. It was at this stage that President Hadi called on GCC countries to provide immediate assistance by all necessary means, including military intervention.

On Mar. 26, the GCC issued a joint statement responding to the request. A military operation, "Decisive Storm" was launched immediately thereafter. The operation was led by Saudi Arabia with the participation of several Arab and Muslim countries including Qatar, Bahrain, the UAE, Kuwait, Egypt, Sudan, Jordan, Morocco and Pakistan. Coalition forces targeted the Houthi militia and forces loyal to Ali Abdullah Saleh.

Iyad Ameen Madani, Secretary General of the OIC, said that the OIC was following closely and with great concern developments in Yemen. He reiterated his appeal to all sides in Yemen to exercise common sense and place the country's interests above all political, tribal and sectarian considerations.

He further called on supporting the GCC resolution which refused the so-called "constitutional declaration," considering it a coup on legitimacy, in contradiction of international resolutions and in violation of the Gulf initiative that was adopted by the OIC and all international and regional organizations.

He called on the international community to bear responsibility, condemn the coup and not to recognize it, stressing the need for the Houthis to withdraw from occupied areas and stop its violence against Yemen's citizens.

He also expressed the OIC's support for President Hadi's efforts to resume national dialogue between different groups within Yemen and commended the sincere efforts of GCC countries to support dialogue.

The Secretary General also expressed his support for steps taken by countries supporting Yemen's legitimate government in response to the president's request to recover Yemen from the chaos caused by the Houthi coup.

## DAESH Destruction of Historical Monuments and Sites in Iraq



The group DAESH released several videos on Feb. 26 showing its foot soldiers destroying priceless ancient exhibits at a museum in Mosul, the second largest city in Iraq and home to approximately 1,800 of the 12,000 documented archaeological sites in the country.

Mosul came under DAESH control in June 2014. The video showed DAESH members using sledgehammers and drills to destroy statues, some of which date back to the ancient Mesopotamian civilizations. Destroyed artifacts included a statue of a winged Assyrian bull dating back to the 9th century BC that weighed over 30 tons, was 4.42 meters tall and had the wings of an eagle and a human head.

Winged bulls are considered leading icons of the Assyrian civilization which flourished and spread north until the city of Nineveh and south until the Nile Valley. It was the first city in the kingdom of Assyria in northern Mesopotamia. DAESH also destroyed a major part of the historical Nergal Gate in the east of Mosul.

Iyad Ameen Madani, Secretary General of the OIC, condemned the destruction and lent his support to Irina Bokova, director general of UN Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), who called for the convening of an emergency session of the UN Security Council to take measures to stop this cultural tragedy.

Madani also emphasized that these crimes are not a loss just for Iraq but for the entire humanity.

Since taking control of a third of Iraq and large chunks of Syria, DAESH has sought to purify areas under its control from anything that does not conform to its extremist reading of Islam; churches and Christian holy sites have also not been spared.

In one video, an DAESH militant can be seen in front of a large statue saying that these "idols and idols of people from the past used to be worshipped aside from Allah. They used to associate partners with Allah Almighty, and would draw close to their offerings and idols. Their removal is a sacred obligation that we need to fulfill. We do not care, even for a billion dollars."

Mosul Museum was founded in 1951 and included artifacts from ancient Islamic and Assyrian times. It was closed in 2003 following the US invasion of Iraq to discourage theft and looting. It was, however, reopened to the public in 2012.

There have also been reports that DAESH militants carried out an arson attack on Mosul's library in January. Militants broke locks to access rare and historical books and manuscripts. The library was home to a collection of 8,000 volumes. Militants were reported to have destroyed all books except those on Islam.

### The Archaeological Site of Nimrud

DAESH also destroyed the archaeological site of the ancient Assyrian city of Nimrud using bulldozers on March 5, around a week after its rampage at Mosul Museum. News about the destruction at Nimrud came from Iraq's Ministry of Tourism and Antiquities. A ministry official also highlighted the presence of trucks in the area, indicating that IS possibly sold artifacts to fund its military operations.

In a statement, the ministry said that DAESH "continues to defy the will of the world and human feelings" by destroying Nimrud and razing it using heavy machinery. It added that the monuments that had been destroyed dated back to the 13th century BC.

Nimrud is one of the most important archaeological sites in Iraq and the Middle East. The original city was founded in the 13th century BC, and was built by the Assyrian King Shalmaneser who made it his capital during the middle Assyrian period. It is located on the banks of the Tigris River, 30 km south-east of Mosul.

Though a number of Iraqi artifacts are preserved at the British Museum, the Metropolitan Museum in New York and the National Iraqi Museum in Baghdad, the Nimrud site was significant as it was home to a large number of carvings and statues in their original locations.

Irina Bokova, director general of UNESCO, said in a statement released following the destruction, "We cannot remain silent. The deliberate destruction of cultural heritage constitutes a war crime." She further called on all political and religious leaders in the region to stand up and remind everyone that "there is absolutely no political or religious justification for the destruction of humanity's cultural heritage."



## The Political Dialogue among Libyan Parties in Morocco



Bernardino Leon (2-L), Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Libya and Head of the UNSMIL, speaks with Libya's warring factions representative Fathi Bashagha (2-R), at the European headquarters of the United Nations in Geneva, Switzerland, 14 January 2015 (epa)

Iyad Ameen Madani, Secretary General of the Organization of Islamic Cooperation (OIC), offered his support for the Libyan political dialogue that is taking place in Morocco to resolve the ongoing crisis facing Libya.

Several Libyan parties are meeting in Morocco to find a political solution to political turmoil in Libya, starting with the formation of a national unity government as a key step to establish security and stability.

Libya has been undergoing a political crisis for a month now that has resulted in clashes between the military and armed groups rebelling against the elected government.

The political dialogue seeks to introduce a legislative power, the House of Representatives, and separate the head of state from the presidency. The moves are designed to avoid contradictions between the legislative and executive authorities.

The third round of the Libyan political dialogue was held on Mar. 28 and will resume at a later stage. The OIC Secretary General previously welcomed the first round of the Libyan dialogue that was held in Geneva on Jan. 14-15 under the auspices of the United Nations Support Mission in Libya (UNSMIL).

Madani also reiterated the OIC's support for the efforts of Bernardino Leon, Special Representative of the UN Secretary-General in Libya, to find a peaceful solution to the crisis.

He further stressed the importance of national reconciliation and reaching a political solution in Libya to end violence and instability, and urged all Libyan stakeholders to demonstrate genuine political commitment to restore peace and stability and ensure territorial integrity inside the country.

The Secretary General reiterated the OIC's commitment to contribute in all ways to the efforts of Libyans and the wider international community in finding a lasting solution to the Libyan crisis, something that would allow the Libyan people to live in peace and security.



Algerian Minister of Foreign Affairs, Ramtane Lamamra (L) shakes hands with participants during the 5th round of the inclusive inter-Malian dialogue between the Malian government and representatives of the political-military groups in northern Mali (epa)

OIC Secretary General Iyad Ameen Madani welcomed the signing of an agreement on Feb. 19 to immediately end all forms of violence and provocations in Northern Mali. The agreement was reached by participants of an inclusive inter-Malian dialogue held in Algiers.

Madani commended international stakeholders, led by Algeria, for mediating the talks and called on all parties to strictly abide to the terms of the agreement. He also promised the OIC's full support in implementing the accord, which he said was vital for peace and stability in the region.

Several regional and international bodies and countries have been involved in mediating the agreement, including the Economic Community of West African States (ECOW-

## Agreement to End violence in Northern Mali

AS), the African Union (AU), the European Union (EU), the OIC, the United Nations (UN), Burkina Faso, Chad, Mauritania, Niger and Nigeria. Madani praised all of the above for their dedication and perseverance throughout the eight month-long discussions that resulted in the accord. He further called on the international community to intensify its engagement in building peace in Mali in the period ahead.

Mali signed a "Peace and Reconciliation" agreement with three armed groups following eight months of negotiations in Algeria. A further three groups requested a delay to carry out further consultations before signing the agreement.

Algeria and the UN have, since July 2014, been leading discussions between government ministers and armed rebels, and calling for national unity and the formation of elected regional councils.

Algeria presented to both parties a new draft agreement that aims to balance out sovereignty and the demand for autonomy by residents of the Azwad region of northern Mali. Armed groups have been known to carry out attacks in the north of the coun-

try.

The OIC Secretary General vigorously condemned recent attacks in a number of towns in Mali, particularly in Bamako, Kidal and Gao. These attacks resulted in the deaths of both civilians and peace soldiers of The United Nations Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in Mali (MINUSMA).

Madani denounced these acts which he said are contrary to the values and principles of Islam. He also described the perpetrators as the enemies of peace and reconciliation, and called on them to renounce violence and weigh the degree of their responsibility in the senseless sufferings meted out on so many innocent families.

The Secretary General also expressed his and the OIC's indignation at the actions of individuals who wish to undermine the peace process that seeks to make Mali stable once more. He further extended his condolences to the people of Mali, its authorities and the families of victims.

Madani, lastly, recommended the return to the inter-Malian dialogue to achieve a solution in favor of peace, reconciliation and stability within the country.

## OIC Secretary General at the Counter Extremism Summit in the US Need to understand the root causes of violent extremism



US President Barack Obama speaks at the White House Summit on Countering Violent Extremism at the State Department in Washington, DC, USA, 19 February 2015 (epa)

WASHINGTON DC: As part of the global effort to counter violent extremism, representatives of around 60 nations, including the OIC, gathered on 17 Feb. in Washington DC for a three-day summit on the issue.

The summit on Countering Violent Extremism was part of US President Barack Obama's strategy to prevent people from being radicalized through early community intervention. In addition to international leaders, local US and federal leaders were also in attendance along with the US president.

The summit followed extremist attacks in Ottawa, Paris, Copenhagen, Belgium and Libya, and in the backdrop of the high-profile presence of the Islamic State. The first two days looked at grassroots prevention in communities with the final day focusing on actions on the government level.

Iyad Ameen Madani, Secretary General of the OIC, delivered a speech on the final day in which he discussed a range of issues, including the need to understand the root causes of violent extremism. He said there is a "need for a clear understanding of the roots, the underlining currents, the formative ideas that create terrorism and turn an individual into a terrorist."

He also called on participants to pause and ask themselves where this violence and evil has come from. "What is it that we have

done to our collective self and globalized world to allow extreme violence and mindless disregard and duplicity to the very basics of human rights to grow and take hold of ourselves?" he said.

"We may cite examples and debate endlessly to identify who is responsible for the spread of violent extremism, but pointing fingers is not the answer, it is actually an escape. Soul searching and looking into our inner individual, national, ideological and religious self to identify that black hole within all of us is the beginning of our road to salvation. We have to delegitimize the narratives of dominance, occupation and extremism that claim legitimacy of violent and manipulative acts in the name of religion, ideology or cultural superiority," he added.

The Secretary General further highlighted the OIC's commitment in dealing with violent extremism and said the bloc is proud of its record on this. He also cited the OIC Code of Conduct on Combating Terrorism adopted in 1994 and the OIC Convention on Combating International Terrorism adopted in 1999.

Violent extremism cannot just be tackled through military means, he said. "Due attention, analysis and concrete plans of action must address the multifaceted dimensions of the phenomenon of violent ex-

trémism. Top among these is to understand and address the political and socio-economic contexts that bring forth conditions conducive to the spread of terrorism and violent extremism," he said, adding that it is the OIC's position that countries should apologize for historical injustices under colonialism and that the denial of the rights of people for self-determination under foreign occupation must end.

He also underscored how reckless media coverage contributes to widening gaps between different religions, cultures and ethnic groups.

The Secretary General also drew attendees' attention to the OIC's recent efforts to confront extreme violence. He said the OIC's Executive Committee held an emergency meeting on Feb. 15 and decided to work towards activating the "International Terrorism Center of the UN"; meet with experts to tighten cyber security; remedy causes of sectarian conflict; empower the youth to ensure they are not at risk of exploitation; utilize the Fiqh Academy, an organ of the OIC, to consult Ulama and academics on dismantling the discourse of extremism and sectarianism; and build bridges with Muslim communities outside of the Member States. The Secretary General also highlighted that the OIC has already been contributing to tackling violent extremism through various projects, including the establishment of a "Culture Fund" at the Islamic Development Bank as a counter discourse for extreme violence.

He concluded by saying that Muslims are widely impacted by extreme violence. "Muslims suffer from those groups that have kidnapped Islam in the most inaccurate and illiterate readings of its texts," he said, adding that Muslims are also, on the other hand, the target of Islamophobia and find themselves often stigmatized and blamed for the ills of the world.

"Muslims have also been at the receiving end of traditional colonialism, neo-colonialism, and political discourse of neo-liberalism," he said.

## Islam Karimov Re-elected as President of Uzbekistan

The OIC Secretary General, Iyad Ameen Madani, congratulated H.E. Islam Karimov on his re-election as the President of the Republic of Uzbekistan during the Presidential election held on 29 March 2015. Madani pointed out that the landslide victory of H.E. Islam Karimov reflects the confidence the people of Uzbekistan have in his leadership. He reiterated the support and cooperation of the OIC with the Republic of Uzbekistan to face any challenges ahead. A team of OIC election observers was de-



Uzbek President Islam Karimov votes during presidential elections in Tashkent, 23 December 2007 (epa)

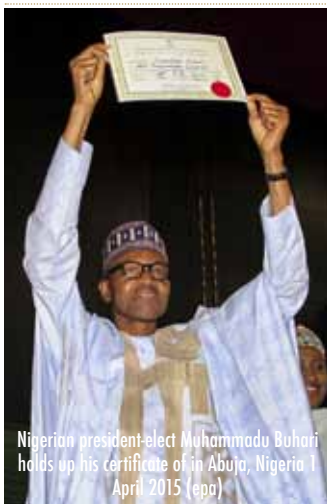
ployed, upon an invitation by the Uzbek Central Election Commission (CEC), to monitor the presidential elections. The members of the delegation were able to monitor every stage of the voting process, right from the opening of polling stations to the collation and announcement of the preliminary results by the CEC. The OIC observer mission noted with satisfaction that the turnout of voters was impressive just as the voting process proceeded smoothly and peacefully.

## Nigeria Elects Muhammadu Buhari President

The Secretary General of the Organization of Islamic Cooperation (OIC), Iyad Ameen Madani, has heartily congratulated the people of Nigeria for the conduct on 28 March 2015 of a widely adjudged successful Presidential election. He said the elections had further consolidated Nigeria's nascent but vibrant democracy. He commended the massive and enthusiastic participation of the electorate in the process, being a clear demonstration of their abiding faith in democratic governance. He also praised Nigeria's Independent Electoral Commission (CEC) for putting in place a good organization that produced a credible outcome.

While welcoming the results announced by the

Electoral Commission, Madani congratulated the President-elect, Muhammadu Buhari, on trust reposed in him by the Nigerian people and urged all candidates to respect the will of the electorate as expressed freely through their vote. The Secretary General expressed his confidence that President-elect Bukhari will fulfill his campaign pledges. The Secretary General finally commended President Goodluck Jonathan for delivering on his pledge to conduct a free and fair exercise and for accepting the election's outcome. He noted that this position, which won him admiration in and outside the country, would also further advance the course of democracy in Nigeria and the African continent.



Nigerian president-elect Muhammadu Buhari holds up his certificate of office in Abuja, Nigeria, April 2015 (epa)

## OIC Welcomes Framework Agreement on Iran's Nuclear Issue; Emphasizes Middle East Denuclearization

The Secretary General of the Organization of Islamic Cooperation (OIC), Iyad Ameen Madani, has welcomed on 4 April 2015, the framework agreement reached in Lausanne between the world's six major powers, collectively known as the P5 + 1 and the Islamic Republic of Iran on Tehran's nuclear issue; and expressed the hope that a final agreement would be reached within the declared points of reference and timetable.

While the Secretary General hailed the negotiated deal as a diplomatic breakthrough in the protracted standoff over Iran's nuclear program, he underlined the OIC's position on the need to respect the inalienable right of developing countries to engage in the research, production, and use of nuclear energy for peaceful purposes without discrimination and in accordance with the Non-Proliferation Treaty.

Madani reiterated the OIC's support for the establishment in the Middle East, of a nuclear-weapon-free zone (MENWFZ) as a basic requirement for the stability and security of all the countries of the region. MENWFZ, along with the Arab Peace Initiative, represent an integrated and comprehensive approach towards a region where peace prevails, conflicts recedes, and radicalization fades. That will require the international community's ability to muster the political will to deal with the unchecked Israeli arsenal of atomic weapons and bring Israel to the community of nations,



EU High Representative for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy Federica Mogherini, Iranian Foreign Minister Mohammad Javad Zarif, British Foreign Secretary Philip Hammond, and US Secretary of State John Kerry, during a press event after the end of a new round of Nuclear Iran Talks in the Learning Center in Lausanne, Switzerland, 2 April 2015 (epa)

he added.

The Secretary General highlighted the support of the OIC towards nuclear disarmament and elimination of other weapons of mass destruction (WMD); restating his call for the resolution of proliferation through political and diplomatic means within the framework of international law, relevant multilateral conventions and treaties and the United Nations Charter. He emphasized that progress in nuclear disarmament and non-proliferation, in all its aspects, was essential to strengthen international peace and security.

## Rohingya Muslims Downtrodden in Political Scramble for Power



Rohingya listing for the 'white card' gather at the ThetKelPyin Muslim refugee camp in Sittwe, Rakhine State, western Myanmar, 3 April 2015 (epa)

The situation for the Rohingya Muslims in Myanmar (formerly Burma) is becoming increasingly precarious with fears of a repeat of the violence that took place in 2012.

Following Buddhist persecution three years ago, which left at least 200 dead, around 140,000 Rohingya are trapped in internally displacement camps (IDP) around Sittwe. Most of those living in the camps lost their homes in the unrest. Persecuted and reduced to a stateless situation, many Rohingya attempt to leave for Bangladesh and Malaysia through Thailand. Media reports of the ongoing situation warn of a possibility of renewed tension.

Yanghee Lee, the UN's special rapporteur on human rights in Myanmar, is concerned at the situation. During a presentation to the UN Human Rights Council in Geneva, Lee said more needs to be done to address underlying issues at the heart of the conflict, including discrimination against ethnic minorities. She stressed that four bills currently before Parliament risk increasing ethnic and religious tension.

"The situation in Rakhine State remains dire. The atmosphere between communities is hostile. There have still been no credible investigations into the serious human rights violations that took place in 2012 and 2014," she said.

"The justification given by the government to the confinement of Muslims in camps for their own protection is troubling ... I witnessed the ongoing discriminatory restrictions on the freedom of movement of Mus-

lim IDPs ... Conditions in Muslim IDP camps I visited were abysmal. People said they had only two options: 'stay and die' or 'leave by boat,'" she added.

According to an article published in March in *The Diplomat*, the Rohingya are at the threshold of a new dilemma, that conditions in Rakhine State are worsening and anti-Muslim sentiment is increasing nationwide.

This follows Myanmar President Thein Sein's order on Feb. 11 that all "white cards" (or temporary cards)—which are mainly held by Rohingyas—would expire on Mar. 31. The decision came a few days after Myanmar's Parliament voted on Feb. 2 approving a bill governing regulations for a planned referendum on constitutional amendments.

This "unleashed a firestorm" as the bill included provision allowing holders of "white cards" to vote. As a result, right-wing Buddhists, led by nationalist monks, protested in Yangon and Rakhine.

"White cards" were given to the Rohingya in the 1990s "as temporary documentation pending a citizenship verification process that never materialized." White card holders have previously voted in a constitutional referendum in 2008 and parliamentary elections in 2010.

However, the 2012 violence that rocked Rakhine led to the issue of "white cards" becoming a hot political issue. Opponents say that the cards allow "foreigners"—as the Rohingya are often referred to—the right to vote. As a result of the pressure, Myanmar's

president issued an order that the cards would expire on Mar. 31.

Democracy campaigners in Myanmar are divided over Rohingya rights, according to the magazine. While some have stood up for Rohingya rights, parliamentarians from Aung San Suu Kyi's National League for Democracy (NLD), which stood up against the former military junta, signed up to the Rakhine National Party's legal challenge against the bill granting "white card" holders the right to partake in elections and referendums.

The magazine added that these developments highlight the president's susceptibility to being easily influenced by public pressure. Suu Kyi herself has found it difficult to support Rohingya rights and that "appearing to support Rohingya citizenship could be political suicide in a country where anti-Muslim sentiment is rising rapidly."

Fortify Rights, a human rights organization in Rakhine State, has called on the Myanmar authorities to "immediately and unconditionally release a group of five Rohingya prisoners of conscience." On Feb. 27, a court sentenced them to prison for between five and eight years. The sentences follow tensions in 2013 when Myanmar's government attempted to force the Rohingya to define themselves as Bangladeshi. "The authorities are sending a clear message to Rohingya that any form of resistance will be met with reprisals," said Matthew Smith, executive director of Fortify Rights. "This is a thinly-veiled attempt to undermine the community's social and political structures. It's a textbook example of persecution."

A Reuters' story published on Feb. 25 detailed the suffering of Muslims living in a camp for displaced Rohingyas. Many of the residents have left or aspire to leave on boats for Thailand and Malaysia. Those who leave are exploited by traffickers. People are held for ransom in remote camps in Thailand where freedom costs up to \$1,800—a fortune for most Rohingya.

The plight of the Rohingya is far from over. The political situation in Myanmar is worsening with the government and its opposition scrambling over each other to win political points at the expense of the Muslim minority of Rakhine State.

## ASEAN needs to address rising intolerance in Myanmar

Participants in a roundtable event held in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia voiced overwhelming concern about the trend of rising intolerance in Myanmar, including proposed legislation related to the 'protection' of race and religion that is inconsistent with international human rights standards including United Nations conventions to which Myanmar is party, as well as continued trends of violence and discrimination against ethnic and religious minorities, including Rohingya, in many parts of the country.

The roundtable was convened by HUMANITI Malaysia, an NGO founded by Tan Sri Dr. Syed Hamid Albar, in partnership with the OIC, KAICIID and ALTSEAN-Burma on 6-7 April 2015 under the theme 'Tolerance in a people-centered ASEAN'. The event brought together diverse stakeholders from ASEAN region, including representatives of more than 20 national, regional and international non-governmental organizations, to discuss key trends, issues of concern and share approaches to promote tolerance in ASEAN.

The participants noted that the trends of rising intolerance in Myanmar have caused and contributed to human rights crises

with severe humanitarian consequences, gender-based discrimination, statelessness, segregation, refugee flows and other threats to human security, posing challenges to Myanmar's transition to democracy and upcoming elections. Moreover, these trends, pointed out the participants in a statement at the end of their roundtable discussion, threaten regional stability and could exacerbate violence and polarization along religious and ethnic fault-lines. Such trends could seriously undermine the establishment, sustainability and credibility of the ASEAN community, including economic integration and regional economic development.

Identifying ways forward, participants discussed a range of strategies at local, regional, national and international levels. The strong responsibility of regional actors was emphasized, particularly ASEAN and other intergovernmental organizations, regional humanitarian and human rights organizations, the regional business community, and regional faith leaders. The participants also pointed out that the ASEAN Human Rights Declaration includes the protection of the right to freedom of religion, therefore there

is a continued need to facilitate interfaith engagement and dialogue within Myanmar and the wider region.

In addition, the participants called on ASEAN to step up engagement on protecting ethnic and religious minorities in the process of Myanmar's transition to democracy. At this pivotal moment in ASEAN's history, when ASEAN's Charter and processes are being reviewed, participants called on ASEAN to re-examine the principle of non-interference in the context of human rights crises that have implications on regional peace and stability.

The participants reiterated their commitment to coordinating efforts to address the root causes of the complex crisis in Myanmar. They stressed that resolving the crisis of intolerance in Myanmar and other parts of the ASEAN region are critical in the realization and promotion of tolerance in a people-centered ASEAN. The participants agreed and committed to continuing their efforts to forge a way forward for a culture of tolerance in the ASEAN region.

### OIC participates in Abidjan Regional Meeting on Statelessness

ABIDJAN: Stateless was the agenda of a ministerial meeting that was attended by the Organization of Islamic Cooperation (OIC) in Abidjan, Côte d'Ivoire, on Feb. 25.

The meeting, jointly organized by the Government of the Republic of Côte d'Ivoire, the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) and the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS), led to the signing of "The Abidjan Declaration." President of Côte d'Ivoire Alassane Ouattara addressed the opening session. The event was also attended by several ministers from ECOWAS countries.

Participants discussed statelessness in West Africa within the framework of the global strategy devised by the UNHCR to end the problem by 2024.



President of Côte d'Ivoire  
Alassane Ouattara

The meeting concluded with ECOWAS ministers signing "The Abidjan Declaration" which set the modalities of future cooperation at both sub-regional and regional levels to eradicate statelessness in West Africa and the continent as a whole in keep with the UNHCR's global agenda

on the issue. The declaration included 25 commitments, most notably generating factual data of the causes of the problem in ECOWAS countries. The declaration also reaffirmed the importance of protecting stateless people and maintaining their dignity by providing them with legal recognition.

The number of stateless people or those under threat in the region is estimated to be around 750,000.

### Commemorating Khojaly Massacre

On the occasion of the 23rd anniversary of the commemoration of the massacre in the Azerbaijani town of Khojaly, the Secretary General of the Organization of Islamic Cooperation (OIC), Iyad Ameen Madani, has paid tribute to all those who lost their lives in the 1992 atrocity.

The Secretary General reiterated that the Khojaly incident was a result of the illegal occupation of Azerbaijani territory by Armenia. He referred to the resolution adopted by the 41st Session of the OIC Council of Foreign Ministers held in Jeddah, Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, in 2014, which considered the actions perpetrated against civilian Azerbaijani population in the occupied Azerbaijani territories, as crimes against humanity.

The Secretary General further reiterated the OIC's full support to the initiatives and efforts of the Republic of Azerbaijan to put an end to the occupation of its territories and to restore its territorial integrity.

## Late King Abdullah



## was OIC Partner in Establishing Muslim Unity

The entire world was enveloped with grief on Jan. 23 with the passing away of Custodian of the Two Holy Mosque King Abdullah bin Abdulaziz Al Saud (may Allah have mercy on him). He was a world leader who contributed immensely in helping the weak and advocating for peace.

Though his soul may have moved to the eternal abode, the virtues of his actions remain alive in hearts and minds. The Muslim world and Muslims across the globe will forever remember the historical projects undertaken in the Grand Mosque in Makkah, the Holy Mosque in Madinah and the Holy Sites of Mina, Muzdalifah and Arafah—projects that have contributed significantly in easing the rites of Hajj and Umrah.

The late king had a special place in his heart for the OIC, something that is remembered with immense gratitude. He is remembered for the crucial role he played in the service of Islam and Muslims, supporting Islamic causes in international forums, and providing financial and humanitarian aid to Muslims, including Muslim minorities, across the globe. King Abdullah's interactions with the OIC

were turning points in the history of this important and prestigious Muslim umbrella body. The Third Session of the Extraordinary Islamic Summit Conference was held in Makkah in 2005 on his invitation. The event was a milestone in the OIC's history and resulted in, for the first time, a complete action plan—the Ten-Year Program of Action—which formed the basis of a new vision to address political, economic and social problems facing the Ummah.

The late King's invitation to hold the Fourth Session of the Extraordinary Islamic Summit Conference on Islamic unity next to the Grand Mosque in 2012 during Ramadan underscores his commitment to uniting Muslims. One of the event's highlights included a decision to establish a center for dialogue between different Muslim schools of thought in Madinah. The summit also resulted in the adoption of a charter on Islamic unity.

Throughout his life, King Abdullah undertook immense humanitarian work across the globe. Following the 2005 Tsunami—one of the worst natural disasters known to mankind in the modern era and which left over 20,000 orphans in Banda Aceh, Indonesia—the OIC and the IDB, with the

late king's support, undertook a project to care for some 10,000 children orphans for 15 years at a cost of \$5,400 per child. The Gaza Strip, blockaded and under siege, was also the focus of the late king's aid. Among several projects, King Abdullah donated some SR200 million to the Palestinian Red Crescent to help besieged Palestinians. Likewise, King Abdullah also funded humanitarian work in several Muslim countries, such as Somalia and other West African countries affected by Ebola.

In the global fight against terrorism, King Abdullah undertook numerous international initiatives, including donating some \$100 million to the UN to show Saudi Arabia's support for international efforts to combat terrorism. He also donated \$10 million to efforts in Africa against terrorism.

In November 2012 King Abdullah facilitated an important event on dialogue that resulted in the opening of the King Abdullah bin Abdulaziz International Centre for Interreligious and Intercultural Dialogue (KAICIID).

## A United and Cohesive Arab World is Strength for the Ummah: Madani

### Sharm El-Sheikh Declaration: Arab leaders stress the importance of maintaining national security and establishing a joint force

SHARM EL-SHEIKH: The security of Arab states and the ability of Arab countries to defend themselves and maintain their sovereignty and independence was emphasized in the Declaration that was reached at the end of the 26th Arab League Summit in Sharm El-Sheikh on March 28-29.

The Summit was held under the title "Arab National Security Maintenance in Facing the Current Challenge." The final Declaration reaffirmed that those common issues that unite Arab countries are greater than what divides them; the Declaration also commended Arab efforts to consolidate bilateral relations and iron out differences.

Leaders attending the Summit pledged to work on achieving the will of the people of Arab countries to live dignified lives; progress in development and enlightenment; consolidate citizenship rights; protect freedom, human dignity and women's rights; and realize social justice and quality education.

The Declaration also called on the international community to support Arab efforts to combat terrorism and take all necessary measures to exhaust their sources of fund. It also urged official religious institutes in the Arab world to intensify efforts and cooperation with each other to address obscure ideologies.

The Arab Leaders vowed to exert every possible effort and stand united against foreign elements which seek to create strife, discord and division in some Arab countries, as well as taking preventive and defensive measures to maintain Arab national security in combating current challenges, while keeping all available options, including taking necessary coordination efforts and plans to establish a joint Arab force.

Speaking at the event, Secretary General of the OIC Iyad Ameen Madani said the OIC attaches lofty hopes in Arab Summits and awaits for them to be convened.

"This is because in the unity and cohesion of the Arab world there is strength for the entire Islamic Ummah," he said, adding that the 57-member OIC provides strategic depth to the entire Arab world. He said that this integration and overlap is reflected in the common challenges; it also appears in the large horizons of cooperation, pointing out that the fragmentation and sectarian extremism speech may have been at the top of those challenges.

In a wide ranging speech, Madani discussed challenges facing the Arab and Muslim world, including sectarianism and extremism. "It is unthinkable that the message of guidance, compassion, justice, equality and civilization belonging to an Ummah from which the messenger of mercy (may Allah be pleased with him) was delivered would lead to rupture and in-fighting.

Madani mentioned that the root cause of sectarianism lies in people wanting to use these groups to exert influence, acquire control and establish hegemony. "The time has come for us to expose and deter them," he said.

He added that extremism is a product of politics and the social and economic environment. "It is completely alien to the creed,



laws and objectives of Islam. It is also a result of outside infiltration for the sake of political agendas that aim to divide in order to rule and to weaken in order to survive. Understanding all this is the key to dismantling, countering and defeating extremist narrative," he said.

Madani also discussed how the OIC is supporting Palestinians under an "apartheid" occupation. "Effort is ongoing to hold an extraordinary Islamic summit on Palestine and what has befallen our people there, including the desecration of the Al-Aqsa Mosque, the dead-end to which more than 20 years of negotiations have reached and a return to negotiations on the basis of the Arab peace initiative and Palestine's demands for a specific and time-bound agenda," he said.

He added that there is a need to break the monopoly of having a single mediator and suggested the forming of a wider group of mediators represented by the Quartet under a new leadership.

The Secretary General also drew attendees' attention to the activities of the OIC in relation to issues across the Muslim world, including in Somalia, the African Sahel, Mali, the Central African Republic, Myanmar, Kashmir and Azerbaijan. The OIC, he said, is "in support of the Arab League's role in Syria and Libya and pushing towards unity of rank in Iraq and Afghanistan. It has declared unequivocally its support for the steps taken by the states supporting constitutional legitimacy in Yemen."

He also highlighted that the OIC, aside from dealing with crises, also operates in the fields of economy, education, culture, science and technology, women's empowerment and youth. He said the OIC stands with the marginalized and aspires to build a promising future.

The summit took place on March 28-29 and was presided over by Egypt's President Abdel Fattah Al-Sisi who took up the presidency of the summit for one year. The summit is held every year by the 22-member Arab League and saw the attendance of numerous heads of state from across the Arab world. It is also worth mentioning that messages to the Summit were delivered during the closing session. Morocco will host the next 27th Arab Summit.

## Charlie Hebdo: freedom of expression or liberty to offend?

In what would have been an ordinary beginning of the new Gregorian year, occurrences at the offices of a satirical French newspaper in Paris resulted in a chain of events that sparked a wave of Islamophobia across the west and the condemnation of the OIC.

The French satirical weekly newspaper, Charlie Hebdo, has a long history of offending and provoking Muslims, particularly in its crude and crass caricatures of the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him). In 2012, for instance, the newspaper published a cartoon of the Prophet Muhammad (pbuh) naked and crouching.

The newspaper's staff were under threat for a number of years. Things came to a head on Jan. 7 when two armed gunmen—Chérif and Saïd Kouachi—entered the newspaper's offices in Paris and shot dead 11 people, including a Muslim police officer, and injured 12 others. The shootings sparked a chain of Islamophobic events across Europe and the US, leaving minority Muslim communities feeling vulnerable.

Though the gunmen—brothers of Algerian descent and affiliated to Al-Qaeda in Yemen—escaped they were subsequently shot dead during a shootout with police on Jan. 9 at a prints work where they had taken hostages. A third gunman, Amedy Coulibaly, who was not part of the Charlie Hebdo attack but knew and supported the Kouachi brothers, killed a policewoman elsewhere in Paris and took hostages in a kosher supermarket in the city. He was also subsequently killed by police.

Charlie Hebdo has a history of offending and provoking Muslims. Depictions of the Prophet (pbuh) are prohibited within Islam, and French groups unsuccessfully tried to sue the newspaper in 2007 for publishing a dozen Danish cartoons of the Prophet (pbuh). In 2011, the newspaper hit newsstands with the temporary new name of Charia Hebdo, a crude play on the word Shariah. The Prophet (pbuh) was depicted with a red nose and saying 100 lashes if you do not die of laughter. The newspaper's offices were fire-bombed the next day.

As news of the attack in January this year came to light, the Organization of Islamic Cooperation (OIC) was quick to denounce the attacks. In a letter to the French Foreign Minister, Iyad Ameen Madani, the OIC's Secretary General, condemned the killings and expressed solidarity with France and its people. He also condemned terrorism in all forms and reiterated that more work was needed to combat the problem. This sentiment was echoed by a spokesperson for the Islamophobia Observatory at the OIC.

Following the shooting dead of the gunmen, demonstrations took place across France, and major cities in the West in condemnation. The phrase Je Suis Charlie (I am Charlie) became a common sign of solidarity against the attacks which were widely perceived as an attack on freedom of expression.

In spite of the OIC and major Muslim countries strongly condemn-



ing the killings and the French government stating that the gunmen do not represent Islam and Muslims, the remaining staff at Charlie Hebdo published new caricatures of the Prophet Muhammad (pbuh) the following week. Some 7.95 million copies in six languages were printed, a marked contrast to its normal print run which was 60,000. The cover depicted the Prophet Muhammad (pbuh) holding a Je Suis Charlie sign with the caption "all is forgiven."

The OIC's Independent Permanent Human Rights Commission described the edition as intolerant, disrespectful and insensitive to the feelings of Muslims across the globe. It further highlighted that the caricatures "further exacerbated the existing debate on the limits of freedom of expression by converting the so-called 'right to offend' into a 'duty to offend.'" What made matters worse was the paper's inconsistency—while engaging in rabid Islamophobia Charlie Hebdo sacked a cartoonist in 2008 for anti-Semitism.

Iyad Madani, the OIC's Secretary General, also condemned the Prophet's cartoon in the new edition which he described as "insolence, ignorance and foolishness." "Freedom of speech must not become hate-speech and it must not offend others. No sane person, regardless of doctrine, religion or faith, accepts his beliefs being ridiculed," he said to the press.

He also said the OIC intends to take legal action against the newspaper. "If French laws allow us to take legal procedures against Charlie Hebdo, OIC will not hesitate to prosecute the French magazine," he said.

The IPHRC also called on Muslims across the world to continue to exercise restraint and not be provoked, and expressed hope that in line with UNHRC Resolution 16/18 the international community would speak up against the caricatures.

In the weeks after the attack Muslims in France experienced an unprecedented rise in Islamophobia. Several mosques were attacked and a bomb even exploded at a kebab shop in Paris.

"Islamophobic acts have reached a never-before-recorded summit of hatred against French people of the Muslim religion," said Abdallah Zekri, president of the National Islamophobia Observatory in France. "This is the first time that grenades being thrown or gunshots have been registered." The organization also added that France's "political class has not criticized these vile acts."



## Iraqi Leadership Welcomes OIC Role in Encouraging Moderation

### Madani visits Baghdad, Najaf and Erbil and proposes Makkah Document 2

**O**IC Secretary General Iyad Madani visited Iraq in mid-January and received official backing for bringing to completion the “Makkah Document”—an OIC initiative formed in 2006 to take steps to end Sunni Shiite sectarianism. He also received support for a proposed second initiative along similar lines that will be entitled Makkah Document 2.

Iraq’s leaders expressed confidence that the OIC would be able to find a way out of the present crisis facing the country and welcomed efforts to build on work carried out by the OIC in 2006 in Makkah to end sectarianism in the country.

During the three-day visit on Jan. 13-15, Madani was received by Iraq’s President Fouad Masum at Al-Salam Palace in Baghdad. Masum said the visit was timely as Iraq was facing heightened terrorism. He further called on the OIC to mobilize its Member States to address the problem.

In response, the OIC chief welcomed the president’s comments and said that the visit was aimed at amalgamating the views of the Iraqi leadership on possible solutions to confront the challenges facing the Muslim world such as extremism, radicalism, sectarianism and Islamophobia.

He added that the OIC is working on encouraging dialogue among people of different religions and cultures through several platforms. This includes a new centre in Madinah dedicated to this line of work. The decision to establish this center was adopted at the Makkah Extraordinary Summit in 2012.

Madani also met with Iraq’s Vice Presidents Osama Al-Nujaifi and Ayyad Alawi, Parliamentary Speaker Dr. Salim El-Jabouri, Chairman of the Council of Ministers Haider Al-Abadi and Minister of Foreign Affairs Dr. Ibrahim Jaafari. During a meeting with Jaafari, Madani emphasized the OIC’s vision for a strong, united and open Iraq.

The OIC chief also visited Erbil where he met President of Iraqi Kurdistan Masoud

Barazani. Both men discussed bilateral cooperation and the current situation in Iraq. Madani told Barazani that the OIC will provide more assistance to the region on account of the heightened humanitarian crisis affecting over 1.5 million refugees. Madani also met Prime Minister of Iraqi Kurdistan Nechervan Barazani and discussed issues of cooperation, the present situation and how to minimize the humanitarian crisis facing people in the region.

The Secretary General also met Sheikh Shamu Namu, the Yazidi representative in the Iraqi Kurd parliament. Sheikh Namu provided a briefing on the tragic situation of Yazidis in Iraq; Madani, on his part, offered the OIC’s sympathy.

He further met Ayatollah Ali Sistani in Najaf who briefed him on the present situation in Iraq, and stressed the importance of mutual understanding and coexistence given that Muslims are a single nation and should be united. He stressed that efforts need to be taken in relation to this and that the OIC has a role to play in bringing Iraq’s various groups together.

In Baghdad, Madani held a series of meetings with a number of religious figures, including His Holiness the Patriarch of Babylon of the Chaldeans Louis Raphael I Sako at the seat of the Patriarchdom in Baghdad. Madani stressed the OIC’s position condemning the mistreatment of Christians and said that Christians constitute a major component of Iraq and should not be prejudiced against.

He also met Nicolai Maldinov, UN Secretary General Ban Ki-moon’s special representative to Iraq. Both sides agreed on the important role that the OIC plays in humanitarian work in Iraq, something that encourages moderation in the face of extremism.

The Secretary General also received briefings on the present situation in the country during meetings with Chairman of the Sunni Endowment in Iraq Sheikh Mahmoud Sameidai and Chairman of the Shiite Endowment Sheikh Saleh Haidari.



## Ambassador Abdullah Alim delivers lecture in Muscat on the OIC's role and challenges



Amb. Abdullah Alim

The role of the OIC on the global stage and the challenges facing it was the subject of a lecture delivered by Ambassador Abdullah Alim, the OIC's Assistant Secretary General for Political Affairs, in Muscat on Feb. 25. "The Islamic world is in the midst of political, social and economic difficulties," said Alim over the course of the lecture delivered at the headquarters of the National Defense College in Muscat, Oman. "These are difficulties that the Islamic world has rarely experienced and on account of which external forces have pounced on it. The internal situation has sapped its strength; its abilities to meet the challenges of the times and safeguard the Islamic world and maintain territorial integrity and

unity have been exhausted," he added. The Assistant Secretary-General said that it is enough for one to look at what has befallen the Islamic world in terms of pain, heartbreak and a sense of helplessness when one looks at Palestine, which remains the primary issue for the Islamic world. He said that the situation remains the same and that the aspirations of the Palestinians to establish an independent state with Jerusalem as its capital has, in spite of the OIC's efforts on the international level, not materialized.

These efforts resulted in many European countries recognizing the State of Palestine, he said, adding that OIC Secretary General Iyad Ameen Madani has led ministerial delegations to several countries to build support for a Palestinian state. He has also previously visited Jerusalem to support Jerusalemites in the wake of repeated Israeli attacks on Al-Aqsa Mosque and Israel's efforts to Judaize the city.

Speaking about the OIC, Alim said the organization consists of 57 Member States from Africa, Asia, the Middle East, Europe and two Caribbean countries, in addition to five observers—Russia, Thailand, the Central Africa Republic, Bosnia and Herzegovi-

na, and the Turkish Cypriot State. Describing the backdrop to the establishment of the OIC, Alim said that meetings had been taking place between leaders of the Muslim world since the 1920s and that these meetings finally culminated in the formation of the Organization of the Islamic Conference in 1969 which is now the Organization of Islamic Cooperation. He said the OIC was established after a Zionist terrorist, Denis Michael Rohan, carried out an arson attack on Al-Aqsa Mosque on Aug. 21 1969.

The Assistant Secretary-General for Political Affairs said that the OIC is a political governmental organization, and not religious. However, its *raison d'être* is Islam in terms of culture, civilization, identity and reference point. He also said it is the second largest political organization after the United Nations.

Alim finished by saying that the OIC looks to the future with optimism and hope, and that in light of the active role that the OIC plays abroad in terms of uniting Muslims, international changes and globalization leaves us no room or opportunity for working individually.

## OIC signs agreement with Central African Republic to open office in Bangui



The Secretary General of the Organization of Islamic Cooperation (OIC), Iyad Ameen Madani, received on 12 January 2015, in his office at the General Secretariat, Mahamat Kamoun, the Prime Minister of the Central African Republic (CAR) and his accompanying delegation.

Madani and his guest reviewed the latest situation in the CAR and discussed ways and means of implementing the political transition and returning durable peace and stability to the country. Prime Minister Kamoun commended the leadership of the Secretary General and thanked the OIC for its numerous contributions to end the violence as well as its sustained interest in the situation in CAR. He particularly praised the overall contributions of the OIC Special En-

voy for CAR Dr. Cheikh Tidiane Gadio who was also present and thanked the OIC for the political and humanitarian assistance extended to his country.

The Secretary General assured the Prime Minister of OIC's continued engagement to promote peace, security and stability through a political process and an all inclusive national dialogue and reconciliation. He reiterated the determination of the Organization and its institutions to intensify their humanitarian assistance and to contribute to the economic recovery of the country. Finally, the OIC and the CAR signed an agreement to open an OIC Humanitarian Development Office in Bangui.

## Madani Meets Afghan President and CEO During Kabul Visit



KABUL: OIC Secretary General Lyad Ameen Madani visited the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan towards the end of January on an official three-day visit that led to a series of positive outcomes, including strengthening ties between the OIC and Afghanistan. Madani met President Ashraf Ghani and Afghanistan's Chief Executive Officer Dr. Abdullah Abdullah during the Jan. 27-29 visit. During the visit, the OIC and Afghanistan agreed to work together on implementing political and economic initiatives as set by Afghani-

stan's National Unity Government.

The visit came in the wake of an invitation from the country's new government. In meetings with the Afghan leadership, Madani discussed many political and economic issues involving both Afghanistan and the wider region. He also stressed the OIC's readiness to work with the National Unity Government and outlined the positive attributes of the OIC which make it an important strategic partner. On his part, President Ghani underscored the important role that the OIC plays in Afghanistan, and highlighted the need for further collaboration. This was echoed by Dr. Abdullah.

At the beginning of his visit, Madani conveyed his congratulations to the Afghan leadership and listened to the new Afghan Government's vision and priorities at this crucial stage in the country's history. He further reaffirmed the OIC's continued support for the National Unity Government's drive for national solidarity.

The two parties also agreed to work together to chart out Afghanistan's situation and new developments at the OIC's Council of Foreign Ministers that is scheduled to be held in May in Kuwait.

During his visit, the Secretary General also met a number of Afghan journalists and discussed with them the OIC's ambitions for the future.

## President Museveni receives OIC Secretary General

The Secretary General of the Organization of Islamic Cooperation (OIC), Lyad Ameen Madani, who was on official visit to Uganda was received on 10th March 2015, in audience by the President of the Republic of Uganda, His Excellency Mr. Yoweri Museveni in his office in Kampala.

Madani briefed the President on the various programmes, activities and initiatives of the OIC in various fields and invited him to attend the forthcoming extraordinary summit to be held in the next few weeks to review the serious situation prevailing in Palestine. He also extended another invitation to the President to participate in the meeting of COMSTECH on science and technology at summit level scheduled for October this year in Pakistan.

President Museveni on his part, identified priorities for the OIC in the period ahead and elaborated on his vision for peace,

sustainable development and progress for the Member States. The Ugandan leader and the Secretary General also discussed important regional and international issues of interest and concern.

As part of his visit, the Secretary General toured the facilities of new Faculty of Medicine of the OIC Institution, the Islamic University in Uganda in Kampala where he interacted with the pioneering staff members of the Faculty.

President Museveni received the Secretary General again in Uganda on 11 April 2015, at the State House in Entebbe. The President and the Secretary General reviewed the state of bilateral relations between Uganda and the OIC and need to further strengthen them. They also exam-



ined the situation in the region and stressed the importance for more cooperative and good neighborly relations in order to enhance peace, security and development. Their discussions similarly covered topical international issues of mutual interest and concern to the Muslim World.

## OIC reiterate continued support to a peaceful resolution of the Cyprus issue

The Secretary General of the Organization of Islamic Cooperation (OIC), Lyad Ameen Madani has, on 23 February 2015, received in his office Ozdil Nami, Foreign Minister of the Turkish Cypriot State.

Madani and the Foreign Minister of the Turkish Cypriot held talks on wide range of issues pertaining to the OIC-Turkish Cypriot relations. During the meeting, the two sides had also explored ways of improving the

bilateral relations in all areas and activities.

The Secretary General further reiterated OIC's continued support to a peaceful resolution of the Cyprus issue

## President Macky Sall of Senegal and OIC Secretary General discuss combating extremism

The Secretary General of the Organization of Islamic Cooperation (OIC), Iyad Ameen Madani, was received in audience in Jeddah on 31st March 2015 by the visiting President of the Republic of Senegal, HE. Mr. Macky Sall.

The OIC Secretary General who was accompanied by a delegation of senior OIC officials held fruitful talks with the President on issues of mutual interest and concern as well as joint Islamic actions. They raised the issue of the situations prevailing in Palestine, Yemen and in the West Africa sub region. In the same vein, discussions also focused on combating violent extremism and terrorism represented by Boko Haram and



other similar groups that continue to destabilize the Sahel and Sahara region.

Madani who further briefed the President on the activities and initiatives of the OIC in various domains including the planned Extraordinary summit on Palestine, the forthcoming Council of Foreign Ministers (CFM) meeting in Kuwait at the end of May 2015, also reviewed the preparations for the upcoming Standing Committee on Information and Culture (COMIAC) meeting to be held in Dakar at the end of April 2015. The President expressed satisfaction with the state of preparedness for the meeting and reiterated his determination to revitalize this Standing Committee under the Chairmanship of Senegal.

## Russian Federation expresses interest in further strengthening relations with OIC



The Secretary General of the Organization of Islamic Cooperation (OIC), Iyad Ameen Madani received, on 16 March 2015, Ilyas Umakhanov, Deputy Chairman of the Council of the Federation (the Federal Assembly of the Russian Federation) and members of

his delegation at the General Secretariat.

Umakhanov briefed the Secretary General about some regional and international issues of common concern and reiterated his country's interest to further strengthen the traditional bilateral relations with the OIC.

On his part, the Secretary General thanked Umakhanov for his visit to the OIC Headquarters and shared OIC position on some major issues on the OIC agenda. He sought stronger Russian role and voice for the protection of Muslim minorities in different parts of the world.

Both sides agreed to remain engaged on mutual issues and strengthen bilateral relations through regular consultations at various levels.

## OIC Science and Technology Summit will Discuss Conquest of Space

JEDDAH (IINA): The OIC plans to hold its first Science and Technology Summit in the Pakistani capital of Islamabad in the last quarter of 2015 to discuss the possibility of conquering space in the near future as part of a joint program of OIC member states.

The OIC Standing Committee on Scientific and Technological Cooperation (COMSTECH) submitted a working paper recommending the formation of a team of scientists and engineers who have the experience and vision to carry out the mission at a preparatory meeting in Jeddah. The working paper revealed that there is a tendency to establish large joint programs to promote and take advantage of multi-disciplinary research in physics, mathematics, chemistry, biology, climate change, satellites, oceanography, earth sciences and technological innovation. The working paper urges OIC countries to design and launch mini satellites for remote sensing applications like crop estimates, disaster management, rescue at sea and weather forecast. It also urges them to use remote sensing applications in experiments on space plasma, ionized particles, magnetic poles shift, verification of communication data, biological experiments and testing materials under space conditions, in addition



to mapping resources and oceans and seas around the coasts of OIC countries, and sending joint teams to the Antarctica. COMSTECH believes that the participation of several countries in designing, implementing and operating these programs collectively will reduce the financial burden on participating states, and lead to better cooperation and collective capability building, which is part of the vision of all OIC member states.

## Custodian of the Two Holy Mosques receives OIC Secretary General and Senior Officials



**T**he Custodian of the Two Holy Mosques King Salman bin Abdul Aziz received the Secretary General of the Organization of Islamic Cooperation (OIC), Iyad Madani, and the OIC senior officials at Al-Yamamah Palace on 22 March 2015.

During the reception, the Custodian of the Two Holy Mosques listened to a briefing on the most prominent efforts exerted by the OIC towards fulfilling its mandate to serve the causes of the Muslim Ummah.

The Custodian of the Two Holy Mosques urged the OIC to continue its efforts to unify the rank of Muslims, to renounce division

and extremism, and to address the challenges and issues facing the Muslim countries in a way that would benefit their peoples and the entire Ummah.

Crown Prince and Deputy Prime Minister, Muqrin bin Abdul Aziz Al Saud, and Deputy Crown Prince, Second Deputy Prime Minister, and Minister of Interior, Prince Mohammed bin Naif bin Abdul Aziz and Deputy Foreign Minister, Prince Abdul Aziz bin Abdullah bin Abdul Aziz attended the meeting.

## Madani discusses with Kuwaiti Foreign Minister preparations for OIC's Council of Foreign Ministers

The Secretary General of the Organization of Islamic Cooperation (OIC), Iyad Ameen Madani, met in Kuwait on March 24, 2015, Sheikh Sabah Al-Khaled Al-Sabah, First Deputy Prime Minister and Foreign Minister, to discuss issues and ways of coordination and prospecting Islamic Cooperation for the benefit of Muslim countries and the world at large.

They also discussed the ongoing preparations for the upcoming session of the



Council of Foreign Ministers (CFM) of the OIC, scheduled in Kuwait for May 2015, as well as the arrangements for honoring His Highness the Emir of Kuwait, Sheikh Sabah Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah, for his selection by the United Nations as a humanitarian symbol and awarding him the "Humanitarian Leader" title of 2014 in recognition of his efforts in humanitarian action and development.

## OIC Secretary General receives the President of Azerbaijan

The Secretary General of the Organization of Islamic Cooperation (OIC), Iyad Ameen Madani, received on 6 April 2015, at the OIC residence in Jeddah, H.E. the President of the Republic of Azerbaijan, Ilham Aliyev, and his accompanying delegation. The Secretary General held a formal lunch ceremony for the President with the attendance of high OIC officials, prominent dignitaries and businessmen.

Madani welcomed President Aliyev and ex-

pressed his appreciation of Azerbaijan for hosting several OIC conferences including that of the Ministers of Labor, Ministers of Tourism, a Conference to Support Palestine, and most recently the Ministers in Charge of Women's Affairs. President Aliyev in turn expressed his support for the OIC and urged for more engagement in dealing with the crises in the region and called for more unity and solidarity of the Muslim Ummah.



## OIC to work with Switzerland on issues of shared interest

Secretary General of the OIC, Iyad Ameen Madani received, on 10 February 2015, Yves Rocher, the State Secretary of the Federal Department of Foreign Affairs of Switzerland at his official residence in Jeddah.

Madani and his guest had useful and extensive exchange of views on various in-

ternational and regional issues of common interest including the Middle East Peace Process, Muslim minority, combating intolerance, radicalization and extremism. Both sides agreed to remain engaged on mutual issues and strengthen bilateral cooperation through regular consultations at various lev-

els.

Secretary General welcomed the interest of Switzerland to the programmes and activities of the OIC and reaffirmed OIC's readiness to work with Switzerland on issues of shared interest.

## Draft Programme of Action for the next decade tabled before the OIC Experts Group



The Intergovernmental Experts Group Meeting (EGM) was held on 18 March 2015 at the OIC Headquarters to consider the draft OIC-2025: Programme of Action. The meeting was attended by experts drawn from all OIC Member States to consider the new OIC Programme of Action which is a successor to the OIC Ten-Year Programme of Action (TYPOA) which was adopted by

Abdul Moiz Bokhari, Advisor, informed the experts that the document before them was an outcome of the collective efforts and hard work by the relevant departments in the OIC General Secretariat and the OIC institutions. It also drew on the lessons learned from the implementation of the outgoing TYPOA. He underlined the importance of the ownership and support by na-

the 3rd extra-ordinary Islamic Summit held in Makkah Al-Mukarramah in December 2005.

The Secretary General H.E. Mr. Iyad Ameen Madani in his statement delivered by Ambassador

tional governments to the goals and actions set forth in the document that envisions the OIC as an effective agent for peace and development in the Muslim World and beyond.

The Chairman of the meeting and Head of Saudi delegation Ambassador Muhamed Ahmed Tayeb recalled the role of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia in the formulation of the outgoing TYPOA and noted that the OIC-2025 was a forward looking document and provided a roadmap for the Organisation to be pursued during the next decade.

The Experts Group Meeting (EGM) will be reconvened on 6-7 May 2015 to finalize the draft Programme of Action which will be submitted for consideration to the 42nd session of the Council of Foreign Ministers to be held in Kuwait on 27-28 May 2015.

## OIC and South Africa discuss possible formal relationship

The Secretary General of the Organization of Islamic Cooperation (OIC), Iyad Ameen Madani, received on 16 March 2015, in his office at the General Secretariat, Mogamat Sadick Jaffer, Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary of the Republic of South Africa to the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia.

Madani and his guest discussed ways and means of establishing beneficial relations between the OIC and South Africa including a possible formal relationship with the Organization. They further explored potential areas of cooperation in Africa considering the leadership position of the country in

the continent.

The two sides also reviewed key regional and international issues of mutual interest and concern, notably, the prevailing serious situation in Palestine and the conditions of Muslim minorities in parts of the world.

## OIC and UN Agree on 2015-2016 Work Plan

JEDDAH: The OIC held a first-of-its-kind round table meeting at its headquarters in Jeddah on Jan. 27 with several international bodies to discuss how to boost joint global humanitarian relief work and attract funding.

The meeting was attended by representatives from the UN's Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA), the European Union's Humanitarian Aid and Civil Protection department (ECHO), the US Agency for International Development, and several Western countries including Germany and Sweden.

Chaired by Amb. Hesham Youssef, Assistant Secretary General for Humanitarian Affairs at the OIC, the meeting was held to coordinate and intensify humanitarian ef-

forts, exchange information, benefit from experience, finance joint humanitarian work across the Islamic world, and promote humanitarian work among OIC Member States.

The meeting, which was initiated by the OIC, highlighted the manner in which the OIC works with international organizations. Further meetings are expected to take place in the future.

Participants at the one-day meeting also discussed the OIC's plan for 2015, how to increase capacity for joint relief work and the work of humanitarian organizations that operate in the Islamic world.

The meeting comes in the footsteps of a Memorandum of Understanding signed between the OIC and OCHA on Nov. 4, 2014

when an action plan for 2012-2014 was outlined identifying areas of cooperation.

Meetings took place between the two organizations at the end of the two-year period to assess work undertaken and develop a new plan for 2015-2016. The new action plan seeks to build on the achievements of the first plan and identify important activities in line with current needs and the capacity of both organizations.

Both sides also agreed to form an action group consisting of individuals from the OIC and OCHA to periodically meet and monitor work. The OIC and OCHA will also, individually and collectively, strive to bring plans into action, including contacting member states and potential donors for funding.

## OIC Humanitarian Delegation Calls for Close Cooperation in Pakistan Relief Work



ISLAMABAD: There is a need for close cooperation between the Organization of Islamic Cooperation (OIC) and Pakistan's National Disaster Management Authority (NDMA), said an OIC humanitarian delegation that recently visited Pakistan.

The OIC delegation, headed by Fuad Al-Maznaee, met with the NDMA in Islamabad to discuss relief work in the country and also, later on, held a joint awards ceremony in Karachi with the UK-based Al-Khair Foundation.

During the visit, the delegation met on Mar. 27 with Tasnim Aslam, spokesperson for Pakistan's Ministry of Foreign Affairs. During the meeting, Aslam expressed Pakistan's gratitude for the OIC's help, saying that the

people of Pakistan would always remember. The OIC delegation also reassured her that the OIC would continue to operate its Islamabad office to coordinate relief work.

The OIC delegation also met with NDMA head Maj. Gen. Asghar Nawaz, and attended a presentation on the NDMA's activities and how it was established in 2005 to oversee disaster management following a major earthquake. NDMA is Pakistan's sole government body tasked with coordinating relief nationally.

The NDMA acknowledged the positive role that the OIC has played in Pakistan following disastrous floods that hit the country in 2010 and expressed a desire to continue to work closely with the OIC in coordinating

relief.

The OIC delegation elaborated on the objectives of the OIC humanitarian mission currently underway in Pakistan and thanked the Pakistan Government and the NDMA for its support in completing two housing projects for people affected by floods. Some 227 homes, a school, a mosque and a health centre have been completed so far as part of two projects in Dera Ghazi Khan and Dado.

The OIC delegation also held a joint awards ceremony at the Ramada Hotel in Karachi in conjunction with Al-Khair Foundation, a UK-based NGO that has been delivering projects in partnership with the OIC. Chief guest at the event was Mufti Farooz-ul Din, advisor to the Chief Minister of Sindh. The event was also attended by community leaders and flood victims.

In his speech, Mufti Farooz-ul Din praised the proactive role played by the OIC in defending the Ummah on the world stage and, on behalf of the chief minister of Sindh, thanked the OIC for carrying out relief projects.

Al-Maznaee, in turn, thanked the Pakistan government and the NDMA for supporting the OIC in carrying out relief work in the country, and also thanked the OIC's partners for helping to deliver projects. Keys were handed to beneficiaries at the end of the event.

## \$4 Billion Pledged in Humanitarian Aid for Syrians at the Third Donors' Conference in Kuwait



UN Secretary General Ban Ki-moon (L) and Emir of Kuwaiti Sheikh Sabah Al Ahmad (C) during the opening session of the Second International Humanitarian Pledging Conference for Syria, in Kuwait City, Kuwait, 15 January 2014 (epa)

**A**round \$4 billion was pledged at the third international donors' conference for humanitarian aid in Syria that was held in Kuwait in March.

Emir of Kuwait Sheikh Sabah Al-Ahmad Al-Sabah said the Syrian conflict is the "biggest humanitarian crisis in recent history" and that the Geneva Communiqué should form the basis of resolving the crisis.

An OIC delegation led by Ambassador Hesham Youssef, Assistant Secretary General for Humanitarian Affairs, attended the event. He delivered a speech where he called on the OIC member states to provide even a small portion of its aid to Syria through the OIC so that it can perform its role towards the Syrian people. He stressed that the OIC will work during the coming period to try and support the Syrian people, especially women, youth, children and those with special needs, to deal with the psychological effect of this crisis in cooperation with some NGOs.

Total pledges from NGOs at the conference came to \$506 million, a sum higher than the Second International Humanitarian Pledging Conference for Syria where NGOs pledged \$158.06 million.

Kuwait also hosted the previous two donor conferences for Syria which were attended by a number of Arab and non-Arab countries, and regional and international NGOs.

Over 78 countries and 40 international organizations attended the third conference in March.

The Secretary General of the United Nations, Ban Ki-moon announced that the total donations pledged at the third conference

reached \$3.8 billion for humanitarian assistance to Syrians. The US topped the list of donors with \$507 million in pledges.

The UAE said it would give \$100 million. Sheikha Lubna bint Khalid Al-Qasimi, the UAE's Minister of Development and International Cooperation, said that in addition to the \$100 million the UAE is also providing humanitarian assistance through a joint Jordan-UAE refugee camp, another UAE Red Crescent camp in Iraq and a hospital in Jordan as well as contribution to supporting humanitarian work in the sectors of health, water, education and others. She added that total UAE commitments over the past three years amounted to \$365 million.

Saudi Arabia said it would provide \$60 million in addition to its previous pledges of \$150 million. Saudi Finance Minister Ibrahim Al-Assaf said total Saudi aid for Syrian refugees since 2011 stood at over \$600 million.

France said it would give \$21.5 million, and the UK, via its International Development Secretary Desmond Swain, pledged \$150 million. Sweden pledged \$40 million, bringing total aid to Syria from the Scandinavian country since the beginning of the crisis to \$150 million, said Sweden's former Prime Minister Carl Bildt.

South Korea pledged \$10 million, Australia \$20 million and Japan said it would continue giving aid with the country's Foreign Minister Nakayama Aasohid announcing that the total aid for the people of Syria, including to neighboring countries with Syrian refugees, amounted to approximately \$509 million.



## War, poverty and need push Syrian children into low paid labor and begging

The ongoing war in Syria which has entered its fifth year this mid-March has deprived hundreds of thousands of children of normal living conditions. The conflict and loss of breadwinners have also forced many children to work, often for low wages.

While roaming Syria's capital, Damascus, or other cities and rural areas, it is common to see children under 15 standing at traffic lights or among stopped cars at the many military barricades erected across the city. Some of them wipe car windows; others wave displacement papers, medical reports or their parents' death certificates; some hang out in abandoned areas in the countryside. Among them is 12-year-old Abdul Karim Mohammed, who while trying to turn his face away from us extends his hand for money, clothes, food or, all the more surprising, a "used mobile."

"I am alone now; my mother is in the Aleppo countryside with my three sisters and I know nothing about them for months. Communication has become difficult. After my father was killed in an explosion, I came to Damascus in search for work and to escape the war," he said, showing obvious signs of fatigue.

Abdo, a nickname given to Abdul Karim by his street comrades, said, "I wish I was now at school with other children, living with my parents in a house with food and clean clothes; I'm just begging, crying and sleeping in streets, parks or the entrances of buildings if I can."

Ahmed, who has his 14-year-old sister with him, said, "I am 13 and I had studied until the fourth grade before the war began but now I am homeless. Some families help me for some time until another child takes my place with them. My sister rinses buildings for little pay and food for both of us and I carry goods for little money or in return for used clothes, food and drink for my sister and me. My family is in Gota and I cannot reach them ... I rarely talk to them because they often change places to escape air raids," he said.

On the doors of mosques and churches, the number of needy children increases making it very difficult or almost impossible to accommodate them all. Hanan, a 10-year-old girl, collects empty plastic bottles to sell. She earns a pittance. International humanitarian organisations report that millions of Syrian children need physical and psychological assistance; they are without schools and some of them have been left without breadwinners because of family separation or the death of parents and loss of everything amidst war and chaos. Though Syria's laws prohibit the employment of children below the age of 15 and outlines specific conditions and work hours, the phenomenon continues to grow as a result of the higher burdens of living. Most of the jobs done by children are industrial or vocational and not suitable for their physique or capabilities. Other jobs are in the service sector with lengthy hours and little pay.



In a car-repair workshop, located in an industrial estate on the outskirts of the capital, Arif Ali, not yet 13, helps the workshop's owner by moving equipment and heavy items. By the end of the day he looks exhausted, especially since he has disabilities in his right hand and left knee due to shrapnel from an explosion.

The need to contribute to a family's income, traditions and education are among factors leading to child labor. However, this was the situation before the crisis. Now, loss of breadwinner, displacement, escape from fighting, higher costs of living and housing rents have become the key reasons behind child labor, let alone war mafias who exploit everything, including innocent children.

The dreams of children in Syria have been reduced to securing the basics of food, drink and shelter as war still rages and batters their big dreams. Even education has become a luxury for some.

Tayssir al-Khalidi, a 14-year-old Palestinian-Syrian working in a carpentry workshop, said, "It is no time now for education ... study without food or drink is worth nothing."

United Nations organisations, including UNICEF, spoke at length of school dropouts as a result of the war and warned earlier that an entire generation of Syrian children may be suffering from illiteracy. There are children who have not gone to school for three years and the enrollment rate dropped from 97 percent to only 15 percent with three million children outside the educational process. However, Hezwan Awaze, Syria's minister of education, announced earlier that the number of children who currently go to school is four million despite many schools being turned into shelters for the displaced and thousands destroyed in fighting. (dpa)

## OIC Attends Preparatory Meeting for World Humanitarian Summit

In the run up to the World Humanitarian Summit (WHS) that is to be held next year, an OIC delegation attended a preparatory meeting in Amman on Feb. 16 that was organized by the OIC, the UN and the Arab League.

Amb. Hesham Yousef, the OIC's Assistant Secretary General for Humanitarian Affairs, led the OIC delegation to the meeting that was held in preparation for the WHS which is scheduled to take place in May 2016 in Istanbul.

Attendees at the meeting in Amman discussed a range of issues including protecting civilians, accessing crises areas for humanitarian purposes, vulnerabilities, disaster risk reduction and building resilience, responding to crises, financing humanitarian work and coordinating relief work.

The workshop was part of a series of meetings held to complete arrangements for next year's summit.

To deal with challenges in coordinating

relief work, UN Secretary General Ban Ki-moon announced a first-of-its kind global humanitarian summit in September 2013, and called on UN member states to support the event which he said would be held to formulate a program for humanitarian action and expand partnerships to help people in need.

The summit is expected to focus on four themes: the effectiveness of humanitarian work, reducing vulnerabilities and risk management, transformation through innovation, and meeting the needs of communities in conflict. It was also agreed that the summit would be held following a series of regional meetings in Ivory Coast (June 2014), Japan (July 2014), South Africa (October 2014), Hungary (February 2015) and Jordan (March 2015).

Future meetings are planned in Guatemala (May 2015), New Zealand (July 2015), and South and Central Asia (last quarter of 2015). A meeting on the purpose of the

consultation is also to be held in Germany (last quarter of 2015) and a Global Consultation meeting will be held in Switzerland (October 2015).

Several important issues were discussed in the first preparatory meeting in Cairo in December 2014, including protection for humanitarian field workers and those affected by disasters and crises, creating a mechanism through humanitarian law to make governments responsible for providing protection to refugees and humanitarian workers, obstacles faced by NGOs such as difficulties in transferring funds due to anti-terror laws, and the challenges that NGOs face in operating within areas controlled by extremists and terrorist organizations.

Discussions also took place on new ways of financing humanitarian work, shortages in funds, displaced people and the inability of host governments to absorb refugees.

## OIC signs MOU with Islamic Committee of the International Crescent

JEDDAH: The Department of Humanitarian Affairs at the General Secretariat of the Organization of Islamic Cooperation (OIC) has signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) with the Islamic Committee of the International Crescent (ICIC) on April 2, 2015 at the headquarters of the General Secretariat in Jeddah with a view to promoting cooperation, partnership and coordination between the two sides on humanitarian

assistance response as well as cooperation in the field of International Humanitarian Law. The MoU also aims to establish regular consultations between the two sides and set up a joint working group to elaborate operational procedures for cooperation and consultation blueprints in the field of humanitarian policies, exchange of information, capacity building and resource mobilization for humanitarian disasters and crises

as well as other issues of common interest. The MoU was signed by Ambassador Hesham Yousef, OIC Assistant Secretary General for Humanitarian Affairs, and Ambassador Ali Buhedma, ICIC President. The ICIC is an affiliated institution to the Organization of Islamic Cooperation and is based in Benghazi, Libya.

## A call to Extend Support to Victims of Winter Weather Conditions

The Middle East region witnessed a wave of very cold weather with the fall of the snow and rain causing Syrian refugees and Iraqi displaced people to suffer.

The storm also affected Palestinian people in the West Bank and the Gaza Strip in particular. It aggravated the sufferance of millions of displaced Syrian people and refugees living in Lebanon, Jordan and Turkey. Heavy rains fell on Zatari Syrian refugee camp in Jordan. Strong winds uprooted hundreds of tents. They also disrupted several roads leading to Lebanon especially mountainous ones rendering access to the Syrian refugee's camps difficult.

On the other hand, weather conditions af-

fecting the region aggravated the hardships of thousands of Palestinian families living in the Gaza Strip. Thousands of people had to take refuge in schools in tragic conditions especially with the aggravated problem of electricity.

Floods in Gaza affected more than 10,000 families leading to the displacement of 1400 families. Families living around Birkat Shikh Radwan started to flee their homes fearing possible floods. The Palestinian Ministry of Education in Gaza suspended work in all educational institutions.

The OIC follows with deep concern the consequences of the storm on humanitarian conditions in the affected states. Iyad

Ameen Madani, the OIC Secretary General, called on Member States, and the international and regional humanitarian organization to extend a helping hand to the victims in these countries.

Meanwhile, the Panjashir Province in Afghanistan has been severely affected by heavy snowstorms, causing catastrophic avalanches which has claimed 168 lives and caused destruction to property.

Madani appealed to Member States and Non-governmental organizations to also extend humanitarian assistance to alleviate the plight of the affected people.

## OIC participates in DIHAD 2015

### A need for a paradigm shift in the architecture of humanitarian assistance

The Assistant Secretary General for Humanitarian Affairs at the Organization of Islamic Cooperation (OIC) said that the international community has to admit that it is failing miserably on fundamental issues pertaining to settlement of disputes starting from early warning to conflict management to conflict resolution.

Ambassador Hesham Yousef stated this at the DIHAD conference in Dubai on 25 March 2015. He stressed that developments in many conflicts including in Syria, Libya, Yemen, Iraq, CAR, and South Sudan is a clear indication of our poor performance in conflict management. "The sheer number of these conflicts and with new crises erupting continuously and with old and chronic crises and conflicts like Palestine, Somalia, Darfur and others as well remaining unresolved is a clear indication of our failure in conflict resolution," he said.

Consequently, the current humanitarian system is unable to cope with the needs that are growing at an exponential rate. "The number and magnitude of humanitarian crises is unprecedented. We have three simultaneous major crises for the first time in recent history in Syria, Central African Republic, and South Sudan. The Commissioner of UNRWA and Robert Turner from UNRWA spoke about statistics of shame in Gaza," said Amb. Yousef.

As for the financial needs of humanitarian assistance, Amb. Yousef pointed out that the gap in financial needs has been on the rise for the last 10 years. Financing needs for humanitarian assistance reached a record of around \$17 billion in 2014 but only a little over 50% was fulfilled.

He called for a paradigm shift in the architecture of humanitarian assistance and raised six points in this regard.

First, is to start by issues pertaining to ensuring respect for International Humanitarian Law and access to those in need in an effective manner and not through a Security Council resolution allowing cross border humanitarian assistance without adequate mechanisms to ensure its effective enforcement.

Second, regarding financial resources, more and more people are convinced that perhaps humanitarian assistance should also be provided through assessed contributions and not through voluntary commitments. He also proposed having a much more advanced system to achieve equitable burden sharing, as it seems that we are witnessing overburden in some areas and the death of compassion in others.

Third, the humanitarian architecture requires fundamental reform in terms of further efficiency and effectiveness. "We have heard a number of speakers on how to make the humanitarian assistance cycle more cost effective from procurement to logistics and from transporting assistance to its delivery," said Amb. Yousef.

He also urged for examining how local NGOs can play a larger role and how they can have a seat in the decision making process and perhaps a more active role for regional organizations as well.

Fourth, discussions pertaining to the linkages between development and humani-



tarian assistance have been going on for years. These discussions evolved in the context of progress in the context of resilience efforts. However, we have not reached an adequate level of coherence in a manner that would ensure that this linkage would not have a negative effect on humanitarian assistance and the principles governing humanitarian assistance including maintaining the dignity of the people receiving assistance.

Fifth, we need to enhance our performance in assisting women, children, the elderly, the disabled and other vulnerable groups and focus more on mental well-being in light of the magnitude of crises that we are facing resulting in huge conflict and post conflict distress disorder with a deep impact on the social fabric of societies and their cohesion.

Sixth, we have to learn from the private sector; we need to deepen the culture of continuous improvement. We also need to make better use and take advantage of technological advances in a more effective manner.

The Dubai International Humanitarian Aid and Development Conference and Exhibition (DIHAD) is held annually under the patronage of H.H. Sheikh Mohammed Bin Rashid Al Maktoum, Vice-President, Prime Minister of United Arab Emirates, Ruler of Dubai, supported by Mohammed Bin Rashid Al Maktoum Humanitarian and Charity Est., the United Nations, the UAE Red Crescent Authority, International Humanitarian City, Dubai Cares and the Organisation of Islamic Cooperation.

The overall aim of DIHAD is to contribute to the further enhancement of technically sound and principled international humanitarian and development assistance. DIHAD further endeavors to build bridges between various actors and countries from around the globe

engaged in addressing needs of those affected by crises, disasters or the adverse effects of under-development. In addition, DIHAD strives to provide a platform where assistance providers can interface with relevant actors from the corporate and governmental sectors with a view to creating meaningful synergies in support of those in need.

*the current humanitarian system is unable to cope with the needs that are growing at an exponential rate*

## OIC Head Attends Human Rights Council Meeting in Geneva



The people of Palestine and Kashmir have a fundamental right to self-determination and the longstanding denial of this right is a stain on the international community, said Lyad Ameen Madani, secretary-general of the OIC, during a speech at the 28th Session of the Human Rights Council.

The OIC head made the comments on the second day of the four-day meeting in Geneva on March 2. "Longstanding cases of denial of this right of the Palestinian and Kashmiri peoples continue to stain the collective conscience of the international community ... It's not enough to talk about peace. One must believe in it and work at it," he said, adding that the United Nations has a moral responsibility to resolve these injustices.

Madani was speaking during the high-level segment of the meeting which was attended by heads of states, ministers and senior government officials to discuss global human rights. He added that the OIC is concerned with the situation in Palestine and touched on Israel's atrocities in Gaza over the summer "which were declared as war crimes and even genocide by many independent sources."

He urged the council to continue highlighting and condemning Palestinian suffering and the continuing blockade of the Gaza Strip, the building of illegal settlements, the

Judaization of East Jerusalem and the construction of the apartheid wall.

Madani also drew attention to the OIC's repeated calls for a peaceful settlement of the Kashmir dispute and that dialogue is needed to realize a solution in conjunction with Kashmiri aspirations.

He also welcomed Prince Zeid Al Ra'ad of Jordan as the new High Commissioner of Human Rights and spoke in detail on extreme violence which is undermining "the multicultural fabric of our global order" and seeks to "spread hatred and violence by stoking interracial and inter-religion tensions and hatred."

He stressed the need to understand the root causes of the problem and that "juxtaposing this phenomenon to one religion or a region would be a great mistake." "This is not mere history, but an inheritance, a context that we must search to identify the root causes of Daishism, Bokoharamism, parkinglotism," he said.

The OIC head also said that, after 9/11, Islam was brought into the discussion regarding the cause of extreme violence, and that the OIC was at the forefront of condemning terrorism, emphasizing that terror is a political tool and that religion should not be considered the source of extreme violence.

"Accusing religion as the source of extreme violence and terror is an abyss that will drown us all," he said.

He also elaborated on the OIC's efforts to introduce UN resolutions on the defamation of religions which, though initially adopted by consensus, gradually lost support. However, through the OIC's efforts the HRC introduced Resolution 16/18 on religious intolerance which was adopted in 2011.

It was on the back of this, he said, that the OIC Secretary General met former US Secretary of State Hilary Clinton in Istanbul and that a joint statement issued following the meeting called on stakeholders to action Resolution 16/18. He said that four Expert Meetings have been held as part of this in Washington DC, London, Geneva and Doha, and that the OIC plans to hold a fifth in Jeddah in June.

He also said that combating incitement to hatred, violence and discrimination based on religion should be a priority for not just the HRC but for the international community. "There already exist various standards to combat hate speech, including in many Western societies. We must endeavor to find a common approach whereby these laws can be applied universally to provide protection to all communities in different situations," he said.

The OIC chief also condemned what is being done to Azerbaijanis by Armenia in the occupied Azerbaijani territory of Nagorno-Karabakh. Likewise, he called on Myanmar to ensure the protection and wellbeing of its Rohingya population.

He finally finished by saying that with "civil and political rights, equal emphasis must be given to economic social and cultural rights including the right to development."

On the sidelines of the event, the OIC secretary general met Minister of Foreign Affairs of Maldives Dunya Maumoon, President of the Human Rights Council Joachim Rucker, Chief of the Federal Department for Foreign Affairs of Switzerland Didier Burkhalter, the High Commissioner for Human Rights Prince Zeid Ra'ad Al Hussein, the European High Representative for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy and Vice-President of the European Commission Federica Mogherini, Minister of Justice and Human Rights of Burkina Faso Josephine Ouedraogo and the Minister Delegate of Foreign Affairs and Cooperation of the Kingdom of Morocco M'Barka Bouaida.

More Needs to be Done to Fight

## ISLAMOPHOBIA

in Wake of Chapel Hill Killing



A vigil at the campus of the University of North Carolina in memory of Deah Shaddy Barakat, Yusor Mohammad Abu-Salha, and Razan Mohammad Abu-Salha who were shot dead at a nearby condominium complex in Chapel Hill, North Carolina, USA, 11 February 2015 (epa)

The cold-blooded killing of three young Muslim students in the US in early February, two of whom were only recently married, shocked people across the globe and attracted the OIC's concerns over rising anti-Muslim sentiments and Islamophobia in the US.

Deah Barakat, 23, his wife Yusor Abu-Salha, 21, and her sister Razan Abu-Salha, 19, were shot dead in the head by neighbor, Craig Hicks, in Chapel Hill, North Carolina on Feb. 10.

Local police said the killings were motivated by a parking dispute, something disputed by the victims' families who described the murders as hate crimes spurred by Islamophobia. "We have no doubt that the way they looked and the way they believed had something to do with this," said Mohammad Abu-Salha, father of the two women, while talking to the press.

He added that his son-in-law had lived alone trouble-free at the home and that problems only arose when his hijab-clad daughter moved in. "My daughter, Yusor, honest to God, told us on more than two occasions that this man came knocking at the door and fighting about everything with a gun on his belt, more than twice," he said. "She told us, 'Daddy, I think he hates us for who we are and how we look.'"

He added, "Now that we know from the police that they were shot in the head, very quickly, the three of them, one bullet each, in a very small space inside in the apartment. That's execution-style. I don't know, if that is not hate, what that would be."

Hicks' social media posts showed a man

with a fascination for guns and someone who described himself as both an atheist and an anti-theist, a particularly outspoken group of atheists who can be confrontational about their disbelief.

Mainstream media was, in the immediate aftermath, slow to pick up on the story and reported the killings in a somber way. People across the world, however, took to social media to vent their frustrations over what was described as Islamophobic media coverage of the killings and the mislabeling of a hate crime. Within hours, the hashtag #ChapelHillShooting was the top trend worldwide on Twitter and the hashtag #MuslimLivesMatter also trended worldwide.

The incident came amid an increase in anti-Muslim hate throughout the US and Europe in the aftermath of the Charlie Hebdo attack in January. The Council on American-Islamic Relations, a Muslim civil-rights group, highlighted Hicks' anti-religion sentiments and that two of the victims wore hijabs. More than 100 religious and community groups, including those made up of Muslims, Sikhs and Arabs, also called on the Obama administration to open an inquiry into hate crimes.

*Mainstream media was, in the immediate aftermath, slow to pick up on the story and reported the killings in a somber way. People across the world, however, took to social media to vent their frustrations*

A few days after the killings, US President Barack Obama publicly condemned the murders, calling them "brutal and outrageous" and that no one in the US "should ever be targeted because of who they are, what they look like, or how they worship." The condemnation coincided with news that the FBI had launched its own inquiry into the killings to run parallel with that of the local police.

Echoing the widespread global condemnation of the murders, Iyad Ameen Madani, Secretary General of the OIC, described them as brutal crimes that shocked Muslims around the world and raised concerns over rising anti-Muslim sentiments and Islamophobia in the US. He also offered his condolences to the families of the victims.

He further commended the US president and called on the US to protect against stereotyping, discrimination and profiling, which he described as being inconsistent with the core values of American society. He also welcomed the FBI enquiry as a positive step.

The Secretary General of the OIC also welcomed the FBI enquiry and said that hate has no place in a multicultural world. He also underlined the importance of interfaith and intercultural dialogue on a grassroots level and praised the unity of American Muslims and the solidarity of ordinary Americans with the families of the victims.

He further called for cooperation at the international level to counter violent extremism, religious intolerance, incitement to hatred and hate crimes.

## Anti-Muslim sentiments: An increase in the US and a decline in Europe



Protesters supporting the 'Reclaim Australia' group hold anti-Muslim placards during a protest rally in Sydney, Australia, 04 April 2015 (epa)

The OIC Islamophobia Observatory has noted during the first months of 2015 a marked ongoing increase in Islamophobia in the US and signs of heartwarming countercurrents against the phenomenon in Europe.

Anti-Muslim feelings are on the increase in the US, something that can be understood through an intense media campaign and the significant number of incidents targeting Muslims, mosques and Islamic centers. This increase goes hand-in-hand with the findings of several polls which show that a third of Americans worry that Sharia law will “invade” their country through Muslim immigrants and that the so-called Islamic State reflects the true nature of Islam. According to the polls, these views are also held by 61 percent of Christians in the US.

The Observatory expects Islamophobia to continue to rise in the US over coming months.

Likewise, the Observatory noted that Islamophobes in the US—consisting of funders, organizations, media outlets and political players—were very active in creating a climate of fear, hate and suspicion towards Muslims. Pamela Geller—a US version of the Dutch Islamophobe Geertz Wilders—has been at the forefront of whipping up anti-Muslim frenzy. Following a series of high profile anti-Islam campaigns, Geller planned an arts “exhibition” and competition to depict the Prophet Muhammad (pbuh) in May 2015 in Texas.

Aside from the US, there has also been growing Islamophobia in Canada. The decision in Shawinigan, Quebec, to ban the construction of a mosque—supported by two thirds of people in Quebec—is a particular cause for concern. Furthermore, the Canadian government backed Minister of Immigration Jason Kenney’s comments against the niqab in February—something that the Observatory views as religious suppression and contrary to religious freedom. Since its inception in Germany in October 2014, the right-wing anti-Islam group PEGIDA (Patriotic Europeans Against the Islamization of the West) has been holding rallies in Germany, Holland, Denmark, the UK, Norway and now Austria. Austria’s first PEGIDA rally was held in Vienna in February and more are in the pipeline

In a further indication of growing Islamophobia in Austria, the country’s parliament passed a bill stressing that national law stands above Sharia law, a provision absent in Austria’s laws governing other religions. The bill also stops the deployment and payment of salaries of imams from abroad, and foreign funding for mosques.

On a positive note, the Observatory noted a general trend that Islamophobia was sharply declining in Europe during February. PEGIDA saw defeat in Germany where it first came to prominence. Likewise, only a tiny number of people attended its Feb. 9 rally in Oslo. There has also been a grow-

ing number of pro-Muslim rallies across Europe to counter PEGIDA-style movements. Hundreds of protestors also gave the French racist Marine Le Pen a hostile reception when she visited the Oxford Union in the UK at the beginning of February. Similarly, the Observatory noted that—in the wake of the Charlie Hebdo killings—France was proactive in easing tensions and preventing an escalation in Islamophobia. France is also moving ahead with a plan to impose tough penalties for hate speech and promote better dialogue with Muslims.

In France, the overall situation of Islamophobia since Charlie Hebdo incident was quite brittle during January 2015. While the politicians rushed to offer their commiserations, the success of Marine Le Pen, the far-Right Front National leader, was the most visible sign of the rising tide of Islamophobia.

President Francois Hollande’s stance in responding to the critical situation in France was worth attention, especially his gesture towards Muslim immigrants.

France has made strong waves when its President put anti-Muslim sentiments on the same level as anti-Semitism.

For his part, the Vatican has been active in showing an opposing stance towards unfavorable manifestation of freedom of expression, including the mocking cartoons of Prophet Mohammed (pbuh) by western media.

Regarding the general trend of Islamophobia in Europe, it is not too different with those in France. The Charlie Hebdo incident was “smartly” manipulated as a “told-you-so” moment for Europe’s far-Rights. In Europe, the constructive debates on freedom of expression vis-à-vis its limits and manifestation, tend to be overridden by the strengthening anti-Islam sentiments. Public opinions were overshadowed by the idea that free speech is a “fixed price” for European societies, and there should not be any space for negotiation with other “ideologies”, including Islam. While in certain countries burqa, niqab, and veil started to be fashioned as Muslim women’s dress code, in many other countries they were considered as a threat and violation to national laws.

## Cordoba: One of Spain's Last Vestiges of a Glorious Islamic Past



There is an ongoing battle in the heart of Europe over perhaps one of the last vestiges of a glorious and tolerant distant past, the Mosque of Cordoba—the continent's premier Islamic heritage site and an iconic symbol of Spain's Islamic history.

Towards the end of November 2014, 55,000 people had within three days signed an online petition demanding Google Maps restore the word "mosque" to the monument's name; the site had been renamed "Cathedral of Cordoba" in reference to the Catholic house of worship that lies within the mosque's ancient walls.

Though the Catholic Church denied any involvement, the petition accused the bishop of Cordoba of appropriating the monument and erasing the building's history. Google subsequently reinstated the old name—the Mosque-Cathedral of Cordoba—which had been in official use since the early 1980s, the Foreign Policy (FP) magazine reported.

10th century Cordoba is renowned as a beacon of knowledge, tolerance, wealth and high-standards of living. The mosque was at the heart of the city's life, a symbol of Umayyad power and a centre of learning. However, following the city's fall it was transformed into a cathedral in 1236. Although at the frontline of the struggle between Islam and Christianity in medieval Europe, the hybrid mosque-cum-cathedral today evokes a different meaning, one of a tolerant past when members of the three Abrahamic faiths lived in peace.

According to FP, Spain is home to some of the highest levels of anti-Islam sentiment in the West, higher than France and the UK. The country is also, at the same time, wishing to cast itself as a leader in conversation

about Islam in Europe, a symbol of inter-faith harmony and a destination for Muslim tourism. The Mosque of Cordoba stands at the heart of these discussions.

The Catholic Church, which administers the site, has since 2006 been slowly removing the word mosque from the monument's title and its online and print publications. Though its early brochure from the 80s celebrated its Islamic identity, literature from the mid-2000s avoids this and asserts that the site was Christian before the mosque was even built even though there is no evidence to support this.

Community groups have since come to the fore challenging the Catholic Church and calling for the building to be administered by a public authority. In December last year, the OIC's Islamic Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization (ISESCO) released a statement condemning the name change and describing it as "an attempt to obliterate the landmarks of Islamic history in Andalusia, and a provocation for Muslims around the world, especially Muslims of Spain."

Business and cultural leaders in Cordoba, and also in Granada, want to position the city as a major destination for Muslim tourism and as a leading producer of halal food and services to tap into the burgeoning Muslim consumer market. The local municipality has also partnered with Spanish Muslim organization to create a halal cluster in Cordoba to house 1,300 businesses devoted to halal food and services.

However, rising Islamophobia is challenging all of this, including the efforts of Spanish Muslims to see themselves part of Spain. Politicians on the right have taken to scare-mongering about an imminent Muslim re-

conquest of the country. It is this backdrop against which the mosque-cathedral debate is unraveling.

What is making matters all the more fraught is the way Muslims visiting the mosque feel harassed by security guards who stringently enforce a rule prohibiting Muslims from worshipping within its confines.

In sum, local Muslims say that some Spaniards do not wish to acknowledge the Islamic history of Cordoba as their own but as something that was not inherently Spanish but alien. Nevertheless, 1.5 million people visit the Mosque-Cathedral of Cordoba annually, many of them Muslims who do so despite the harassment of security guards.





**2015 Islamic Culture  
Capital for the Arab Region**



The city of Nizwa is significant because of its historic contribution in helping to develop Islamic civilization; this was especially the case when the Omanis made it their capital in 793 AD. Nizwa had the privilege of witnessing dynamic intellectual activities, with many Muslim scientists and scholars being born there. Documents dating back to the 7th century show that Omanis authored books on Islamic jurisprudence (fiqh) and Hadith. The city was given the title “Baydat Al-Islam” (Stronghold of Islam) because of its historical castle which still exists along with many forts, towers, and mosques. As the home of many scholars, thinkers and writers, it was also a hub of learning and scholarship throughout history.

Visitors will find the city’s gardens fascinating. These gardens contain underbrush which spreads among large greeneries with many varieties of palm trees, citrus, sugar cane, and various types of beans. These are watered by underground channels (known as Faljas). Five of these channels were added to the World Heritage List by the World Heritage Committee—including Falaj Daris and Falaj Al-Khatmayn—in expression of the international standing of this unique water system that represents a cultural legacy created by the Omanis.

**Location:**

Nizwa is known for its strategic geographic location at the southern foothills of Al-Jabal Al-Akhdar (Green Mountain). It is bordered on the east by the Wilayat of Izki, on the north by Al-Jabal Al-Akhdar, on the west by

the Wilayat of Bahla and on the south by the Wilayat of Manah. The city has a mixed topography consisting of plains, ever-green oases and gardens irrigated by aqueducts and wells.

**Sites:**

Despite the modern revival the city has enjoyed, it has been able to preserve its historical heritage in terms of ancient buildings and alleys. Aside from local architecture and inscriptions, there are also ones inspired by other civilizations, as the Persians settled in Nizwa for a certain period of history, and many sites have been found with Persian names.

**Mosques:**

Nizwa is known for its numerous historic mosques with ornately decorated niches (mihrabs) that date back to the eight century. The oldest among these places of worship were built in the style of the Prophet’s Mosque in Madinah, which was known for its simple architecture. Over time, mosques proliferated throughout the city. The first of these mosques were characterized by the absence of high minarets, which were later replaced by an extension leading to the roof via stairs reaching the mosque’s interior.

**Sa’al Mosque:**

This mosque contributed significantly to science in the early period of Islam. It was built in the 8th year after Hijra and was the second mosque built in Nizwa. It is considered among the most famous mosques in the country.

The mosque’s niche is square shaped with

each side 3 meters and surrounded by an outer band engraved with Quranic inscriptions in the Kufic script. Its niche is among the oldest in Nizwa and its decorations were completed in 1252 AD. The mosque was renovated several times, most recently by His Majesty Sultan Qaboos Al-Said. Moreover, as a place of teaching and prayer frequented by scholars, the mosque played a leading role in the dissemination of religious education.

Other mosques in Nizwa are decorated with plaster patterns done in a later period, such as the Shawazna Mosque situated in Aker in Nizwa. It is also one of the country’s older mosques. Its engravings date back to 1529. Al-Jinah Mosque is located in the old district of Sa’al, and was last renovated in 1519.

**Nizwa Fort:**

Built in 1668 by Imam Sultan bin Saif Al-Malik Al-Ya’rubi, Nizwa Fort now houses the Museum of Nizwa which showcases traditional handicrafts still practiced in the region. Nizwa Fort, one of the oldest in the Sultanate of Oman, is known for its enormous rounded walls covered with earth coating.

Rising 24 meters above the ground, with an external diameter of 43 meters and internal diameter of 39 meters, the fort has seven wells and numerous embrasures allowing ancient defenders of the city to fire from a protected position, along with various prison dungeons as the fort used to be a government building.



## Second International Congress on

## China and Muslim World held in Istanbul

The Second International Congress on China and the Muslim World: Cultural Encounters was held in Istanbul on Feb. 3-4 and was attended by representatives from universities, museums and think tanks from Turkey, China and the Middle East.

This was the second event of its kind to be held and was organized by IRCICA (the OIC Research Center for Islamic History, Art and Culture) and the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences (CASS).

A previous similar congress was held in Beijing in 2012 which focused on bringing researchers together to study interactions between China and the Muslim world in terms of history, literature, culture and religion. The scope of this year's event, however, was expanded to include economy and international relations.

Organizers said the event was a useful forum for Chinese scholars and officials and their counterparts from the Arab and Muslim world to exchange ideas and build networks. Experts in various fields came together and presented papers which will be published as a reference book on China-Muslim world relations. There is also scope for setting up a base for mutual understanding and cooperation between China and the Muslim world.

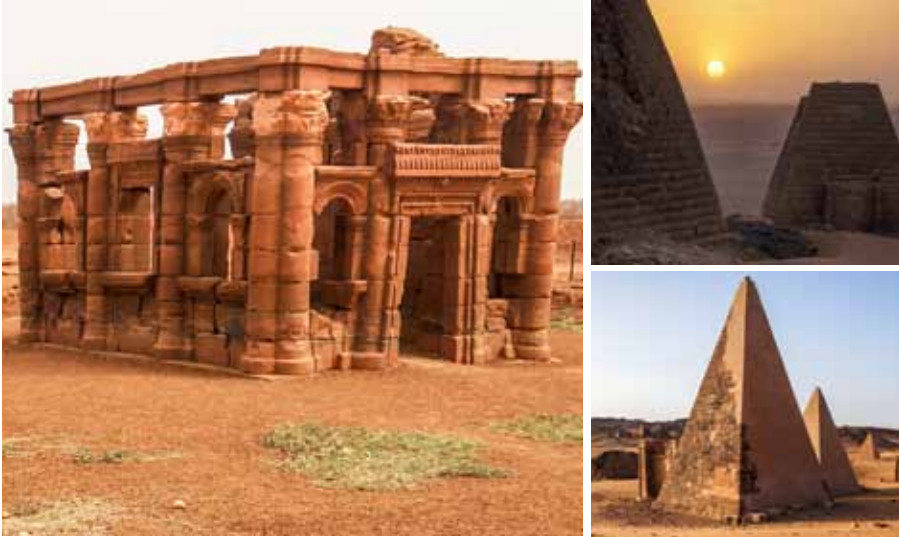
During discussions on the "Historical Encounters Between China and the Muslim World," attendees discussed the taxation system during the Tang Dynasty, the consequences of the Talas War during the Abbasid period and the roots of relations between China and Islam.

Discussions in the "Encounters in Culture and Religion" panel focused on how Islam and Christianity adapted to Chinese culture, and how Chinese and Arabic writings were translated into each other. There was also a comparative study on Jihads in West Africa and rebellions in Northwest China during the 18th and 19th centuries, and a discussion on Yusuf Ma De Xin's notes on his travels to the Ottoman Empire.

Mosque architecture, calligraphy in China, Chinese porcelain, and early Islamic sites and women's mosques in China were discussed in the "Encounters in Culture and Arts" panel. In discussion on "Encounters in Economy," post-2014 China-Afghanistan economic relations were discussed with regard to their implications on the Silk Road Economic Belt—a 2013 initiative by Chinese President Xi Jinping for trade and infrastructure networks to be established along the ancient Silk Road trade route, stretching northwest from China's coastal area through Central Asia, the Middle East and on to Europe. Academics also discussed the history of the Silk Road. China's evolving relations with Turkey, the Middle East and the expansion of economic and political countries of the Muslim world in general were discussed in the panel entitled "Encounters in International Relations." The collective role of China and the Muslim world in shaping the world order, as well as important roles played by prominent Chinese figures and institutions in the promotion of Islamic cultures and modern education in China, was discussed in the panel on "Encounters in Culture and Education."



## When peace prevailed in Sudan: venerable temples and pyramids of ancient civilizations



When Ahmed Kharif drove his car off the driveway on to a dirt road, with his car dancing sideways, he shouted, "All roads are now like this." Wherever you look, the eye falls on a few bushes scattered here and there and brown earthen walls. Ahmed's car was falling apart to the point that there was no door handle. He used a screwdriver to open it and its side windows had disappeared.

Visitors may wonder whether he would return from a trip of this nature that involves traveling through the Sudanese desert inside a rickety vehicle to visit one of the most invaluable cultural treasures in Sudan, the old city of Naga'a—located 37 km from the Nile River and far from present population clusters.

Visitors who roam Sudan to see archeological sites rely on local people like Ahmed when not traveling in groups. Ahmed lives in Shendi, a small town overlooking the Nile and 130 km north of Khartoum. In return for a few Sudanese pounds, he takes tourists to Naga'a, which was built around 250 BC by the Nubian rulers of the immemorial Kingdom of Kush.

Naga'a was the south gate to the ancient world, according to Dietrich Wildung, the head of a research project on Naga'a at the Museum of Egyptian Art in Munich,

Germany. "When traders and caravans travelled from East Africa to the north and they entered the city of Naga'a, they saw for the first time a city that represents a world of refined culture," he said. Visitors can still today see the Temple of Amun, the Temple of the Lion, and that of Hathor, and a building housing architectural elements from the Hellenistic era and blending Greek civilization with the culture of the southern Mediterranean. A Latino-style Roman temple is also situated in the vicinity.

Wildung added that for the people of that era, the picture of the place was a cosmopolitan amalgamation of various wonderful architectural styles of the western world of the time.

Until recent archaeological excavations, Naga'a remained untouched despite European explorers visiting it in the 19th century and making plans to excavate its monuments.

Thanks to its preserved historical condition, as the date of each monument can be determined, Naga'a is an archaeological gold mine. This was understood by wealthy Gulf States, and so a Sudanese-Qatari excavation project managed from Doha is being carried out, funding 38 archaeological excavations. Qatar has also allocated \$3 million to build a museum.

On the conclusion of the trip to Naga'a, Ahmed takes his guests safely back to Shendi. The journey continues on a local bus heading north on a road parallel to the Nile, with flashes on the horizon from the extreme heat; no milestone can be seen on the road save sand, dry bushes and a few old car tires scattered here and there. The next place that deserves visiting is 50 kilometers away. This is where the location of the Pyramids of Meroe, where the rulers of the Kingdom of Kush were buried between 300 BC and 300 AD.

The builders of these pyramids were strongly influenced by the doctrine of death as understood by the ancient Egyptians. The many small pyramid-like tombs cast a shadow of spirituality on the ruins of the royal city of Meroe. The tombs are located far off the road and visitors have to walk. Near the pyramids there is a small house for visitors to buy tickets. A man named Abdo offers visitors camel rides to a camp built by an Italian travel agency in 2000 and made permanent.

Diplomats and businesspersons from Khartoum love to spend the night in this luxury camp with groups of wealthy tourists, mostly from Europe and the United States.

The journey continues to the final destination of any trip within Sudan; visitors head north through Karima to the sacred Jebel Barkal, a small mountain at whose foot is located the city of Nabta. This is a journey to the past of Nubia. Since 750 BC, the city was the capital of the Kingdom of Kush, albeit established long before that by the Egyptian Pharaoh Thutmose III around 1450 BC. Today the city and the mountain are UNESCO World Heritage Sites.

It is recommended to walk to Jebel Barkal in the afternoon when the temperature is cooler. Because the area down the mountain is as flat as the Nile Valley, the scene from above the rocky plateau of the mountain is more than fantastic. Visitors can see the tantalizing sight of the banks of the Nile, the beacons of the town of Karima and the vast desert surrounding it. (dpa)

## Key discussions with Islamic Fiqh Academy on women, families and children

JEDDAH: The Family Affairs Department at the OIC held a meeting with the Islamic Fiqh Academy at the OIC headquarters on Feb. 26 to discuss common themes and a methodology of how to work together on issues surrounding women and families. The meeting also addressed the establishing of a joint advisory committee on women, families and children, and the role that the Family Affairs Department would like the Islamic Fiqh Academy to play in it. The joint advisory committee includes the

OIC's Family Affairs Department, the Cultural and Social Affairs Department, the Legal Affairs Department, the Independent Permanent Human Rights Commission, the International Islamic Fiqh Academy, and experts and specialists in sociology, social affairs, family affairs, Islamic law, international law and medicine.

The committee will advise the OIC Secretariat and its subsidiary bodies in international meetings that the OIC attends on issues relating to families, women and children.

It will also prepare a guide explaining the terminology and concepts associated with areas relating to families, women and children; the guide will become the singular reference point for the OIC and its subsidiary organizations.

The committee will also propose key topics on families, women and children to be discussed at international and regional forums and meetings.

## Promoting Cooperation between the OIC and IUMS

Members of the OIC's Social and Family Affairs Department met with Dr. Zuhair Husain Ghunaim, Secretary General of the Islamic Union of Muslim Scouts (IUMS), at the OIC Headquarters in Jeddah on Feb. 24. Participants at the meeting discussed ways of promoting bilateral relations between

the OIC and IUMS to support and build the capacity of youth in OIC Member States.

This included education activities, trips to foreign countries within the OIC and outside to expose young people to different cultures, encouraging moderation, tolerance and coexistence, and enriching the

activities of social services, volunteer groups and protecting the environment.

IUMS has developed a plan for activities in 2015 with the OIC's supervision and approval of the OIC's Secretary General.

## OIC's Work on Developing Women Highlighted at UN Meeting

The OIC's role in developing and empowering women in Member States was the topic of a presentation delivered by the director of the OIC's Family Affairs Department at a recent UN meeting in New York.

Dr Fadila Grine, director of the Family Affairs Department, delivered the presentation at the fifty ninth session of the Commission on the Status of Women (Beijing+20) held at the UN headquarters in New York on March 9-20.

During the presentation, Dr Grine said that the OIC has engaged women in Member States and presented them with the "OIC Plan of Action for the Advancement of Women" (OPAAW) and the "Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women" (CEDAW).

She further called for increased efforts to promote women in decision-making and in the reinforcement of peace, and highlighted the OIC's role in the achievement of justice and social peace for women within the family setting.

The issue attracted significant attention of participating regional and international organizations and underscored the lack awareness on the matter, highlighting the need to organize extensive awareness campaigns in Europe and North America on the rights of Muslim women.

Dr Grine also held a series of meetings on the sidelines of the event including a meeting with Mervat Tallawy, chairperson of the National Council for Women in Egypt. The pair spoke on expediting the endorsement of the draft agreement on the Women Organization that will be headquartered in Cairo.

She also met with Monia Meslem, Algeria's minister of national solidarity, family and women's affairs. The pair discussed areas of bilateral cooperation and the endorsement of an agreement on women and children.

In a meeting with Shahindokht Molaverdi, Iran's vice-president for women and family affairs, the two women discussed cooperation with international organizations to hold an international conference about family values in conjunction with the Vatican and other



faith-based organizations concerned with family affairs.

The Department of Family Affairs is also presently following up on the recommendations of the 5th Ministerial Conference on the Role of Women in the Development of Member Countries that was held in Baku, Azerbaijan.

The conference recommended the convening of a meeting of a committee of experts during the second half of the current year to study and evaluate the results of previous conferences and the OPAAW in line with the OIC's second 10-Year Plan of Action (2016 - 2025).

The Family Affairs Department is also coordinating with the center for Statistical, Economic and Social Research and Training (SESRI) to prepare reports, documents and studies for the committee of experts' meeting in October.

The meeting in New York was an opportunity to discuss with UN organizations issues surrounding women and families, and partnering with relevant institutes and international organizations to organize meetings next year on the sidelines of next year's Commission on the Status of Women.

## Women's Rights: An Ongoing Battle in Tunisia



Even till today, Taher Haddad's portrait covers the front page of the most prominent books exhibited at the time-honored bookshop on Habib Bourguiba Avenue.

Notwithstanding the fact that his very popular "Our Women: A Shariah and Societal Perspective" was published in the 1930s, many Tunisians still recall by rote what Haddad wrote in that book and his revolutionary ideas regarding women's emancipation. Published over 80 years ago, the book is today classed among a list of iconic works in bookstores in Tunis; it is further considered the first step to the publication of the "Family Affairs Code" in 1956 as a result of which women were granted civil rights in a totally unprecedented manner in Tunisia itself as well as in the Arab region as a whole. "The vast majority of women, to this day, consider themselves deeply indebted to the late president and leader Habib Bourguiba who granted them such comprehensive rights in the 'Family Affairs Code,' said Leila Shabbi, a Spanish language teacher who was leafing through the book at the bookshop on Bourguiba Avenue.

"Things would not have been so, had Bourguiba not been imbued with the ideas of Haddad which he sought to turn into a tangible reality despite the then mainstream conservative society," she added.

Just like Shabbi, thousands of other young Tunisian women hold prominent positions in Tunisian society, and in the country's educational centers, public institutions and private corporations—a reality which has been well entrenched over the decades in Tunisia. In reality though, the road to women's

emancipation was not strewn with roses. Haddad's book stirred outrage among the conservative elite of those days, with an angry response that started with a massive campaign to counter the book, heaping against its author accusations of seeking to unravel the society's conservative laws.

Likewise, Tunisia's late president Habib Bourguiba, the builder of an independent Tunisia who initiated the process of modernizing Tunisian society in the 1950s and 1960s based on Haddad's ideas and the ideas of other pioneers of intellectual reform in Tunisia, met with the same critical fire.

Bourguiba, the first president of post-independence Tunisia, ruled from 1957 till 1987 and is considered the founder of the modern post-independence state and the architect of the policies of mass education, health programs and family planning. He is also credited with granting women civil and legal rights that were unprecedented in the Arab region.

One of these rights came in the form of consecrating the principle of gender-equality at work, prohibiting polygamy, granting women the right to seek divorce and to pass on their citizenship to their offspring, and so many other rights of no less importance.

Yet, as settled as women's status may have been for decades since, the political and social emanations of the 2011 revolution have led to the resurfacing of old-time debates, with the rising star of Islamists and their arrival to power in the wake of the elections for the National Constitutional Council in October 2011.

Human Rights institutions did not tarry in descending on the streets to defend women's rights only a few months after the Islamist Government took office, and more specifically on the occasion of the anniversary of the publication of the Family Affairs Code, on Aug. 13 2012.

Zakia Dhifaoui, an independent activist, said, "A few years ago, as we were celebrating the 50th anniversary of the 'Family Affairs Code,' we were claiming the revision and

improvement of certain provisions in the code, particularly with regard to inheritance laws. Now in the 55th anniversary we have regressed to just claiming the preservation of the status quo lest we lose our past achievements."

The matter is not confined to apprehensions against the extremist intellectual waves sweeping the country and against the sudden changes witnessed on the street, starting with the spread of the partial and full face veil (hijab and niqab) and the surveillance of activists from modernist or secular tendencies, but rather extends to what was being cooked up inside the Constitutional Council in an attempt to amend certain provisions in the Family Affairs Code.

The controversy started with rising calls from radical Islamists for the full application of the Shariah, along with attempts on the part of less radical politicians to consecrate the concept of "complementarity" between the two genders in the draft of Tunisia's new constitution instead of adopting the concept of straightforward "equality," a matter which rights activists viewed as a limitation of women's rights and their role in society.

However, the constitution battle is now over, having been settled through street demonstrations and pressure exercised by the opposition in the Constitutional Council.

Abdel Fatteh Moro, a prominent moderate leader in the Al Nahda Islamist movement, said "Tunisia's new constitution has garnered the consensus of all the political forces in the National Constitutional Council, and offers a reflection of the societal

model approved by Tunisians. Accordingly, any threat to this model would be a breach of the Constitution.”

Article 46 of the Constitution, as approved in 2014 after the revolution, stipulates that the state shall protect, promote and develop women’s acquired rights, and ensure equal opportunities for men and women in assuming all duties and in all cases.

The same article also provides that the state shall endeavor to achieve a 50/50 participation of men and women in elected councils and take the necessary measures to eradicate violence against women.

The electoral legislation gave an additional boost to women’s status after the revolution with the adoption of the principle of equal representation in the electoral lists. This ultimately helped women to capture a third of the parliamentary seats, at the rate of 31.33 percent, i.e. 68 out of a total of 217 seats, a rate which is over and above the world average set at 20 percent, and

which even exceeds the rate of women’s representation in more than one European parliament.

The success of the historic elections, which have crowned the democratic transition, is credited to female voters in particular with their overwhelming presence in lengthy queues at polling stations in 2014.

“Women’s intensive participation in the elections and the high rate of registration among them, exceeding 50.2 percent, underscores women’s interest in public affairs and the political sphere, and their well-deserved presence in decision-making centers,” said

Anwar Mnasri, a member of the League of Tunisian Female Voters.

Women also did not dissociate themselves from the intense electoral battle during the presidential race between Beji Qaid Essebsi, who presents himself as an inheritor of Bourguiba’s school of thought, and the independent candidate Moncef Marzouki,

who is seen as the figurehead representing the Islamist Al Nahda movement and the conservative society project.

Ultimately, it was the women’s vote which tipped the electoral balance in favor of Beji Qaid Essebsi in the presidential contest, with the latter gathering around 1 million female votes out of the officially registered 3 million voters.

The first thing that Essebsi did following his victory in the presidential elections was to express his gratitude to Tunisia’s women who voted for him with a majority of 61 percent against 39 percent who voted for his contestant, the outgoing president, Moncef Marzouki.

Nevertheless, many of the advocates of the modernization-driven project believe that women’s battle is not over yet. The object eyed by women’s associations is to further enlarge female participation in decision-making circles. (dpa)

## OIC Chief Congratulates Women on International Women’s Day March 8, 2015

**O**n the occasion of International Women’s Day, Iyad Ameen Madani, Secretary General of the OIC, sent a message highlighting the importance of the day and the vital role that women play in helping nations progress, prosper and develop.

Women play an exceptional role in helping their families, society, country and the world develop, said Madani, adding that the OIC’s congratulating Muslim women on this occasion stems from its appreciation for women and the active role they play in society and in the wider Muslim Ummah.

Madani said Islam has honored women, established rights for them and stopped the burying of girls as practiced by Arabs in the time before Islam, adding that women are fully able and have the right to engage in all activities that would enhance their prestige and dignity in sync with what is apt for them, their families and the societies and countries they live in. Likewise, he said, Islam has balanced the differences between men and women, and that the basis of equality and piety is good work. He also said that Islam has honored women by mentioning their qualities and attributes along with those of men.

Islamic history, said Madani, is full of examples of noble Muslim women who were not prevented by the society they lived in

to become scholars such as Zaynab bint Abu Salma Al-Makhzumi who is considered among the oldest jurists (faqihah); the societies they lived in did not prevent them from being involved in the fields of preaching, issuing Islamic rulings (fatwa) and teaching Sacred Knowledge (Shariah), he said, adding that after the demise of the Prophet Muhammad (pbuh), the issuing of fatwas remained the remit of the Hadith scholars (huffaz), and that Sayyida Ayesha (ra) played an important role in this area since Muslims of that era would refer to her to know how the Prophet (pbuh) led his life and passed his day.

The OIC has made the issue of Muslim women, their advancement and helping them overcome challenges one of its top priorities, said the Secretary General, while drawing attention to the OIC Plan of Action for the Advancement of Women (OPAAW). He said that the plan was a historic turning point in the pursuit of goals and strategies on helping women to advance and encourage their participation in politics, economics and culture.

He pointed out that the OIC, via its Ten Year Program of Action (2005-2015) adopted by the Third Extraordinary Session of the Islamic Summit Conference held in Makkah in December 2005, established a specific department to deal with Families and Wom-

en, and follow up on the implementation of the OPAAW and other relevant resolutions. Madani said that the OIC has again placed women, families and children among its top priorities and goals for the second Ten Year Program of Action (2016-2025).

The Secretary-General also offered a special tribute to women caught up in conflict and war within OIC Member States and the wider region, especially in Occupied Palestine, Syria, Iraq and Kashmir. He further offered his congratulations to women in prominent positions such as Morocco’s Minister of Sports Nawal El-Moutawakel, Prime Minister of Bangladesh Sheikh Hasina, Vice President of Iran and President of Iran’s Environment Department Dr. Ma’soumeh Ibtikar (who was vice president during President Khatami’s time and also now during President Hassan Rohani’s term), Senegal’s Minister of Health and Social Affairs Awa Marie Coll-Seck, and member of the Egyptian Social Democratic Party Dr Mervat Talawy, who was also previously the under-secretary-general of the UN, executive secretary of the UN Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia (ESCWA) and a former minister for insurance and social affairs in Egypt. He further acknowledged the achievements of the late Benazir Bhutto who was prime minister of Pakistan for two consecutive terms.

## In a seminar on food and medicine by the International Islamic Fiqh Academy OIC to Hold Forum on Developing Unified Global Halal Standard



JEDDAH (IINA): The OIC is to hold an international forum on unifying the standards and certification of Halal in the second half of this year in Jeddah as part of efforts to develop a broad agreement on Halal standards in light of increasing global attention to the Halal industry.

Details of the seminar were revealed during a speech delivered on behalf of OIC Secretary General Iyad Amin Madani on Feb. 9 at the opening session of a seminar on food and medicine held in Jeddah.

During the speech, delivered on behalf of the OIC chief by Assistant Secretary-General for Economic Affairs at the OIC Hameed A. Opeloyeru, Madani said that Muslims in both the east and the west need to know what sacred Islamic law says about ingredients in food and medicine, and the changes of properties of ingredients.

He also said that key organizations involved in the Halal industry would be attending the forum, and that participating Shariah experts and researchers need to reach an agreed fiqh view on Halal, something that the Ummah needs and which many people and organizations look forward to.

He also said that the seminar will provide a great impetus to OIC efforts to unite Halal standards in member states. "The International Islamic Fiqh Academy is currently studying the most effective ways to address the issue of machine slaughter and the stunning of poultry, and when it is com-

pleted will enable us to then to direct our efforts to develop common standards in the fields of medicine, pharmaceuticals and cosmetics," said Madani.

Ahmad Khaled Ba Bakr, secretary of the International Islamic Fiqh Academy (IIFA), said the academy is researching Shariah rulings on the sources, changes and effects of gelatin and alcohol, and the extraction of vitamins from desalinated water to irrigate crops and its harms.

He added that the IIFA discussed over two days scientific and fiqh opinions on rennet, trypsin and gelatin derived from pork, how it is derived, whether there was a shift in its nature during the extraction process, and the ratio used in food and medicine.

Ba Bakr said that the IIFA would soon discuss the Shariah ruling of extracting protein from blood and its use in food and medicine, and the use of ingredients that are derived from Haram and their effects on humans and animals.

He added that the IIFA will also soon publish its decisions on this matter which will be available to researchers and experts for reference purposes.

Dr. Khaled Al-Mazkur, head of the supreme advisory committee for work on completing the application of Shariah and a representative of the Islamic Organization for Medical Sciences in Kuwait, said, "Islam is special for its keenness to ensure a Muslim's food, clothing and medicine are Halal. Islamic scholars have throughout history established principles on this matter."

He pointed out that advances in technology have provided new evidence in favor of or contrary to previous fatwas around the Shariah ruling on the issues that the IIFA is discussing. He stressed that "this indicates that Islamic law is not static or fossilized and can accommodate all developments, and that the Ulama are able to develop and issue fatwas on Halal and Haram." The Halal industry (food, banking, pharmaceutical, cosmetics and tourism) is seeing phenomenal growth of \$500 billion a year, and is expected to grow from \$2 trillion to \$10 trillion in 2030.



## Visiting Al-Quds Permissible and Recommended: International Islamic Fiqh Academy Issues Decree

KUWAIT CITY: Visiting the holy city of Al-Quds (Jerusalem) is a permissible and recommended act, ruled the International Islamic Fiqh Academy (IIFA) recently.

Muslim scholars and theologians from across the world reached the decision at the IIFA's 22nd Session held in Kuwait on March 22-25. The IIFA is a subsidiary organ of the OIC.

In its ruling, entitled "Visiting Al-Quds: Objectives and the Shariah Ruling," the IIFA decreed that there is a debate on the pros and cons of visiting the city and that the "assessment of these interests return back to the specialists from among the rulers and politicians within Muslim countries."

The IIFA also reminded Muslims the world over that the issue of Al-Quds is one that affects the entire Muslim Ummah, not just the people of Palestine. It also highlighted that it is obligatory to help the city, and support its people and the people of Palestine. The event was also attended by Secretary-General of the OIC Iyad Amin Madani who delivered a speech in which he stressed that Al-Quds is under a fierce Zionist attack that seeks to obliterate the city's Islamic landmarks and alter its Arab and Islamic identity. He added that visiting the city and its Third Haram sends a strong message to the Occupation and the international community that Muslims the world over have a deep and ingrained attachment to the city.

The IIFA also issued a decree regarding the concept of shura and democracy. It clarified that Muslim governments are based on shura and that there are no Shariah prohibitions preventing governments from benefitting from aspects of democracy in those matters that benefit individuals and societies as long as sacred Islamic law is adhered to within the specific context of each individual Muslim country. It added that democracy is based on the rule of people.

Participants also discussed offensive and defensive Jihad. The IIFA stressed that the default relation of the Muslim Ummah with people of other faiths is one of peace and that, within Islamic polity, the cause of war is enmity and not differences in faith.

The IIFA also declared that Jihad in its general sense is the expending of every legitimate effort to raise aloft the Word of Allah (kalimat-Allah) and propagate the Message of Islam; this, it decreed, is of two kinds: Offensive and Defensive. The purpose of

Offensive Jihad is to defend the weak and ensure freedom to propagate Islam without compulsion in light of the Quranic verse, "There is no compulsion in religion," (2:256) and, "The only duty of the Prophet is to clearly convey," (24:54). It decreed that there should be agreements that allow freedom to call to Islam, while utilizing various contemporary means of da'wah in numerous languages and in different societies.

The IIFA said Defensive Jihad becomes compulsory when the Muslim Ummah, or a Muslim society or country, comes under attack. It added that this form of Jihad ends once the enmity finishes, or the enemy withdraws. Allah Almighty says, "Fight in the Path of Allah those who fight you, and do not transgress for indeed Allah does not love those who transgress." (2:190)

The IIFA also called for the establishment of an Islamic Court of Justice to settle disputes among Muslim states and communities, and called on the Muslim world to unify in supporting its establishment.

Another subject discussed at the event was takfir, its causes, implications and remedies in view of its increase and the hastiness with which it is applied on individuals, communities, countries and governments without consideration for the principles of Islamic law.

The IIFA decreed that in view of the dangerous implications of takfir, in terms of death, destruction and displacement of people, it is impermissible to consider anyone out of the fold of Islam who believes in Allah Almighty, His Messenger (peace be upon him) and the basic principles of Islam, and does not deny known fundamental principles of faith. It also advised young people to be wary of deviant ideologies.

The fiqh body also discussed other topics, including the rights and duties of citizens of non-Muslims in Muslim countries. It decreed that non-Muslims living in Islamic countries are guaranteed by Shariah the same general and private rights enjoyed by Muslims. It added that they have equal rights and a right to rule according to their legal systems in their acts of worship and personal lives. They are also allowed to appoint judges of their faith to rule on internal matters.

The IIFA also discussed rulings pertaining to treated sewage water. It decreed the permissibility of using such water for normal use such as washing homes and clothes,

and for irrigating plants that are not edible and will not harm people's health. If, however, such water is harmful, then the water would not be permissible to use. It is also not permissible to use the water, if harmful to health, in food and drink, and also for worship and religious purposes unless tahir (pure) in the Shariah sense.



## University chiefs from across Muslim world discuss future plans

The third Vice Chancellors Forum of Islamic Countries took place in Islamabad on Feb. 23-24 as a platform for academics and researchers and educational institutes in OIC Member States to develop links, pool resources, strengthen cooperation, offer scholarships and encourage dialogue.

The forum—entitled Vice Chancellors Forum 2014: Universities in the Islamic World: Facing Global Challenges—was attended by over 200 vice chancellors, rectors and presidents of universities and higher education institutions from across the Islamic world, and was jointly organized by the OIC's Islamic Educational Scientific and Cultural Organization (ISESCO), the Federation of the Universities of the Islamic World and several Pakistani governmental organizations.

Dr. Aminah Obaid Ramadha Al-Hijri, ISESCO's deputy director general, spoke at the event. She said the forum was a wonderful opportunity for university heads to discuss joint research initiatives and foster links.

She added that developing human resource was of utmost importance for the Islamic world. "We need leaders to take up a firm visionary position, thoughtful thinkers who can identify the changing demand, dare to take risk. It has become crucially important to make our universities more effective," she said.

Attendees, among others, included university heads from Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Brunei, Algeria, Cameroon, Egypt, Indonesia, Iran, Iraq, Jordan, the Kyrgyz Republic, Libya, Malaysia, Niger, Nigeria, Pakistan, Sudan, Tunisia, Turkey, Uganda, Yemen, Gambia, Jordan, Saudi Arabia and the Ivory Coast.

Ambassador Muhammad Naeem Khan, the OIC's Assistant Secretary General for Science and Technology, said that higher education is the key driver for socio-economic change in any country and urged vice chancellors to forge linkages and pool resources to develop universities in Islamic countries. He also shared information



Amb. Mohamed Naeem Khan

on several OIC initiatives to promote higher education in Muslim countries.

Ahsan Iqbal, Pakistan's Federal Minister for Planning and Development, was chief guest at the forum's inaugural ceremony. In his speech, Iqbal said he hoped participants would come up with tangible solutions facing universities in the Islamic world and underlined the significance of multi-disciplinary knowledge.

"Future battles will not be fought in battlegrounds, rather the brain power will supersede the muscle power ... we are in an age of paradigm shift," he said.

"In our classrooms, teachers keep students quiet while in our offices, officers keep their subordinate staff quiet," he said, adding that there was a need to

encourage questioning for creativity.

He also said that innovation and creativity define limits of success and that universities are where this is nurtured. He also stressed the need for universities to create links with industries, and that higher educational institutes need to equip themselves with latest advancements in light of the digital revolution that has engulfed every field.

Dr. Mukhtar Ahmad, chairman of Pakistan's Higher Education Commission, said that education alone was the solution to problems Muslim countries are facing. He also stressed the need to work in collaboration rather than isolation.

He said that the forum is an opportunity to share success stories and find ways of developing our universities, adding that there is no dearth of potential in Islamic countries, the only thing needed is a proper environment and opportunities for academics and researchers.

Pakistani organizations that helped organize the event included the Higher Education Commission, COMSATS Institute of Information Technology, the Ministry of Science and Technology, and the Ministry of Federal Education and Professional Training.



## Delegation of "World Federation of Arab Islamic International Schools" Visits Alexandria Library

A delegation from the General Secretariat of the World Federation of Arabic Islamic International Schools (WFAIIS) visited Alexandria Library on March 30 and met a number of officials there.

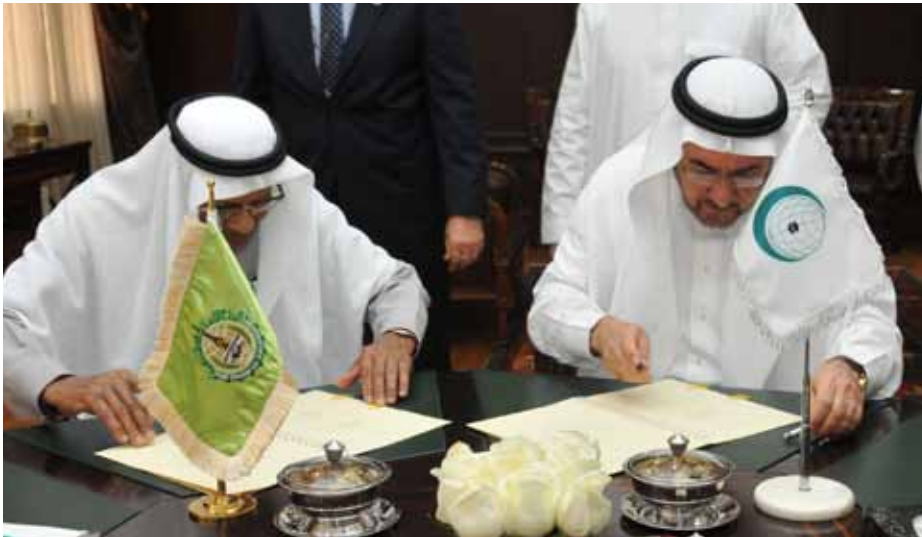
The delegation included WFAIIS' Secretary General Abdel Fattah Suleiman Ahmed Abdullah and its General Manager Ibrahim Mohammed Ajeery. The officials they met at the library included Dr. Sherif Riad, head of External Relations.

During the visit, the delegation spoke about WFAIIS' efforts in several fields. This included curriculum development, eradication of illiteracy in villages and poor remote areas, future plans in Egypt, particularly in rural areas, supporting education at Azhar University, especially foreign students by providing them with training and enhancing their Arabic, and training teachers on advanced teaching methods, curriculum development, managing the educational process inside and outside classrooms, and extra-curricular activities and their implementation and importance.

A detailed tour of the library was organized, along with a presentation regarding its history since its establishment until the present day. The delegation also visited the Alexandria International Book Fair.



## OIC and IDB sign an MOU for the Management of Ebola Program in West Africa



The Organization of Islamic Cooperation (OIC) and the Islamic Development Bank (IDB) signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) on February 1, 2015 on the management and implementation of a joint program to fight Ebola hemorrhagic fever disease in West Africa.

By virtue of the MoU, areas of cooperation and partnership between the two parties include: exchange of information and suggestions on needs to fight Ebola in West Africa, identification of available potential and all other means that could strengthen the program's efficiency, and benefitting from the technical, administrative and legal expertise of the IDB in implementing the said program. The MoU provides for continuation of consultation and cooperation and

for the coordination of efforts for a better planning and implementation of the program. It also calls for endeavoring to build new partnerships with relevant local and international circles to fight this epidemic in West Africa, and stipulates that all operations aimed at fighting the disease should complement the efforts of authorities and various international and local donors, taking into account the need to select the projects responding most to the priority needs of the states concerned.

The program's Steering Committee is composed of the OIC Secretary General (Chair of the Committee), the IDB President (Alternate Chair), and five members; OIC and IDB shall appoint two members each and shall agree on a renowned figure in the field

of medicine to join the membership of the Committee.

The MoU stipulates that the IDB shall act as the executive body of the program. It shall provide all services, which would guarantee the program's sound implementation consistent with the directives of the Committee in charge of program supervision and in such a way as to ensure efficient use of resources to achieve the program's specific objectives.

The MoU was signed by Secretary General Iyad Ameen Madani on behalf of the OIC and Dr. Ahmad Mohammad Ali, on behalf of the IDB.

It is worth noting that this MoU comes as a continuation of efforts exerted by the OIC and the IDB to mobilize support for affected countries since the outbreak of the disease. The two parties held a joint conference at the headquarters of the OIC General Secretariat on 5 November 2014 to mobilize the resources needed to support efforts to combat the disease. On 29 September 2014, the OIC held a meeting in Geneva chaired by the Minister of Health in Indonesia and attended by the WHO Director General to discuss the Ebola epidemic in West Africa.

It is to be noted that the IDB is entrusted with the mission of implementing the initiative of the Custodian of the Two Holy Mosques, the late King Abdullah bin Abdulaziz - may Allah have mercy on his soul - which includes a donation of US\$ 35 million to the West African states for the program to fight Ebola.

## Islamic University in Uganda marks the inauguration of Habib Medical School

The Islamic University in Uganda (IUIU), which is an affiliated institution of the Organization of Islamic Cooperation (OIC), has met a major milestone with the inauguration of the Habib Medical School on 10 February 2015.

The Habib Medical School was inaugurated by the honourable Minister of State for Foreign Affairs, Mr. Asuman Kiyingi, on behalf of the President of Uganda, and OIC Assistant Secretary General, Ambassador Muhammed Naeem Khan, on behalf of the

Secretary General.

Reading out the address of the President of Uganda, the Minister of State for Foreign Affairs thanked the OIC, University of Lahore (UoL), Pakistan, and the Habib family from Jeddah, Saudi Arabia, which have collaborated with the IUIU in the establishment of the Habib Medical School. The Medical School is a part of the newly established Faculty of Health Services at the IUIU. The Kabuli Muslim Hospital is associated with the Medical School as its teaching hospital.

The inauguration of the Habib Medical School is a milestone in the advancement of IUIU towards the objective of becoming a center of excellence in learning catering to the modern educational needs of students in the region.

The OIC along with the Islamic Development Bank (IDB) and Islamic Solidarity Fund (ISF) is committed to supporting the IUIU efforts for improvements in its academic programs, faculty and infrastructure.

## 40 Percent Water Shortage Predicted in Just 15 Years

Unless countries dramatically change the way they use water, the world could suffer a 40 percent shortfall in just 15 years.

According to a UN report released on Mar. 20, two days ahead of World Water Day, there is a looming global water crisis with many underground water reserves already running low and rainfall patterns predicted to become more erratic with climate change.

As the world's population increases to the expected 9 billion by 2050, more groundwater will be needed for farming, industry and personal use.

"Unless the balance between demand and finite supplies is restored, the world will face an increasingly severe global water deficit," the annual World Water Development Report said, noting that more efficient use could guarantee enough supply in the future.

According to the report, global water demand will increase 55 percent by 2050 while reserves dwindle. If current usage trends fail to change, then the world would only have 60 percent of the water it needs in 2030.

The increase in people means that agri-

culture, which already uses some 70 percent of water resources globally, will have to step up output by some 60 percent. Climate change and growing urban populations are also expected to exacerbate water shortages.

Having less water risks several forms of catastrophes, including crop failures, ecosystems breaking down, industries folding, disease and poverty worsening and violent conflicts over access to water.

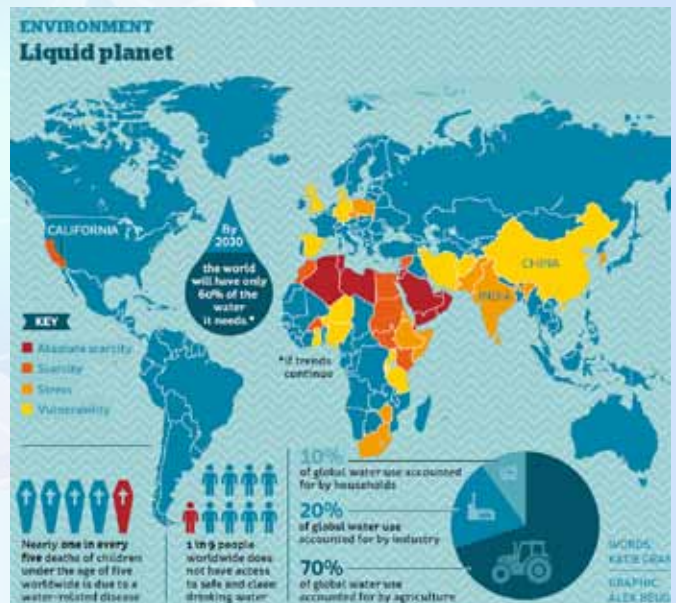
The report calls on policymakers and communities to rethink water policies, urging more conservation as well as recycling of wastewater as done in Singapore. Countries may also want to consider raising prices for water, as well as searching for ways to make water-intensive sectors more efficient and less polluting, it said.

In countries such as India water use is unregulated and often wasteful. Water pollution is ignored and at least 80 percent of India's population relies on groundwater for drinking to avoid bacteria-infested surface waters.

Currently, about 748 million people worldwide have poor access to clean drinking water, the report said, cautioning that economic growth alone is not the solution and could make the situation worse unless reforms ensure more efficiency and less pollution.

"Unsustainable development pathways and governance failures have affected the quality and availability of water resources, compromising their capacity to generate social and economic benefits," it said. "Economic growth itself is not a guarantee for wider social progress."

The OIC's Ankara-based "Statistical, Economic and Social Research and Training Centre for Islamic Countries" (SESRIC) is-



sued a report in 2012 on water resources in OIC Member States. According to the report, many OIC countries are classified as water scarce.

The 2012 report stated that in some OIC countries, such as those in the Middle East and North Africa region, "absolute water scarcity governs production systems and economies" while in other countries, such as those in Asia, "unpredictable monsoon systems can be immensely productive, or can either cause devastating floods, or, by their absence, major droughts." In other OIC nations, such as those in Sub-Saharan Africa, "very high inter- and intra-annual variability of rainfall and runoff create great risks at all levels."

The report also stated that "water resource management is further complicated in some parts of Central Asia, Africa and Asia where rivers and aquifers cross international boundaries." It further concluded that in most member states "lack of reliable access to water and high risks of water-related shocks are a significant cause of poverty and characterize the lives and livelihoods of a high proportion of poor people."



## OIC Attends UN Conference on Disaster Risk Reduction



United Nations Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon delivers a speech during the opening ceremony of the Third UN World Conference on Disaster Risk Reduction (WCDRR) in Sendai, Miyagi Prefecture, Japan, 14 March 2015 (epa)

SENDAI: An OIC delegation recently participated as an observer in a UN conference on disaster risk reduction held in Japan and delivered a speech regarding the OIC's activities in reducing risks associated with disasters.

The Third UN Conference on Disaster Risk Reduction was held in Sendai, Japan, on March 14 to 18 and led to the adoption of the Sendai Declaration and Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction 2015-2030. The declaration and framework were given the go ahead after several days of deliberations

among representatives of 187 UN Member States that attended the event.

This was the third such conference to be hosted by the UN to discuss international strategies on disaster risk reduction.

Aissata Kane, the deputy permanent observer of the OIC Delegation to the UN in Geneva, delivered a speech in French on behalf of the OIC on March 16. Kane stressed the OIC's commitment to actively work to reduce disaster risks and move ahead on implementing the Hyogo Framework for Action via its Member States.

"The OIC, which groups 57 member states divided into several continents, is especially involved in reducing disaster risks; its member countries face all kinds of disasters that often dramatically impact their populations and socio-economic environments," said Kane.

She further elaborated on how OIC member countries have firsthand experience of disasters—both natural and manmade. "The vulnerability to disasters of our member countries such as Pakistan, Afghanistan, Somalia, the Sahel countries, Palestine and Indonesia to name a few led the OIC to look at high-level decisions in formulating responses to protect people and the economies of affected countries," she added.

Kane said that the OIC conducted two major studies in 2012 and 2104 to assess risks related to natural disasters, manage disasters and conflicts, and develop national strategic frameworks for reducing risks.

"These studies with the help of our international partners to make a draft OIC strategy for reducing disaster risks was discussed at the OIC's Minister of Environment Conference held in 2012," she said. The OIC delegation also called for increased partnership at the national, regional and international levels, and for building the resilience of affected countries by establishing strong disaster risk prevention and management strategies.

The 187 UN Member States which attended the conference approved seven targets, four priorities and a set of guiding princi-

ples, underscoring that substantial reduction of disaster risk requires perseverance and persistence "with a more explicit focus on people and their health and livelihoods." Over the past decade, the conference heard, disasters have led to the deaths of over 700,000 people, leaving 1.4 million injured and 23 million homeless. Over 1.5 billion people have in some way been affected by disaster and global economic losses have been estimated to be \$1.3 trillion.

The new accord seeks to achieve, over the next 15 years, "the substantial reduction of disaster risk and losses in lives, livelihoods and health, and in the economic, physical, social, cultural and environmental assets of persons, businesses communities and countries."

During her speech, Kane expressed optimism at the new framework which would allow countries to "provide a better future for risk reduction disaster, to reduce disastrous consequences and determine appropriate responses and strategies tailored to local and national needs."

The previous two conferences on disaster risk reduction were held in Yokohama in 1994 and in Kobe in 2005. This conference was held to assess the 1995 Hyogo Framework for Action, outline priorities for a post-2015 framework for disaster risk reduction, better understand disaster risk, strengthen management and investments in disaster risk reduction, and enhance effective responses in terms of recovery, rehabilitation and reconstruction.

Japan was actively leading discussions in formulating a new international framework for disaster risk reduction. The five-day conference consisted of ministerial roundtables, high level thematic dialogues and working sessions, as well as specialized sessions.

Over 6,500 people participated in the conference, including 2,800 government representatives from 187 countries. The Public Forum was visited by 143,000 people over five days making it one of the largest UN gatherings ever held in Japan.



# Al-Quds

The OIC's General Secretariat selected Al-Quds (Jerusalem) as the Capital of Islamic Tourism for 2015 at the Eighth Session of the OIC's Islamic Conference of Ministers of Tourism held in Banjul, Gambia, on Dec. 4 to 6.

The designation was made with the aim of specifically drawing attention to Israeli occupation of the city and wider Palestine. OIC Secretary-General Iyad Amin Madani visited the holy city in January and attended the opening of an exhibition entitled "Jerusalem in Memory." The exhibition—which was opened by Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas—was organized by the OIC's Research Center for Islamic History, Art and Culture (IRCICA) in conjunction with the Palestinian Ministry of Culture.

Occupied Al-Quds, situated in the central mountainous region of Palestine, is considered the largest city in historic Palestine in both size and population, and also the region's most important in terms of religion and economy. The city is the capital of the Palestinian people as stated in the Declaration of Palestinian Independence issued in Algeria on Nov. 15, 1988.

Due to its religious and historical importance, and the reverence with which the city is considered by members of the three Abrahamic faiths (Islam, Christianity and Judaism), Al-Quds has immense tourism potential. The city is viewed with affection by Muslims across the globe and is noted for being the resting place of a number of Quranic prophets.

As a result of its immense religious significance, the Old City is home to a number

## Designated Capital of Islamic Tourism for 2015 Al Aqsa and Dome of the Rock its main sites

of important religious monuments, such as the Al-Aqsa Mosque, which comprises several sacred landmarks including the Dome of the Rock, the Southern Mosque (Al-Masjid Al-Qibli) and the Buraq Wall, and the Church of the Holy Sepulcher.

Within Islam and among Muslims, Al-Quds is considered the third holiest city after Makkah and Madinah. It was also the first Qiblah towards which Muslims faced when prayers were first prescribed in 610 AD. Likewise, it is also the place to which the Prophet (peace be upon him) travelled in the Night of Isra and Mi'raj and then from there ascended to the heavens.

Al-Quds is special in terms of its rich cultural and diverse heritage, which is an important source for sustainable development. The city enjoys several major historical and religious attractions and good levels of services in spite of the Occupation, sieges, curfews and deliberate destruction of its Islamic heritage sites. According to the Palestinian Department of Antiquities, there are ap-

proximately 742 important historical sites in the city. This includes 60 major archaeological sites, and 682 heritage sites such as mausoleums, caves, water channels and pools, and industrial plants. There are also over 3,700 buildings of historic importance. The non-physical cultural heritage of Al-Quds is also of great importance and a potential factor in developing the city as a tourist attraction. This includes the city's traditions, culture and festivals.

The city is teeming with structures of historical Islamic importance, including mosques, Islamic schools (madrasahs), Sufi lodges (zawiyahs and tekkes), mausoleums, ribats, old military structures, souks, traveler inns (khans), minarets, ancient city walls and gates. Since its very first appearance, Islam paid specific attention to the city and Muslims monarchs and rulers throughout history—in order to earn the pleasure and reward of Allah Almighty—paid special attention to the city by constructing magnificent structures decorated with inscriptions and beautiful designs, and public buildings for pilgrims, religious devotees and those living in proximity to Al-Aqsa Mosque.

The Al-Qibli Mosque (Southern Mosque) is situated in the southern part of the plateau on which rests the Al-Aqsa Mosque. Al-Aqsa covers a total area of 142 dunums, while the Al-Qibli Mosque covers 4,500 square meters. The building of the present structure was started by the Umayyad Caliph Abdul Malik bin Marwan and completed by his son Walid in 705 AD. It is 80 meters tall and 55 meters wide and consists today of 53 marble columns and 49 square-shaped



masts.

During the Umayyad period, its doors were plated with gold and silver. Abu Jafar Al-Mansur, however, ordered the precious metals to be removed and the money spent on the mosque. In the early 11th century, parts of the mosque were repaired, and its dome and northern doors were built. During the Crusader occupation of the city in 1099 AD, a part of the Al-Aqsa Mosque was turned into a chapel and another section into the living quarters of the Knights Templar and an armory. When Saladin Al-Ayyubi triumphantly recovered the city he ordered for the mosque to be repaired and its prayer niche (mihrab) to be built anew. Its dome was decorated with mosaics and a pulpit (mimbar) studded with ivory and made from cedar and ebony wood was placed to the right of the mihrab. This pulpit, a masterpiece, remained at its location

until Aug. 21 1969, the fateful date when Denis Michael Rohan, an Australian Zionist fanatic, began a fire within the holy compound. The fire spread 1,500 meters within the Al-Qibli Mosque, a third of the total area.

A modest wooden replacement pulpit was thereafter used until another replica pulpit of the original was produced using material in Jordan. It was brought to Jerusalem and set up in Al-Aqsa Mosque by order of His Majesty King Abdullah II of Jordan in 2007 (1428 AH).

Al-Aqsa is also home to the Dome of the Rock (Qubba Al-Sakhrah) which proudly stands in the heart of the Noble Haram above a rock from which the Prophet (peace be upon him) is said to have ascended to the high heavens in the Night of Isra and Mi'raj. This structure was built by Umayyad Caliph Abdul Malik bin Marwan, following a visit

to the city, to commemorate the Night Journey (Al-Isra) and Ascendancy (Mi'raj).

In addition to Islamic holy sites, the city is also home to the Church of the Resurrection that stands over what Christians believe are the tombs of the Prophet Isa (peace be upon him), Joseph the Shepherd and his family. The first to build a church here was Queen Helena in 335 AD. There is also the Via Dolorosa, Christian monuments, a mausoleum in Wadi Al-Joz at the foot of the Mount Olives near the Church of all Nations, and the Garden of Gethseman outside Jerusalem. Most of the Eastern Churches believe that this mausoleum is where the Virgin Mary Mother of Isa is buried. Among other historical Christian churches within the city is the Church of Saint Mary and the Chapel of Ascension.

## UNESCO Defines Boundary of Al-Aqsa Mosque

AL-QUDS: UNESCO has adopted a resolution submitted by Jordan and Palestine and supported by other Arab and Muslim groups which confirms that Al-Aqsa Mosque is the entire prayer complex within which is located the Southern Mosque, the Dome of the Rock and also the Maghrabi Gate.

The resolution also calls on Israel to commit itself to international law and UNESCO decisions in relation to heritage sites within the Old City of Al-Quds, which were listed as UNESCO World Heritage Sites by Jordan in 1981; the sites were also listed in the World Heritage in Danger list in 1982.

The resolution also calls on Israel to stop all excavations and demolitions within the Old City, and urges it to end violations that exacerbate tension and conflict among followers of different religions. UNESCO also called for an immediate stop to all actions impeding 19 projects under the Hashemite Rehabilitation Project in Al-Aqsa, the reopening of the Rahma Gate to the mosque, a halt on obstructions to reconstruction work at the site and necessary measures to implement the Jordanian design for the reconstruction of the road to the Maghrabi Gate.

The resolution also urges Israel to immediately suspend the almost daily incursions by Jewish fanatics and armed soldiers into the mosque, attacks on Jordanian Awqaf and Islamic Affairs officials, conversion of Islamic buildings and sites into synagogues and the Judaization of street names and historical sites.

Palestinian Minister of Awqaf and Religious Affairs Sheikh Yousef Adeis welcomed the UNESCO move and said his organization would work to protect Al-Aqsa and awaken the religious sentiments of Muslims to counter Israeli aspirations to alter the city's geographic and demographic reality.

"The Occupation's escalation of attacks in the recent period in Al-



Quds tells of dire consequences. These attacks are racist and underscore the Zionist occupation's disregard for the sanctity and lives of the Palestinian people ... remaining silent on such crimes encourages their repeat," he said.

He emphasized the necessity to unite Arab, Muslim and global efforts to protect Al-Quds, and the need for swift action to protect its inhabitants and holy sites in the face of state terror.

## Egypt Economic Development Conference

# Egypt Secures \$60 Billion

## IDB Signs 6 Agreements

Investment agreements worth \$36.2 billion were made at the three-day Egypt Economic Development Conference that took place on Mar. 13-15 at Sharm El-Sheikh on the Red Sea.

At the close of the conference held to kick start the country's economy, Ibrahim Mahlab, Egypt's Prime Minister, announced that direct investment contracts worth \$36.2 billion had been signed and that Egypt had also agreed to undertake \$18.6 billion in financed projects that the country would repay.

Egypt also won \$5.2 billion in loans from international institutions. This brings the total that the country was able to secure to around \$60 billion. At the beginning of the conference, Saudi Arabia, the UAE and Kuwait pledged \$12 billion in financial support and investments.

During his closing speech, Egyptian President Abdel Fattah Al-Sisi said that the country still needs between \$200 and \$300 billion to achieve desired development.

Meanwhile, on the sidelines of the conference, the Islamic Development Bank Group signed six agreements with Egypt worth \$3.9 billion. The agreements were signed by Dr. Ahmed Mohammed Ali, president of the Islamic Development Group, Dr Najla Ahwani, the Egyptian minister of international cooperation, and Hani Mohammed Saif Al-Nasr, chairman of the Arab Investment Bank in Egypt. The participation of the IDB head at the event underscores the special relation that the IDB enjoys with Egypt since its inception. The conference was held to pave the way for Egypt to prosper and develop itself as an attractive investment destination.

### The IDB-Egypt agreements include:

- \* \$457 million towards developing the first and second phases of the Sharm El-Sheikh International Airport project,
- \* \$220 million to install a 3,000 megawatt AC/DC transformer substation in the "Badr" region as part of the power transmission project between Egypt and Saudi Arabia,
- \* \$198 million for an oil refinery development project in Assiut which is expected to meet the growing demand for fuel in the Janubul Wadi region,
- \* a \$3 billion framework agreement with the International Islamic Trade Finance Corporation (the trade arm of the IDB Group) to finance the import of commodities such as oil, oil-products, and food commodities for three years,
- \* and an agreement between the Arab Investment Bank and the Islamic Corporation for the Development of the Private Sector (the private sector development arm of the IDB Group) to establish a leasing company with an authorized capital of \$21 million to develop finance as well as small and medium size business sectors in member countries.

Work on the IDB projects is expected to begin in the third quarter of the year. Egypt is one of the IDB's major beneficiaries having received some \$12.2 billion so far.



Egyptian President, Abdel Fattah al-Sisi (C), delivers a speech during the closing session of the Egypt Economic Development Conference (EEDC), in the Red Sea resort of Sharm El-Sheikh, Egypt, 15 March 2015 (epa)

The IDB is also to shortly sign an agreement with Egypt to establish an IDB office in Cairo, which will be opened in the third quarter of 2015, and a partnership strategy between Egypt and the IDB is being prepared to align the priority areas of the Egyptian Government and the strategies of the Bank and bolster the Bank's contributions in the main sectors of the Egyptian economy in order to support the efforts for comprehensive and sustainable development. Priority areas for the Egyptian economy in the coming years include infrastructure (energy and transport), youth employment, job creation and the transfer of Egyptian experience and capacity development to member countries.

The two days of Egypt Economic Development Conference (EEDC) witnessed huge participation from Arab and international communities as well as investors and businessmen.

A new government project has also boomed at the summit. "The Capital Cairo" is deemed to be one of the largest-of-its-kind infrastructure development projects in the world, according to the government, and will form a key part of the government's economic reform programme.

The project will cost \$45bn, and will take between five to seven years to complete, Ministry of Housing Mostafa Madbouly said, expecting that the population of Greater Cairo, currently estimated at about 18 million, will double within 40 years.

The Suez Canal Project was also said to be the leading project for the Egyptian economy during the next years, according to Prime Minister Ibrahim Mehleb, who confirmed that investment revenues will be distributed to all Egyptians, which guarantees comprehensive and sustainable development.



## ICDTA Calls for Training Academy on Organizing Exhibitions to be Established in Morocco

MARRAKECH: The establishment of a training academy in Morocco to train and develop cadre that would be able to organize exhibitions of international standards was called for by El Hassane Hzaine, director general of the Islamic Centre for Development of Trade (ICDT), a subsidiary organ of the OIC.

In a speech delivered in Marrakech on March 24 during the opening of an international meeting on exhibitions in Africa, Hzaine said a training institute is necessary to raise professional standards in the sector, which has promising potential for Arab and African countries. The meeting was attended by a number of professionals from countries across the globe, including North Africa and Africa.

The director general of the ICDT said that exhibitions are the key to developing trade between OIC Member States and that there is, as a result, a growing need for training and expertise and an institute of this nature. Hzaine also spoke about the potential for exhibitions in OIC states and Africa, adding that—aside from Turkey and the UAE—the sector needs developing in other countries. He said that a number of steps need to be taken to achieve this, and called for a bypassing of monopolies that contradict the spirit of competition, opening up to the global market and attracting foreign investment.

*a training institute is necessary to raise professional standards in the sector, which has promising potential for Arab and African countries.*

Hzaine said that the exhibitions sector in OIC Member States and Africa require the removal of obstacles that stifle competition. He also called for growth and development of the sector through joint ventures between domestic and foreign actors.

According to data presented at the meeting, out of 30,000 events organized worldwide, only 600 took place in Africa. Exhibitions globally covered an estimated 100 million square meters with only 1.5 million square meters taking place in Africa. Likewise, some 260 million people visited exhibitions out of which only 3.5 million were in Africa.

The meeting was organized by the ICDTA and the Global Association of the Exhibition Industry under the theme “Exhibitions in North Africa: Today and Tomorrow.” The event was attended by a number of industry professionals from North Africa, Africa and other countries of the world. The meeting was an opportunity for stakeholders to exchange ideas and report on the present situation in Morocco, Tunisia, and other North African and Sub-Saharan countries.

The meeting, which took place over three days, included presentations of important studies, especially those relating to Morocco by the Office of Trade Casablanca. The meeting also provided an opportunity to open discussions between professionals about ways and mechanisms to assist specialist entrepreneurs to organize exhibitions according to global and regional standards.

A number of workshops supervised by international experts were also held on several contemporary industry-related topics, including significant successes in this area, the exhibition industry in a global climate of competitiveness and human resource challenges in light of the digital revolution.

The Global Association of the Exhibition Industry, founded in 1925 in Milan, Italy, has since 2013 621 members from 85 countries and is considered the primary association for organizers of the world’s leading trade fairs and exhibitions. It seeks to represent, promote and support its members and the exhibition industry worldwide.

## Fishing and Livestock Should be Included in IOFS Agenda



A consultation meeting in relation to the OIC-affiliated “Islamic Organization of Food Security” (IOFS) was held at the OIC headquarters in Jeddah on Jan. 13. The IOFS—which is based in Kazakhstan’s capital Astana—delivered a presentation on its work which was followed by participants discussing the group’s action plan for the

next five years.

Participants agreed that the IOFS needs to undertake a wide range of projects relating to fishing, livestock, trade and market access, reduction of post-harvest losses, and enhancing food resilience and security. They also outlined an investment plan with funds coming from OIC Member States.

The meeting was also used as a platform to praise the IOFS’ efforts to nurture knowledge sharing and partnership work with organizations affiliated to the OIC, in collaboration with regional and international organizations and in synch with national strategies and initiatives. The Government of the Republic of Kazakhstan was specially thanked for supporting the IOFS.

The meeting was chaired by Amb. Mohammed Ahmed Al-Tayeb, Saudi Arabia’s permanent representative to the OIC. The opening session was addressed by Kazakhstan’s representative to the IOFS Mr. Yermek Kosherbayev, vice minister of agriculture for the Republic of Kazakhstan.

A statute establishing the IOFS was adopted at the fortieth session of the Council of Foreign Ministers held in Conakry, Guinea, in December 2013. IOFS has been established to provide expertise and technical know-how on sustainable agriculture, rural development and food security, and attract finances to develop agriculture and promote food security in OIC Member States.

## Benin Foreign Minister signs the Statute of the Islamic Organization for Food Security

The Secretary General of the Organization of Islamic Cooperation (OIC), Iyad Ameen Madani received on 11 February 2015, in his office at the General Secretariat, Prof. Nassirou Bako Arifari, the visiting Foreign Minister of the Republic of Benin and his accompanying delegation.

Madani and his guest discussed wide ranging areas of cooperation between Benin and the OIC and explored ways and means to further enhance them and how to promote joint Islamic actions. The two sides also reviewed extensively the latest developments in West Africa and the Lake Chad region with particular reference to the

escalating violent activities of the Boko Haram terrorist group and the threat that it poses to regional peace and stability.

The Minister commended the leadership and endeavors of the Secretary General and assured him of his country’s support. He briefed the Secretary General of a plan by Benin to convene an international interfaith forum later this year in Cotonou and emphasized the importance of partnership with the OIC in the project. He also signed the Statute of the Islamic Organization for Food Security with headquarters in Astana, Kazakhstan.

## OIC Secretary General receives the Minister of Planning and Economic Development of Niger

The Secretary General of the Organization of Islamic Cooperation (OIC), Iyad Ameen Madani received on 24 February 2015 the visiting Minister for Planning and Economic Development of the Republic of Niger, Amadou Boubacar Cisse at the General Secretariat. The Minister who was on an official visit to the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, discussed with the Secretary General issues of mutual interest and concern between his country and the OIC in the various fields including socio-economic development, education, capacity

building and the situation in the region.

Madani assured Cissé of the OIC’s commitment to continue to work closely with Niger and his intention to upgrade the existing OIC Office in Niamey to further enhance bilateral cooperation. The Minister expressed his country’s gratitude to the OIC for its sincere efforts to help his country face the multiple challenges in the field of development and nation-building.



## Newly-Launched Muslim Travel Index Crucial in Helping OIC Countries Develop Tourism



A recently-launched Muslim travel index has listed 18 OIC countries among the top 20 destinations for the increasingly growing segment of worldwide Muslim travelers.

According to the “MasterCard-CrescentRating Global Muslim Travel Index 2015”, Malaysia was named the number one destination for Muslim travelers followed by other OIC countries including Turkey, the UAE, Saudi Arabia, Qatar, Indonesia, Oman, Jordan, Morocco and Brunei.

Singapore came top of the list of the 10 halal-friendly non-OIC countries. The South East Asian country was followed by Thailand, the UK, South Africa, France, Belgium, Hong Kong, the USA, Spain and Taiwan.

The survey—which looked at data covering 110 destinations comprising 29 OIC and 81 non-OIC destinations—is an overall index based on a number of criteria. These destinations represented over 95 percent of destinations visited by Muslims in 2014.

The index shows that Muslims are fast becoming an important global consumer market and that their faith is influencing their purchasing decisions. The index, put together for the first time, is a useful tool for stakeholders to exploit this niche.

In 2014, the Muslim consumer market was worth \$145 billion with 108 million Muslim travelers representing 10 percent of the entire travel economy. This is expected to grow to 150 million representing 11 percent of the travel economy by 2020 with a market value projected to grow to \$200 billion.

The world’s Muslim population is also rapidly growing and is expected to become 26.5 percent of the world’s population by 2030, with the majority from some of the world’s fastest growing economies such as Indonesia, Malaysia, Turkey and the Gulf. The report said that “although OIC destinations have a distinct advantage due to having Muslim friendly facilities and services by default, there is still a requirement to create a clear and coherent strategy

across every level to fully maximize their attractiveness to Muslim tourists. It is a commitment that Malaysia, and to an extent Turkey, has embraced wholeheartedly over the last decade. In 2014 Malaysia and Turkey attracted 13 percent of total Muslim travelers. Other destinations in the top 10 also have the potential to target this segment to increase their visitor arrivals.” It added that non-OIC destinations have been much more proactive in looking at this segment and are developing services to attract Muslim travelers with Asian destinations, such as Japan and Taiwan leading the way.

The top 20 destinations currently only have two non-OIC destinations, Singapore and Thailand. Singapore presently boasts some of the best Halal food environments in non-OIC destinations, even when compared against OIC destinations, and has invested in processes such as a dedicated Halal certification body.

Saudi Arabia and Turkey saw the highest number of Muslim visitors in 2014 with 10,2 million and 8.1 million respectively.

All 100 destinations in the GMTI were scored against a criteria which included suitability as a family holiday destination, the level of services and facilities on offer, accommodation options, marketing initiatives as well as visitor arrivals. Each criterion was then weighed to make up the overall index score.

“The MasterCard-CrescentRating Global Muslim Travel Index has today set a real precedent for the tourism industry,” said Fazal Bahardeen, CEO of CrescentRating & HalalTrip.

“Not only is it the most in-depth research that we have undertaken so far on the fast-growing Muslim travel market, but has provided all stakeholders with some invaluable insight into how the halal-friendly tourism sector is growing and developing from a global perspective. CrescentRating has seen a recent huge shift towards more destinations targeting this sector like Japan and Taiwan, and it is a trend we expect to continue,” he added.

## IDB, Morocco to Promote Knowledge Transfer in Sub-Saharan Africa

The Islamic Development Bank (IDB) and the Kingdom of Morocco have signed a memorandum of understanding (MoU) on 20 January 2015 to promote knowledge sharing, and capacity building to countries in Sub-Saharan Africa. The memorandum was signed by Mohamed Boussaid, Minister of the Economy and Finance, IDB Governor for Morocco, and Dr. Ahmed Mohamed Ali, President of the IDB Group.

The memorandum was signed in Rabat at the headquarters of the Ministry of the Economy and Finance. The memorandum aims to enhance growth and social progress and promote Islamic banking in Sub-

Saharan countries to enable them achieve sustainable development by involving the Moroccan public and private enterprises in the implementation of IDB-funded development programmes.

Additionally, another tripartite memorandum of understanding (MoU) was signed between the Moroccan Agency for International Cooperation, the Government of Burkina Faso and the IDB, within the framework of the Bank's efforts to promote the exchange of knowledge and expertise among its member countries. Under the terms of the MoU, the Moroccan Agency for International Cooperation is to provide expertise to the national drinking water

company of Burkina Faso and help build its capacity to manage and supply clean drinking water, protect the water resources of the Ziga dam, optimize the use of the dam's water treatment capabilities and enhance the capacity of the national central laboratory in Ouagadougou in Water quality control.

The memorandum was signed by Dr. Ahmad Mohamed Ali, IDB President, Abderrahim Kadmiri, Director General of the Moroccan Agency for International Cooperation, and Jean Gustav Sanon, Minister of Economy and Finance and IDB Governor for Burkina Faso.

### IDB Group Chairman stresses the right policies for promoting trade and private sector growth

Heading a senior delegation to the headquarters of the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) in Paris, Dr. Ahmed Mohamed Ali, Chairman of the Islamic Development Bank (IDB) Group, on 26 January 2015, delivered a key note statement at the 2015 Arab Coordination Group – OECD/DAC (Development Assistance Committee) High Level Dialogue on Development.

Speaking to the session focusing on “reducing trade and investment costs to promote private sector development”, Dr. Ali provided perspectives and highlighted efforts of the Arab Coordination Group Institutions (ACGIs). He called for right policies for achieving sustainable economic growth, with the private sector and especially the SMEs playing an important role in promoting innovation and jobs creation. The IDB Group Chairman further emphasized the need for achieving greater regional integration by supporting trade-related infrastructure and reinforcing the development of regional markets.

The heads of the ACGI and OECD-DAC held the high-level dialogue against the backdrop of the on-going global political and economic situation and the emerging post-2015 development agenda. Over 200 delegations representing international donor communities attended the forum, which was co-chaired by Abdullatif Al-Hamad, Director General, Arab Fund for Economic and Social Development, and Erik Solheim, Chair of the OECD-DAC. Sheikha

Lubna Al-Qasimi, Minister of International Co-operation and Development, the United Arab Emirates, delivered the inaugural statement calling for well-coordinated, coherent and results-oriented development cooperation. The Dialogue aimed at deliberating on emerging developmental issues and identifying opportunities for cooperation amongst Arab countries/institutions and bilateral donors represented in the DAC.

The forum also saw high-level round-table discussions on the three topics of the agenda: “ensuring sustainable energy for all”, “reducing trade and investment costs to promote private sector contribution to development”, and “strengthening means of implementation to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)”.

The session on “Ensuring Sustainable Energy for All” deliberated on addressing the critical energy needs of the poor especially in the least developed countries, utilizing new technologies for clean energy and encouraging greater engagement of the private sector in increasing affordable and sustainable sources of energy. Commitments were expressed on identifying and mobilizing additional financial resources domestically, increasing international development assistance and encouraging private sector investment to meet the growing energy needs of the developing countries.

The session on trade and private sector dis-

cussed key issues that developing countries are facing in promoting trade and private sector development. The speakers called for facilitation of trade and investment for greater integration of land-locked countries with the global markets.

Furthermore, the participants of the Dialogue emphasized boosting of cooperation for successful adoption and implementation of SDGs. The importance of availability of a platform of global partnership for effective development cooperation was also emphasized. The need was underlined for building institutional capacity of countries to implement and monitor new SDGs. The heads of ACGI and OECD/DAC then reaffirmed their commitment toward working together with recipient countries in realizing the SDGs.

The Dialogue recognized the importance of collaboration between two major groups of providers of development assistance. Common understanding was reached on the new global agenda and the Arab-DAC donors agreed to establish a task force to develop a common platform for increasing access to energy for the poor with focus on Sub-Saharan Africa. The forum, also agreed to strengthen the on-going cooperation on regular reporting on development assistance and publishing joint success stories. The OFID extended an invitation for the next annual dialogue to be held in Vienna during the first quarter of 2016.

## IDB Announces Award for Best Application of Agent-based Simulation (ABS) in Islamic Finance

The Islamic Development Bank (IDB), SABIC Chair of Islamic Financial Markets Studies, and Islamic Financial Engineering Lab at Mohamed V University, Morocco, have joined hands to present the first Award for Best Application of Agent-based Simulation (ABS) in Islamic Finance.

The Award is aimed at inspiring student researchers across the world to use and apply Agent-based Simulation (ABS) to various

aspects of Islamic economics and finance. ABS is a valuable tool for studying complex phenomena and developing practical solutions. Platforms such as ABS can prove to be effective in understanding multi-agent behavior in complex systems. Over the past 25 years, ABS has been increasingly applied in a variety of fields of knowledge such as science, finance among others.

The Award offers three prizes to the best

three winners: first place: \$8,000; second place: \$6,000; third place: \$4,000. Deadline for submission is 30 September 2015.

The Award is in line with the mandate of IDB of promoting Islamic finance by developing innovative Islamic financial products and instruments that support economic growth and development of Member Countries and Islamic financial institutions.

## IDB, DFID to Establish Arab Women's Enterprise Fund



The Islamic Development Bank (IDB), and the United Kingdom's Department for International Development (DFID) have signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) on January 30, 2015 to establish Arab Women's Enterprise Fund (AWEF) in order to support less privileged women in Arab countries to unleash their economic potentials and increase their participation in the economy.

The MoU was signed by RT Honorable Desmond Swayne, UK's Minister of State for International Development and Dr. Ahmad Mo-

hamed Ali, IDB President, at DFID's head office in London. According to Dr. Ali, the signing of the MoU provides "great opportunity to lift the women in Arab countries in transition from abject poverty and make them fully participate in the economic activities of their countries."

As part of the agreement, both IDB and DFID will contribute £10 million in Pounds Sterling each (nearly US \$20 million) towards the establishment of Arab Women's Enterprise Fund.

The MoU aims at establishing the necessary governance arrangements for the Fund, exploring the opportunity for co-financing individual projects, supporting generation of knowledge, dissemination of information, and demonstration and utilization of best practices, collaborating on ways to bring on board other development partners, and supporting advocacy events to engage the private sector and to raise public awareness and mobilize support for the mutually agreed initiatives.

The IDB President informed the Minister that IDB will be very happy to partner with the DFID in other development projects. He told the Minister that already IDB has partnership with the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation on polio eradication, and has recently signed an agreement with Ministers from Ebola affected countries for the implementation of the Late King Abdullah's US \$35 million initiative on the fight against Ebola.

## IDB, UNIDO sign Joint Declaration to promote collaboration and create jobs in common member countries

A Joint Declaration was signed today at the IDB headquarters in Jeddah on April 12, 2015 between the Islamic Development Bank (IDB) and the United Nations Industrial Development Organisation (UNIDO).

The President of the Islamic Development Bank (IDB), Dr. Ahmad Mohamed Ali, and the Director General of the United Nations Industrial Development Organization (UNIDO), Mr. Li Yong signed the declaration on behalf of their institutions.

As part of the Declaration, the two institu-

tions will work towards poverty alleviation, promoting agriculture, trade, investments, women and youth empowerment in common member countries.

The Declaration also stated that both IDB and UNIDO will focus on "economic empowerment and entrepreneurship, sustainable energy development, agriculture, agro-industry and food security, water, environment and climate change".

The two institutions agreed to strengthen their cooperation in promoting economic

and social development in their common member countries, and at same time to work together to achieve sustained industrial development.

This declaration followed an agreement signed between IDB and UNIDO in July 1981. It also completes the agreement signed by the private sector arm of the IDB Group, the Islamic Corporation for the Development of the Private Sector (ICD) with UNIDO in July 2006.

## Islamic Development Bank Group voices strong support for greater economic cooperation and integration in Central Asia

The Turkmenistan International Investment Forum was held in Istanbul, Turkey, under the patronage of the President of the Republic of Turkey, HE Recep Tayyip Erdogan and the President of Turkmenistan, HE Gurbanguli Berdimuhamedov.

The Chairman of the Islamic Development Bank (IDB) Group, Dr. Ahmad Mohamed Ali, addressed the Forum which took place over two days (5-6 March 2015) and was hosted by the Foreign Economic Relations Board of Turkey (DEIK) and Turkmenistan Business Council in cooperation with the Chamber of Commerce and Industry of Turkmenistan. The Forum was attended by a large number of Cabinet Members from both Turkey and Turkmenistan as well as high profile representatives from international organizations and global investors.

In his statement, Chairman of the Islamic Development Bank (IDB) Group, Dr. Ahmad Mohamed Ali, appreciated the support rendered by the Government of Turkmenistan to the implementation of the IDB Group Projects. He also congratulated Turkmenistan on the successful completion of the construction of the Bereket-Etrek Railway Project which links Turkmenistan to neighboring countries and helps in giving it access to the sea.

Dr. Ali expressed hope that the event contributes to attracting further foreign investment to the priority sectors in Turkmenistan while benefitting from a strong Turkish economy sitting on a unique strategic gate-

way between the East and the West. "Forging greater regional economic cooperation amongst the Central Asian Republics will expand developmental opportunities and advance social progress for the people of the region. The IDB Group is, therefore, committed to assist in facilitating and enhancing intra foreign direct investment flows amongst member countries within the context of investment promotion", the IDB Group Chairman underlined.

Dr. Ali further underlined that the IDB Group is currently seeking to foster the regional cooperation framework in the Central Asian region through the Special Program for Central Asia (SPCA), under the framework of the OIC Plan of Action for Cooperation with Central Asia. The main objective of the SPCA Initiative is to further enhance the economic cooperation and complementarity between the Central Asian countries and other IDB regions, through supporting regional high-impact activities, mainly transport, energy, trade, and agriculture sectors.

Since Turkmenistan joined IDB in 1994, the cumulative IDB Group development assistance for Turkmenistan has amounted to US\$ 638 million for 18 operations. The Bank prides itself in having approved US \$371.2 million as financing for Bereket-Etrek Railway Project, which links Turkmenistan with its neighboring countries, the largest single operation ever financed by IDB in any member country.

In his remarks, Dr. Ali also appreciated the strong support rendered to the Central Asian economies by Arab Coordination Group Members such as the Kuwait Fund, the Saudi Fund, Abu Dhabi Fund, OPEC Fund, AGFUND, and Qatar Fund, in addition to the IDB Group. Since the independence of the CIS Countries, the Coordination Group has organized 13 Round table meetings which led to financing of priority projects in the region amounting to US \$1.1 billion.

Elsewhere, the IDB Group Chairman expressed strong admiration and support for Turkey's recent measures to promote its "Participation Banking Industry". "I strongly believe that there is an enormous opportunity in Central Asia, especially in Turkmenistan, to leverage Turkish experience in this area", he reiterated. Dr. Ali also touched upon the role that the Republic of Turkey is playing as the 2015 chair of the G20 in promoting the interests of developing countries and advocating a more inclusive G20 agenda. He stated that the IDB Group highly values the strong support of Turkey to place Islamic Finance in the G20 agenda. "The priorities of the Turkish Presidency have clearly highlighted the positive features of Islamic Finance principles and the need to benefit from them in the different working groups on development, investment and infrastructure", he concluded.

## Workshop on Agriculture Capacity Building in OIC Countries Held

The OIC's Islamic Chamber of Commerce, Industry and Agriculture (ICCIA) held in December a workshop on "Capacity Building on Value Chain Analysis for Agribusiness" within OIC Member States.

The event, held in Ankara on Dec. 1-3, was organized in collaboration with the Perez-Guerrero Trust Fund (PGTF) which is a part of the United Nations Development Program (UNDP), the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) and the Statistical, Economic & Social Research and Training Centre for Islamic Countries (SESRIC).

Some 42 participants from 16 countries, representing all regions of the OIC, attend-

ed the workshop, along with representatives from FAO, SESRIC and the Standing Committee for Economic & Commercial Cooperation of OIC Countries (COMCEC). Participants included directors, businessmen and senior experts.

Countries which attended included Bangladesh, Indonesia, Iran, Jordan, Kazakhstan, Lebanon, Libya, Pakistan, Palestine, Nigeria, Saudi Arabia, Sudan, Tajikistan, Tunisia, Uganda and Turkey.

The workshop was held to share best practices among primary producers and small-to-medium scale entrepreneurs engaged in first, second and third level agro-processing

activities. Participants also visited the Ankara Union Milk Facility to gain firsthand knowledge on the collection, processing and distribution of milk products.

The director general of SESRIC, Savak Alpaly said that there are 31 OIC member countries from different climatic regions ranking among the top 20 producers of major agricultural commodities worldwide. Development of agriculture in these countries would help reduce poverty, secure food sufficiency, provide additional job opportunities and promote other sectors in the economy related to agricultural production. Numerous agreements were made at the

workshop, including an agreement between Bangladesh and several African countries to share knowledge and technology on exporting processed fruit juice abroad. Bangladesh also expressed an interest to learn from Turkish dairy producers about the collection and distribution of milk. Several recommendations were adopted at the event. These included creating awareness of the need to minimize food loss and

waste, ensuring food safety and hygiene, understanding consumer preferences, highlighting the importance of health policies, ensuring quality, promoting halal, creating methods of minimizing the role of middle man who small farmers depend on, investing in cold-chain technology, creating an association for agribusiness among OIC countries to facilitate marketing and business opportunities, developing existing and

proposed agribusiness value chain, introducing reliable data and studies on the OIC region into the work of the ICRIC, calling on the relevant authorities to relax and remove some non-tariff barriers to increase intra-OIC trade, and encouraging better water management in light of water scarcity in OIC regions.

## 20th Meeting of the ICCIA Board Held in Istanbul

The OIC's Islamic Chamber of Commerce, Industry and Agriculture (ICCIA) held its 20th board of directors meeting in Istanbul on Nov. 27. The meeting was opened by Mustafa Rifat Hisarcıklıolu, President of the Union of Chambers and Commodity Exchanges of Turkey (TOBB), and chaired by Sheikh Saleh Abdullah Kamel, Chairman of the ICCIA's board of directors. The ICCIA's board of directors elected three new office bearers for the 29th session of the meeting. These were Mustafa Rifat Hisarcıklıolu as vice chairman (Turkey), Ahmed Al-Wakeel also as vice chairman (Egypt) and Dr. Abdul Sattar Esharh as rapporteur (Egypt). The board discussed the global economic situation and the ICCIA's role in member states. A road map was also put forward to enhance the ICCIA's revenue. Details of the meeting on the Food Trade Exchange

between Saudi Arabia and other Islamic Countries that was held in Jeddah on Nov. 5-6 was also provided to attendees. Board members thanked the ICCIA for its efforts under Sheikh Saleh Kamel and called on the OIC to continue with similar activities. Attendees also highlighted the need for members to play a more active role and honor financial commitments. A roundtable meeting was also held on the sidelines of the event to review the role of OIC economies and discuss long-term goals in developing intra-OIC trade, mutual investments and economic relations. A Pal-



estinian Trade and Business Expo was also arranged by TOBB and the Islamic Development Bank. The ICCIA board of directors is comprised of 17 members that include Djibouti, Egypt, Iran, Iraq, Jordan, Kuwait, Niger, Oman, Pakistan, Palestine, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, Sudan, Tunisia, Turkey, Uganda and the United Arab Emirates.

## Islamic Development Bank seeks inclusion of Islamic banking on the G20 agenda

Chairman of the Islamic Development Bank (IDB) Group says the Bank is in coordination with the governments of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, Indonesia and Turkey, all of them members of the G20, to incorporate the topic of "Islamic banking" in the agenda of the upcoming G20 summit, poised to take place in Antalya, Turkey, during November 2015 under Turkey's chairmanship. Dr. Ahmad Mohamed Ali stated this while speaking at the opening ceremony of the 5th Arab-Turkish Economic Dialogue Forum in Istanbul (5-6 March, 2015), graced by Dr. Ali Babacan, Turkey's Deputy Prime Minister, Minister of Finance and IDB Governor for Turkey. In the statement, the IDB Group Chairman praised the role Turkey played in organizing the Forum as well as its chairmanship of the G20/B20 in making the voices of Arab and Turkish investors heard paving the way for a constructive

role in achieving G20 aspirations towards balanced growth leading to creation of jobs and sustainable development. He also welcomed cooperation between Turkey and the Group of Arab States in the framework of the various cooperation programs particularly for exchange of expertise and knowledge sharing amongst IDB member countries. He emphasized that this would facilitate building capacity for young people and provide appropriate job opportunities for the youth and help fight poverty while leading to the integration of low-income people into economy. He further put forth a number of suggestions including the need for the Group of Arab States to benefit from the importance of Turkey as a strategic and resolute partner, to promote Arab-Turkish partnership and provide recommendations for this partnership in the context of Turkey's Chairman-

ship of the G20/B20. Dr. Ali also proposed the launching of a joint working group to continuously work on developing an ambitious vision for Arab-Turkish cooperation until 2030 inclusive of all mutually beneficial economic sectors. He underlined the need to come up with quick initiatives to plan commitments in the interest of mutual exchange of knowledge and expertise. The IDB Group Chairman expressed the readiness of the Group to support the proposed joint working group comprising the Turkish Ministry of Development, the Union of Arab Banks Union and the Association of Turkish Banks. During the conference, the Union of Arab Banks honored the IDB Group Chairman in recognition of his role in the service of Islamic banking over the past four decades.

## More than US \$63 billion from IDB Group towards trade and investment promotion

Chairman of the Islamic Development Bank (IDB) Group, Dr. Ahmad Mohamed Ali, has underlined the significance of the Group's member countries' accession to and implementation of the convention for promotion, protection and insurance of investments prepared by the Organization for Islamic Cooperation (OIC) and related to the areas of intra trade and investment.

Dr. Ali made the remarks at the opening ceremony of the 1st Global Islamic Investment Gateway (GIIG) Forum in Manama, Bahrain, on March 2, 2015. He deliberated on the important role IDB Group entities have played towards advancing investment and intra trade. He stated that IDB through its trade financing arm, the International Islamic Trade Finance Corporation (ITFC) established in 2008, has offered US \$27 billion of financing to foreign trade (export and import) operations in addition to the US \$29.5 billion of financing provided by IDB itself for promotion of intra-trade prior to the establishment of ITFC. Dr. Ali added that the Islamic Corporation for the Development of the Private Sector (ICD),

IDB's private sector development arm, has contributed more than US \$3 billion of financing to nearly 300 private sector development projects while the IDB's own total contribution from its Ordinary Capital Resources (OCRs) to support the private sector in member countries stood at US \$3.5 billion for 45 development projects.

The Chairman also mentioned that more than US \$23 billion worth of investments and export credits have been insured by the Islamic Corporation for the Insurance of Investment and Export Credit (ICIIEC), which has greatly contributed to the flow of investment projects and helped promote intra-trade amongst member countries paving the way for exporters to enter the world markets and compete with others.

He expressed hope that the Forum will facilitate a better flow of foreign investment into IDB Group member countries as the inflow of foreign investment is one of the active ways for increasing investment in member countries' economies and will further deepen the economic integration and cooperation amongst them.

The 1st GIIG Forum, co-organized by Bahrain's Economic Development Council, the Islamic Development Bank and Thompson Reuters, was graced by Bahrain's Crown Prince, First Deputy Chairman of the Ministers Council and Chairman of Bahrain's Economic Development Council HRH Sheikh Salman bin Hamad bin Isa Al Khalifa. Bahrain's Minister of Finance HE Sheikh Ahmed bin Mohamed Al Khalifa was also present at the Forum attended by more than a thousand high profile businessmen and investors representing more than 700 firms and global banking institutions. The participants exchanged views over the challenges ahead of intra investment amongst OIC member countries and also touched upon ways for increasing the intra investment flows.

On the sidelines of the event, the participants visited an exhibition of various investment agencies of the IDB Group member countries displaying investment opportunities and potentials in different sectors.

## IDB Hands over 10 Schools-Cum-Cyclone Shelters in Bangladesh

In special ceremonies that took place in several locations over two days in Southern Bangladesh in April, the Islamic Development Bank (IDB) representative Dr. Mohammad Hassan Salem, handed over 10 Schools-cum-Cyclone Shelters, as part of the first phase of the Fael Khair Program in Bangladesh which was donated by the Late King Abdullah Ibn Abdul Aziz (may Allah have mercy on him). The Handing Over ceremonies were attended by high ranking local government officials, including representatives of Primary and Secondary education, Local Government Engineering Department (LGED), School administrators and local community leaders.

These state-of-the-art buildings are part of a long cherished dream of the local population. Each building, apart from serving as a modern school for 240 students, will also give shelter to 2,000 people and 500 heads of cattle during cyclones, which afflict Ban-



gladesh from time to time.

It may be recalled that late King Abdullah, had requested not to reveal his name while donating USD 130 million for providing relief and assistance to the victims of cyclone Sidr as follows: (i) USD 110 million for the construction of a number of School-cum-Cyclone Shelters in the coastal belt of Bangladesh; and (ii) USD 20 million Waqf for providing urgent relief and rehabilitation in

the form of agricultural and other inputs to the affected population.

According to an MOU signed with the Bangladesh Government on 12 May 2008, the IDB is responsible for the implementation of the program, with the Government providing all necessary assistance to ensure its completion within the prescribed time.

The schools-cum-shelter buildings have been designed to withstand top wind speeds of up to 260km per hour. These facilities are designed as "green" buildings equipped with durable school furniture, solar power and potable water supply system, including rain water harvesting which provides safe drinking water in this saline belt where safe drinking water is a priceless commodity, especially during calamities.

The total number of Schools-cum-Cyclone Shelters is expected to reach 178 at project completion.

## IDB President Inaugurates Advisory Panel of Top Global Experts



JEDDAH: President of Islamic Development Bank (IDB) Dr. Ahmed Mohamed Ali chaired on March 19 the first meeting of a body of 13 global experts to be known as the President's Advisory Panel (PAP). The role of the members of the panel is to advise the IDB on how to tackle economic and development challenges.

Dr. Ahmad Ali said that the advisory panel brings reputable statesmen and women, who have amassed experience in different sectors of the economy and international development, to advise in steering the IDB towards making greater impact to both its member countries and Muslim communities in non-member countries.

"As we have our first meeting today in Jeddah, I have full confidence in your ability to discharge this important responsibility. You have managed nations and institutions, you have excelled with distinction in the private and public sector, and you have won the highest honors in the world. The IDB is optimistic that with this kind of experience and expertise, you would come up with ideas that will help us confront the challenges of the 21st century," the IDB president told the 10 members of the Advisory Panel who attended the inaugural session.

"We have to be proud that IDB has AAA rating. I congratulate the president and his staff. Since we have been successful in the last 40 years, the expectation will also be high. But I believe that IDB is well

positioned to deliver what is expected from it", said Dr. Abdullah Gul, former president of Turkey during his address at the inaugural session.

In his remarks, the former President of Indonesia, Dr. Bacharuddin Jusuf Habibie, emphasized the need to focus on science and technology, and the development of human resources in order to achieve meaningful development.

Dr. Ahmad Ali finally stated that the IDB is working on developing a 10-year strategic framework aimed at maximizing the impact of the bank in addressing key global challenges. He explained that the input of the members of the President's Advisory Panel will be crucial for the IDB Group.

Members of the Advisory Panel are: H. E. Prof. Dr. Ing. Dr. Sc. H. Bacharuddin Jusuf Habibie (Former President of Indonesia); H. E. Dr. Abdullah Gul (Former President of Turkey); H. E. Dr. Jobarah Al-Suraisry (Former Transport Minister, KSA); H. E. Madam Aïcha Bah Diallo (former Minister of Edu-

cation Guinea-Conakry); H. E. Madam Bintou Sanogoh (Former Minister of Finance Burkina Faso); H. E. Dr. Jacques Diouf (Former Director General, Food & Agricultural Organisation (FAO); H. E. Saleh Abdullah Kamel (Chairman, General Council of Islamic Banks); H. E. Mr. Abdul Aziz Al-Zaabi (Member, Federal National Council, UAE); H. E. Dr. Surin Abdul Halim Pitsuwan (Former Foreign Minister, Thailand); H. E. Dr. Ishrat Husain (Former Governor, State Bank of Pakistan); H. E. Prof. Dr. Abbas Mirakhor (First holder of INCIEF Chair of Islamic Finance); H. E. Prof. Dr. Muhammad Yunus (Nobel Laureate and founder Grameen Bank) and H. E. Abdellatif Jouahri (Governor Central Bank of Morocco).

The IDB is a multilateral international development financing institution located in Jeddah. It was founded in December 1973 by the OIC's Conference of Finance Ministers of Muslim Countries (then known as the Organization of the Islamic Conference). It began operating on Oct. 20 1975 and there are at present 56 shareholding member states.

The IDB's purpose is to foster economic development and social progress of member countries and Muslim communities, individually as well as jointly. In 2013, IDB tripled its authorized capital to \$150 billion to better serve Muslims in member and non-member countries. It also holds a credit rating of AAA and is an observer at the UN General Assembly.

IDB has evolved into a group of five entities, consisting of Islamic Development Bank (IDB), Islamic Research & Training Institute (IRTI), Islamic Corporation for Development of the Private Sector (ICD), Islamic Corporation for Insurance of Investment and Export Credit (ICIEC) and International Islamic Trade Finance Corporation (ITFC).



Saleh Kamel



Bacharuddin Jusuf Habibie



Ahmed Mohammed Ali



Jobarah Al-Suraisry



Abdullah Gul

## Seminar on Al-Aqsa at OIC Refutes Israeli Claims to Islam's Third Holiest Site

The Al-Aqsa Mosque in Jerusalem is a Palestinian, Arab and Muslim site and Israel has no claims to it, said a leading Palestinian historian during a seminar on Islam's third Haram at the OIC headquarters in Jeddah on Feb. 12.

Dr. Mohammed Ghosheh stressed that Al-Aqsa belongs to Muslims and refuted Israeli claims to the site. The Palestinian historian also provided attendees with a detailed explanation of important buildings within the Al-Aqsa Mosque, including the Dome of the Rock and the southern Qibli Mosque. He said that Al-Aqsa is the entire courtyard consisting of 144,000 square meters.

Ghosheh, a specialist in Islamic architecture, also provided an accurate historical account of Al-Aqsa Mosque and the Dome of the Rock along with photographs and architectural drawings, which show that the Haram is Islamic and so are the buildings within the entire complex.

He also showed images and gave historical accounts of Arab delegations which would visit Jerusalem and the Al-Aqsa Mosque over the years prior to Israeli Occupation in 1967. Notable visitors included princes and leaders from Gulf Arab states such as the UAE, Qatar, Saudi Arabia and Kuwait, and



a delegation representing King of Morocco Mohammed V in the 1950s. Ghosheh said that these visits confirm that Jerusalem was an important stopping point for Arab leaders during the period before Israeli Occupation.

The Palestinian historian also spoke about Israeli violations against the site since occupation, including the demolition of the Moroccan Quarter and destruction of 135 historical Islamic sites within the first week of occupation. He said that in its stead the Israelis established the Wailing Square near to the so-called "Wailing Wall"—a wall that Muslims call the "Buraq Wall" as the Prophet (pbuh) tied his Buraq there during the Night Journey.

Ghosheh also drew attendees' attention to a deliberate fire in 1967 that destroyed Saladin's wooden pulpit and which then led to the establishing of the OIC. He also refuted Israeli claims that there are tunnels under the Haram, which have led to the Israelis carrying out extensive excavations underneath the prayer complex and leading to the weakening of its foundation. He also stressed that only tunnels from the Umayyad period have been discovered.

The historian further provided a series of explanations of the buildings, domes, minarets, ornaments, archways, tiles and other ceramic tiles within the Haram and which underscore the site's Islamic nature and are clear evidence supporting the right of Muslims to Islam's third holiest site and Third Haram.

He also explained that there are many buildings built by Palestinian families—such as the Radwan family from Gaza—within Al-Aqsa and which highlight the Palestinian impact on the Haram and the rich contributions of Muslim civilizations from the Umayyad period through to the Ayubids, the Fatimids, the Ottomans and the Arabs most recently.

## Secretary General of World Federation of Arab Islamic International Schools visits OIC

JEDDAH: The Secretary General of the World Federation of Arab Islamic International Schools (WFAIIS) visited the OIC headquarters in Jeddah on Feb. 5 and met Dr. Abdul Aziz Al-Sebail, Chief Advisor and Director General of the OIC Secretary General Cabinet.

During the meeting, the WFAIIS Secretary General delivered a presentation on his organization's activities, achievements and future plans. The two men also discussed a variety of educational topics. Dr. Alsebail

was then presented with the plaque of the WFAIIS.

On Feb. 8, the Secretary General visited the Islamic Development Bank headquarters and presented a plaque to its president, Dr. Ahmad Mohamed Ali, in recognition for the IDB's efforts in supporting developmental projects in Islamic countries.

WFAIIS' Secretary General concluded his visit on Feb. 10 by visiting the Islamic Solidarity Fund where he met Ibrahim AlKhozaim, the fund's Executive Director.



The senior officials' preparatory meeting for the 42nd Session of the Council of Foreign Ministers—entitled "Joint Vision in Promoting Tolerance and Reject Terrorism"—was held at the OIC headquarters in Jeddah on April 5. Ambassador Mohammad Ahmad Tayeb (R), Saudi Arabia's representative to the OIC, and whose country chaired the 41st CFM, opened the meeting with a speech. Following Tayeb, and as Kuwait took over the chairmanship of the CFM, Jassim Mubark Al-Mubarak (C), Director of the Department of International Organizations at the Kuwaiti Ministry of Foreign Affairs, delivered a speech. Iyad Amin Madani (L), Secretary General of the Organization of Islamic Cooperation, also delivered a speech in which he offered his thanks and appreciation to Saudi Arabia which is where the OIC headquarters is based, and to the Custodian of the Two Holy Mosques King Salman bin Abdul Aziz (may God protect him) for his attention and care and ongoing support for the OIC and its activities.



# COUNTRY PROFILE

## Azerbaijan

**Official Name:** Republic of Azerbaijan

**Capital:** Baku

**Population:** 9,494,600 (2014)

**Area:** 86,600 sq km

**Official Language:** Azerbaijani

**Currency:** Azerbaijani Manat (AZN)



### Location and Geography

Azerbaijan is situated in the eastern part of the region beyond the Caucasus Mountains. To its north is the Republic of Dagestan, north-west the Republic of Georgia, south-west the Republic of Armenia and south the Islamic Republic of Iran with which it shares a 611 km long border. It also shares an 11 km border with Turkey.

Azerbaijan is home to a wide variety of landscapes. More than half of the land mass in Azerbaijan consists of mountains and hills that rise to levels between 400 and 1,000 meters; the rest of the topography consists of plains and low lands. Rivers and lakes constitute the main part of the water network in Azerbaijan, which was formed in a lengthy geological time underscored with significant changes. This is particularly evident in the remnants of ancient rivers found across the country. The country has an abundant range of natural and cultural attractions making it an attractive destination for visitors.

### Language

The country's official language is Azerbaijani, a Turkic language spoken in South West Asia, primarily in Azerbaijan and among Iranian Azerbaijanis. Azerbaijani is a member of the Oghuz branch of Turkic languages and is closely related to Qashqai, Turkish and Turkmen.

The language is divided into two—Azerbaijani North and Azerbaijani South, and into numerous dialects. Some consider Khalj, Turkish, Qashqai and Seljuk sepa-

rate languages in the Azerbaijani language group. From the 16th to the early 20th century, Azerbaijani served as a lingua-franca in most parts of the Southern Caucasus (with the exception of the Black Sea coast), southern Dagestan, eastern Turkey and Iranian Azerbaijan.

### Architecture

Azerbaijani architecture typically combines elements of East and West. Many ancient architectural treasures such as the Maiden Tower and Palace of the Shirvanshahs in the walled city of Baku survive today.

Among other medieval architectural treasures from the Middle Ages there is the Palace of the Shirvan Shahs in Baku, the Palace of Shaki Khans in the town of Shaki in north-central Azerbaijan, the Surakhany Temple on the Apsheron Peninsula, a number of bridges spanning the Aras River and several mausoleums.

### Cuisine

Azerbaijani cuisine has been influenced by the foods of different cultures due to various political and economic factors. In spite of those factors, Azerbaijani cuisine remains distinct and unique. Many foods that are indigenous to the country can now be seen in the cuisines of neighboring cultures. For the Azerbaijanis, food is an important part of their culture and is deeply rooted in the nation's history, traditions and values. The country's diverse climate and fertility is reflected in the national dishes which comprise fish from the Caspian Sea, local meat

and seasonal vegetables. Saffron rice is the country's primary dish and black tea the national drink.

### Arts

The people of Azerbaijan possess a rich and distinct culture, a major part of which is decorative and applied art. This form of art is represented by a wide range of handicrafts, such as chasing, jewelry work, engraving in metal, carving in wood, stone and bone, carpet-making, lasing, pattern weaving and printing, knitting and embroidery. Each of these types of decorative arts reflects the culture of the people of Azerbaijan.

Azerbaijani carpets are made by hand and come in various sizes. They are made in varying textile patterns depending on the region of the country. The carpet industry dates back to the second or third millennium BC.

Azerbaijani music is based on folk traditions dating nearly 1,000 years. It has evolved under the badge of monody, producing rhythmically diverse melodies. Music from Azerbaijan has a branch mode system, where chromaticization of major and minor scales is of great importance.

Mugham is one of the many folk musical compositions in Azerbaijan. It usually consists of poetry and musical improvisation in specific local modes. The foremost performers embody their feelings in song and music. In contrast to the tradition of Mugham in Central Asia, Azerbaijani Mugham is freer and less rigid.





**Maha M. Akeel**

*Chief Editor*

*what is it that we have achieved over the past 50 years since we stopped visiting Al-Quds? Israel's settlements have expanded throughout the city, land has been grabbed, Palestinian homes and property demolished, and Palestinians are being killed, imprisoned and displaced.*

## *Occupied Al-Quds Beckons Us*

**D**uring a newspaper interview regarding his visit to Al-Quds and the feelings he had as a Muslim when offering prayers in Al-Aqsa Mosque, H.E. Iyad Amin Madani, Secretary General of the OIC, explained that the visit was an immortal and unforgettable moment.

The visit, Madani mentioned on several occasions, embodied being physically in the Third Haram to which the Prophet (peace be upon him) urged people to travel to; the visit also homed in on the fact that the city is under occupation with visits being prohibited. He added that he saw longing in the eyes of the people of Al-Quds who yearn to see thousands of Muslims come to pray there.

Muslims from across the world are eager to visit Al-Quds, walk in its alleyways, retreat in I'tikaf in Al-Aqsa Mosque, pray under the Dome of the Rock, and visit the Buraq Wall and the 'Umari Mosque. It is definitely our right as Muslims and none can dispute that; the Occupation has no right to prevent visits, for it is a right according to international law, which guarantees freedom of worship, access to holy places and respect for their sanctity. Why then should we give up this right and allow the Israeli Occupation behave as it pleases.

Indeed, what is it that we have achieved over the past 50 years since we stopped visiting Al-Quds? Israel's settlements have expanded throughout the city, land has been grabbed, Palestinian homes and property demolished, and Palestinians are being killed, imprisoned and displaced.

This issue of the OIC Journal will look at the issue of visiting Al-Quds and praying at Al-Aqsa Mosque from several perspectives. The political dimension of the issue will be discussed together with the OIC endeavors to rally support in OIC Member States to facilitate the visit to Al-Quds.

The economic aspect and the selection of Al-Quds as the Capital of Islamic Tourism upon a decision by the 8th Session of the Islamic Conference of Tourism Ministers (ICTM) held in 2013 in Banjul, Gambia, are explored. This conference spotlighted the plight of Al-Quds following the Israeli blockade, deliberate destruction of Palestinian heritage sites and damage to Palestinian tourism.

The religious dimension is equally scrutinized. Indeed, a major resolution was adopted by the International Islamic Fiqh Academy (IIFA) at its last meeting in Kuwait. Visiting Al-Quds, IIFA decided, is permissible and desirable. Likewise, IIFA highlighted that Al-Quds concerns the entire Muslim Ummah, urging aid and support for the city, its inhabitants and the people of Palestine. Al-Quds, IIFA emphasized, is not just for the people of Palestine but for Muslims the world over.

The historical background to Al-Quds and its standing were reviewed at a lecture by a historian specializing in Al-Quds. The event was held at the OIC headquarters. The lecturer is preparing a book for the OIC on the Holy City, with an emphasis on recent Israeli violations.

Aside from Al-Quds, this issue focuses on terrorism and violent extremism, a twin threat to the Muslim world, causing fragmentation and infighting, along with humanitarian tragedies and economic, social, and cultural deterioration. Other reports highlight the enmity and hatred of right-wing and xenophobic groups outside the Muslim world, that spare no effort in fanning hatred against Islam and Muslims.

This issue also covers the looming global water crisis due to the gradual disappearance of underground water reserves and climate change. Reports indicate that several OIC Member States suffer from water scarcity.

These are formidable crises, yet we need to maintain hope. We can certainly stop this waste of innocent lives. Muslim youth can start building a more secure and stable future based on knowledge and development, with the spirit of tolerance and cooperation. The Muslim world boasts of huge natural resources and a trove of talented people just waiting for the opportunity to get away to more promising environments. No wonder one of the key priorities for the OIC is to facilitate knowledge acquisition and technological development in its member countries. The First Islamic Summit on Science and Technology will indeed be held late this year to discuss cooperation and integration between Member States and their academic institutes in various fields such as health, environment and technology.

Augmenting Islamic cultures • Combating poverty  
 Protecting the rights of Muslim minorities • Promoting Science and Technology  
 Preserving Islamic heritage • Joint Islamic solidarity  
 Strengthening International relations • Promoting development  
 Combating terrorism • Achieving economic and trade cooperations  
 Encouraging dialogue among cultures and religions  
 Boosting Economic and Trade cooperation  
 Defending the Palestine Cause • Defending the rights of Muslim minorities  
 Combating terrorism • Promoting Science and Technology



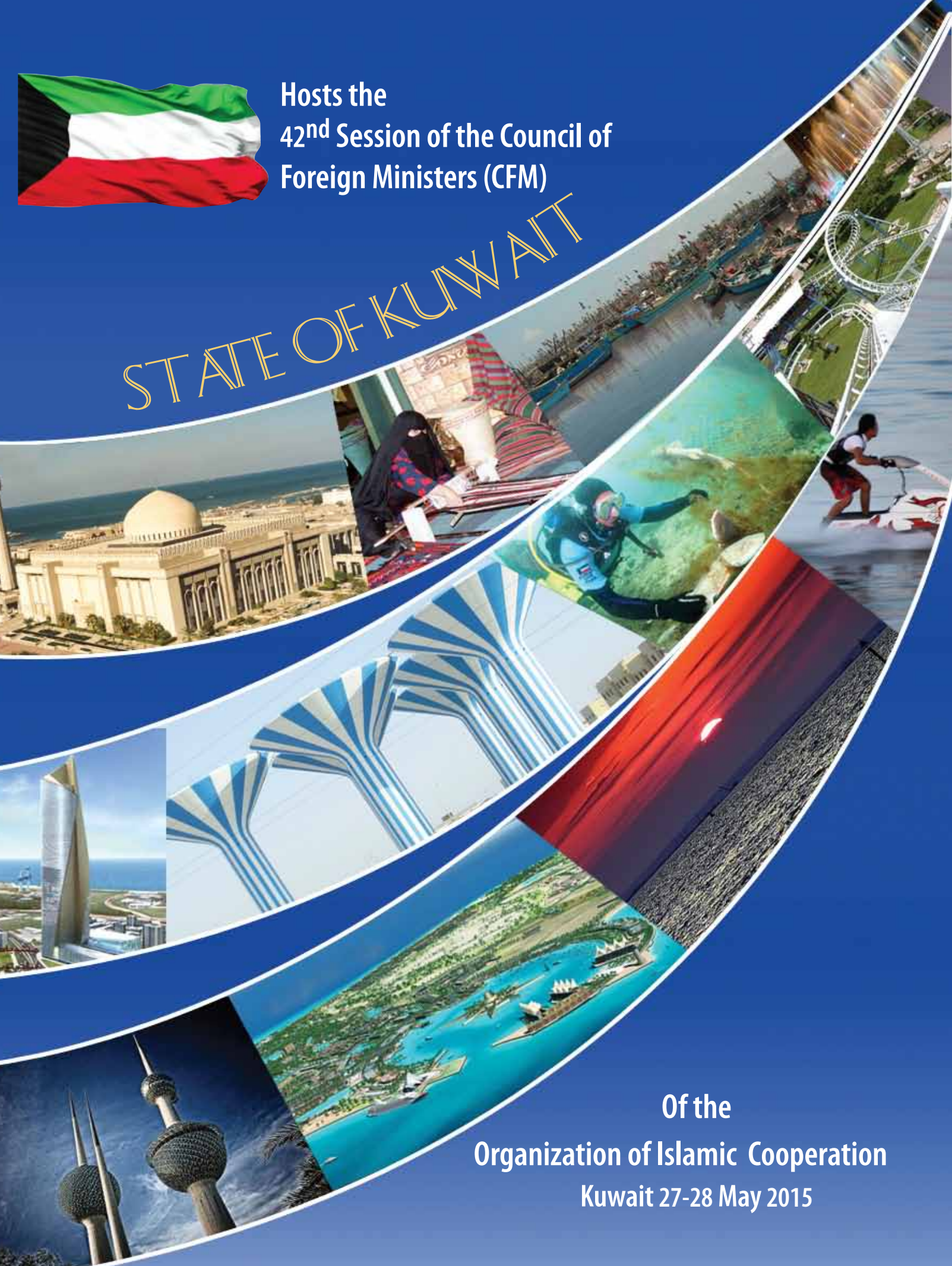
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