



ISLAMIC DECLARATION ON CULTURAL DIVERSITY

(Adopted by the 4th Islamic Conference of Culture Ministers)

Algiers – December 2004

بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمَنِ الرَّحِيمِ

Introduction:

1. At the threshold of the third millennium, our present-day world is witnessing sweeping changes and attendant dangers that are growing at an ever accelerating pace which rebounds on the stability of human societies and mortgages the world's peace and security, owing in the main to the adverse effects of the creeping phenomenon of globalization that hews out the world's cultures, civilizations and peoples on domineering standardized cultural and political patterns while taking no account of their specificities and particularities, in total disagreement with the basis of joint interaction. The United Nations and such international organizations as the Organization of the Islamic Conference and the Islamic Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization -ISESCO- are exerting efforts to press forth inter-cultural and inter-civilizational dialogue, as a unique alternative of the prevailing culture of violence and exclusion of the other, while globalization is triggering conflicts that jeopardize the culture of dialogue and mutual understanding, in utter breach of the very spirit of the international law and the international conventions that acknowledge the cultural and civilizational specificities of a nation and a people and guarantee the right of individuals and groups alike to preserve their cultures and civilizations.
2. The urge to gear dialogue among peoples and cultures towards serving the universal objectives of the humanity as a whole is strongly felt today more than any other time in the past. It is all the more a pressing need since it is not easy to see why constructive cooperation and actual inter-cultural and inter-civilizational dialogue have any significance in an ever changing world without the principle of cultural diversity being confirmed as a recognizable fact. In order to build up a common future in which peace, solidarity and coexistence prevail, there is no other alternative but to ground people in dialogue along with the respect and preservation of cultural diversity.
3. It is the universal virtues of brotherhood, justice and tolerance, which all civilizations share that should be sublimated and established in the minds and behaviours, as a common heritage of humanity on which the drive towards a true inter-cultural and inter-religious dialogue should build. Such a dialogue cannot be improvised. It must be built on the basis of an accurate identification of its preconditions; achieving the objectives targeted, as well as consolidating its principles and determining the methodology to be adopted with pinpoint accuracy, and the actors involved in giving it substance as a main groundwork and fundamental principle of international policy, and an effective means for enduring world peace and security.

4. Today, humanity is aspiring towards disentangling itself from the concatenation of debilitating conflicts and the maze of struggles that force the international community into accepting a particular world state of affairs degenerating into the worst of all possibilities that mortgage the present-time human civilization, galvanizing into activity the hostile policy of extremist fanatics against peace, justice and the peoples of the world. In fact, it is all the more an incessant urge to promote inter-civilizational dialogue, since it has been retaining interest as a universal issue that is not limited to any specific historical context; and since dialogue has become a strategic choice that opens up wider horizons for humanity as a whole for building a new world wherein the immense breadth of the civilizational achievements which constitute, indeed, a common heritage for the whole humanity is accessible to all.
5. Despite its positives and possibilities, globalization constitutes a formidable challenge to the common heritage of humanity, which makes it indispensable to consolidate solidarity among peoples and promote their cultural diversity, through adopting a methodology that is based on dialogue as a means conducive to raising awareness about the values shared among the peoples of the world, within the framework of a human concept that seeks consolidation and dissemination of these principles. This method should seek, likewise, mobilization of the Islamic world's actors such as governments, in addition to non governmental organizations and bodies, the aim being to turn to good account their achievements and to benefit similarly from the principles and objectives such regional or international organizations as ISESCO are working towards elaborating. This should be achieved:
 - In accordance with the resolutions issued by the United Nations on inter-civilizational dialogue and cultural diversity, along with the relevant international covenants, declarations and conventions, on top of which is the International Declaration on Cultural Diversity which was adopted by the General Conference of UNESCO in 2001, and wherein the governments, together with the UN and the concerned NGOs are called for planning and implementing appropriate cultural, instructional and social programmes geared to consolidating the concept of inter-civilizational dialogue;
 - In consistence with the principles of the Tehran Declaration issued in December 1997, by the 8th Islamic Summit Conference which stressed that the chief support of the Islamic civilization, throughout history, has been peaceful coexistence, joint cooperation, mutual understanding among civilizations, as well as fruitful and constructive inter-religious dialogue that is receptive to other ideas; and placed emphasis on the need to establish mutual understanding and interaction between the various cultures, in keeping with the Islamic precepts of tolerance, justice and peace;

- Drawing on the resolution issued by the 9th Islamic Summit Conference which was held in Doha, in 2000; with due reference to the deep consideration expressed therein for the invaluable initiative taken by His Excellency Mr. Mohammed Khatami, President of the Islamic Republic of Iran and President of the 8th Islamic Summit Conference, to establish inter-civilizational dialogue as part of fulfillment of the aspirations of the Islamic Ummah, in perfect keeping with its deep-rooted traditions of tolerance and receptiveness;
- In response to the calls, communiqués and declarations issued by the symposia and conferences convened by ISESCO within the framework of its several action plans, in collaboration with the regional and international organizations, on inter-cultural, inter-civilizational and inter-religious dialogue and the awareness it is likely to raise about the common values shared by all peoples and about the need to promote mutual understanding;
- Pursuant to the objectives of the Cultural Strategy for the Islamic World, which was adopted by the 6th Islamic Summit Conference, Dakar, 1991, and by the 4th Islamic Conference of Culture Ministers, in its amended version, in Algiers 2004; and based on its contents which lay emphasis on respecting cultural diversity and strengthening means of inter-civilizational and inter-cultural dialogue founded on the principles of tolerance, coexistence, justice, peace, joint cooperation, and the mutual respect of the world's civilizations, cultures and peoples.

Accordingly,

The Member States taking part in the 4th Islamic Conference of Culture Ministers endorse the principles and objectives enunciated in the present Declaration on cultural diversity, as part of expression of the conjoined will of the Islamic world and the concern the Member States of the Organization of the Islamic Conference expressed to join efforts with the international community and support the efforts directed towards laying down solid bases for inter-civilizational dialogue and establishing its principles, through practical and methodological conceptions of inter-civilizational dialogue. The OIC Member States seek also to contribute to grounding this inter-civilizational dialogue on humanistic ideals and principles culled from the spirit of Islam and its clement fundamentals.

The principles and objectives:

Article 1: Characteristics of cultural diversity and inter-civilizational dialogue.

Today more than any time in the past, the world's religions and cultures are called upon to sustain joint efforts directed towards furthering dialogue and strengthening coexistence in such a way that may benefit one another; while casting away the causes of discord and disdain, on the basis of the universal values and principles of love, brotherhood, tolerance, mutual respect, solidarity and justice. It is these universal virtues and principles, which all religions share, that should be sublimated and instilled in the minds and behaviours, as a common heritage of humanity, through a true dialogue among cultures and religions.

In fact, constructive cooperation and actual dialogue among civilizations and cultures should not be conceived of without the principle of cultural diversity being firmly established. Moreover, the clash of civilizations is not a fated fact, because violence and the ignorance of realities as well as the fear of the other are not a predestined fatality. They rather spring up and develop through education and culture which pattern the behaviour and reactions of individuals. Therefore, there is no alternative but dialogue for the preservation of cultural diversity and cultural plurality, and human-beings all have to determine on living together with a free will, regardless of their different beliefs.

Therefore, we ought to cling to and stand up for our cultural and civilizational identity, while interacting with the other civilizations and cultures. We are, likewise, called upon to review our perception of the other and cast away the stereotype views of a people, their culture and civilization. In fact, equal dialogue among nations and peoples entails that we honestly judge ourselves without in any way cutting loose from our religious and cultural identity, because without sticking to our values it will not be easy for us to understand fully the values of the other and fathom his culture. In fact, inter-cultural and inter-religious dialogue cannot abide unless it draws on tolerance and mutual respect and if it is not receptive to the plural cultural convictions and beliefs.

As Islam is a divine path and embodies a human way of life, Muslims are confident that since culture is the expression of the genius of a people, there is no justification for conceiving of a culture as being either sublime or mean and lowly. Each culture has its own genius, and is distinctly prolific and enlightened. Therefore, the following should be emphasized:

- Cultural and civilizational diversity is a grace bestowed from God; and as Muslims, we are taking on a humanistic mission towards laying down the

bases of international peace, and we ought to lend support to the universal civilizations for the benefit of the whole humanity.

- Each culture has its own value and enjoys a special status. And none can deny the contribution of each culture to the enrichment of the universal cultural heritage. In fact, each culture has to be concerned with striving to bridge the gap of misapprehension among civilizations, so as to ward off the hostile tendencies and smear campaigns that are distorting the image of Islam and Muslims and charging the clement religion of Islam with false accusations.
- There is no justification for believing that there is such a thing as an enemy culture or nation; and the preconceived ideas of the other cultures and civilizations, in addition to the stereotype images of nations and peoples should be debunked. It is also important to give a wider hearing to the call for turning to avail the profitable possibilities of globalization, shunning its adverse effects and avoiding its looming threats.
- Cultural diversity constitutes an immense wealth that should not generate discord, tension and rejection of the other. However, it has to be a means to broaden the scope of joint cooperation, conducive to shoring up concord, rapprochement, as well as to reducing differences and defusing conflicts through peaceful means.
- The outcome of the material and non-material cultural heritage which observes cultural diversity in all its aspects is what constitutes the common heritage the whole humanity draws on to strengthen international concord, for an abiding international peace.

Article 2: Cultural diversity, as a factor of comprehensive and sustainable development.

Making cultural diversity a recognizable fact, and working towards preserving it within the framework of an international policy founded on the principles of dialogue, peace, as well as on rejection of the logic of power and hegemony, subsumes a condemnation of all forms and sources of violence and terrorism, including state terrorism. It involves also the respect of the right to life, dignity, freedom as well as the right of resistance which occupied peoples are entitled to, in order to defend their entity and culture. Cultural diversity also integrates the need to distinguish legitimate resistance from terrorism.

Cultural diversity can be a fundamental factor of development, mutual understanding; peaceful coexistence, economic and social progress, redressing disparities and disorders existing in the present international order, respecting and protecting the environment; in addition to preserving the material and immaterial heritage of all peoples whose cultural and civilizational heritage is subjected to attempts of distortion, forgery, obliteration, destruction and confiscation, fighting against poverty, raising development standard and production rate, consolidating democracy, and extending popular participation in decision taking in all administrative, cultural, economic and social sectors.

At this present-time juncture which is characterized by the increasing dependence of cultural industries on new information and communication technologies that strongly direct artistic creativity today, pressure on poor countries should be relieved as regards their debt so that they could allocate additional resources to support local cultural production, restore balance to their markets flooded with the inundating influx of cultural products of rich countries, and bridge the digital divide between them and the developed countries; the aim being to make them productive of culture and contributors to the edification and enrichment of universal civilization.

In this respect, emphasis may be laid on what follows:

- Encouraging cultural tourism as a form of cultural and civilizational dialogue among peoples, and holding symposia and conferences to develop cultural communication, in an endeavour to learn directly about the culture of the others, respect the diversity and plurality of creative means, contents and expressions, introduce Islamic culture and secure presence in the global space of communication.
- Cooperating closely with economic and financial international organizations to lay down a long-term programme aimed at reducing the widening gap between the rich and the poor countries which threatens cultural diversity, diminishes the efficiency of the use of new information and communication technologies in the service of development and hinders the serious and effective participation of poor countries in the administration of a fair global economic order.
- Elaborating an executive conception of the action plan issued by the World Summit of Information Society, with its first and second phases, in such a way that enhances digital solidarity between all peoples.
- Using the moral values of the different cultures in drawing up and working out a global system of ethics, and recognizing the diverse sources of knowledge and

cultural diversity as basic characteristics of human society and as an asset indispensable to the progress of humanity.

- Economic and social disparity between peoples requires taking fair measures and working out appropriate developmental strategies and establishing an environment that allows construction of balanced human relations and constitutes an efficient framework for dialogue among civilizations, away from all forms of violence and extremism.
- Cooperation at the international and Islamic levels through implementing cultural activities in order to face the challenges of urban development, globalization and current technological changes, encourage the establishment of research and information networks in the field of cultural policies for development, including studying the setting up of an observatory of cultural policies and cultural diversity and reconsidering cultural policies with a view to modifying priorities, programmes and working methods and making of the cultural dimension a basic constituent of development.

Article 3: Cultural diversity, civilizational interaction and globalization

The crucial events we have inherited from the early nineties of the past century and which changed the economic and social infrastructures of many a people, in the context of unipolarity, globalization and the concatenation of the amazing changes that pervaded the world in the beginning of the present century, constitute on the whole a contemporary map full of political, economic and social contradictions on the one hand, and of cultural challenges facing all nations on the other, especially nations with deep-rooted, diversified and rich history and cultural and civilizational heritage, including the Islamic Ummah. Moreover, the development of communication means and of computer technologies, the shortening of distances and the rapprochement between peoples have contributed to precipitating globalization and providing unprecedented material and technological resources that have, in their turn, contributed to the emergence of a unique dominating model in all areas in such a way that eliminates the cultural particularities of societies and might obliterate the basic elements of their identity and civilization.

One of the adverse effects of globalization is the endeavour to standardize culture at the universal level. However, globalization does not consist only of negative aspects. It also offers new opportunities of communication, interaction and rapprochement. In fact, the Islamic Ummah should make use of such opportunities and possibilities to introduce its culture and civilization, forge ahead with progress, enhance the concept of cultural diversity and assert the concept of cultural identity and the complementarity of the constituents of Islamic culture and their interaction among themselves as well as with the other nations.

With a view to avoiding the negative impacts of globalization, cooperation relations should be strengthened for a correct understanding of the mission of the Islamic culture as well as for enhancing the belonging thereto and pride thereof. Likewise, creativity, diversity and effective participation in the contemporary cultural production should be carried on, by means of promoting the active role of the different elements working in the cultural fields, at every level and in every sector. The aim is to enable the Islamic Ummah to protect its culture, understand the other's culture and wield new communication and information technologies that are considered today as prerequisites to blazon forth the voice of the Islamic world, to transfer its culture to the other and to engage with the latter in a constructive dialogue.

Therefore, we assert:

- That the process of globalization requires considering cultural diversity and civilizational plurality as a stimulus of globalization, not as an obstacle thereto; it would be interesting to respect and take account of the cultural and civilizational particularities in a world that has become a global village, thanks to the information and communication technology, and tends towards homogeneity.
- That the values of plurality and cultural diversity are not a justification to exclude the other; on the contrary, the opportunities and possibilities offered by globalization should be exploited to further solidarity, exchange and coexistence between people.
- That it is important to joint efforts to build a world that is characterized by communication, information and mutual understanding and wherein the diversity of cultural values, moral perceptions and behaviours encourages the emergence of a true culture of peace.
- That it is equally significant to support international efforts to elaborate a world convention on the respect of the creative human diversity, with a view to warding off any attempt aimed at exterminating a language, culture or race, which will be bound for reference use to developmental strategies in the future.

Article 4: The contribution of Islamic culture and civilization to enriching cultural diversity

The Islamic culture, as history attests, is a culture of progress, creativity, knowledge and action that has always respected and dealt with diversity. The diversity of cultures and civilizations and their coexistence within the large Islamic world, despite its different languages, cultures and civilizations, is the best historical evidence of the

culture of dialogue and tolerance that Islam has always called for, regardless of the changing junctures.

Characteristically, Islamic culture and civilization consider “the quest for knowledge a religious duty”, despite the relating difficulties. This has contributed to enriching universal heritage in the various fields of science, arts and literature. Islam, indeed, attaches great importance to knowledge and urges the quest for it, even in distant parts of the world.

The world’s different generations are inspired by the various contributions of the Islamic Ummah and of its radiant civilization that has always endeavoured to make additions to the universal civilization and worked towards enhancing progress, peace as well as material and moral prosperity. The Islamic civilization is also the cradle of several fields of knowledge and science. Accordingly, materializing these principles requires:

- Establishing prizes and grants to be awarded to institutions and individuals who have made distinguished intellectual contributions in the field of enhancing dialogue among civilizations and introducing Islamic civilization, its lofty values, its everlasting landmarks, and its qualitative contributions to the universal civilization.
- Activating communication with the world by attaching importance to Islamic cultural centres abroad, supporting international research centres that deal objectively with Islamic issues, setting up more similar institutes and centres in the most important capitals of the world, holding joint symposia, organizing cultural caravans and fairs and stepping up cooperation with active international satellite and electronic networks.
- Encouraging great publishing houses in the world to translate Islamic masterpieces and serious studies into world languages, supporting the circulation of such works and encouraging the joint production of TV programmes, documentaries and reference works on the diversity and richness of the sources of Islamic culture and its immense contributions to enriching universal civilization, promoting mutual understanding and learning about the other.

Article 5: Cultural diversity by and for all

The growing trend of the outside world towards the use of the means of electronic communication technology in the field of culture, of fostering diversity and supporting inter-civilizational dialogue is heading progressively and surely towards the Islamic world. This compels us to prepare the young generations from now on to these

sweeping changes so that the culture of internet becomes a part of the intellectual training of these generations. The ultimate objective consists in enabling Islamic people to become producers, instead of consumers, of these technologies. Furthermore, cultural diversity can contribute to enriching cultural life by endowing it with more homogeneity, as long as it does not cause division and melting. Actually, culture develops, progresses and establishes itself firmly.

In this respect, emphasis should be laid on what follows:

- Respecting the religious rites and holy books and texts, written and oral, of a people or a nation, as they constitute foundations of the different religions and faiths, and respecting also mankind's unity and cultural differences.
- Continuing the promotion and modernization of the institutions that publicise culture in the Islamic world and carrying out integrated structural and organizational reforms in all cultural areas so that these can cater for the needs of cultural action.
- Laying down laws and legislations that forbid the abuse, looting, damaging of and illegal trafficking in heritage, and considering such practices as downright affront to cultural security.
- Enhancing the global dimension of Islamic civilization through attracting foreign investment which makes foreign markets accessible and helps benefit from the advanced expertise available in the developed countries, at the level of production and that of the diverse sources of this production.

Article 6: Cultural diversity, and the Islamic perception of human rights and the culture of justice and peace

Since the inception of Islamic culture and civilization, the Muslim peoples have been keen on highlighting their will and emphasizing their determination to engage, together with all other peoples on an equal footing in terms of rights and obligations, in building a world that basks in the warm glow of peace, justice, equality and tolerance, and which is based on respect for human rights and the preservation of the material and moral fundamentals of human dignity. The aim is also to consider cultural diversity and the right to difference an essential component of human rights, as prescribed by Islam and enunciated in international laws.

Muslim peoples are proclaiming once again, as they have always been doing, their adherence to the culture of justice, peace and tolerance, since peace is a prerequisite to the development of peoples and coexistence between civilizations, and as it is impossible, according to this Charter, to dissociate peace from justice. Peace, in

fact, implies respect for human rights, a collective and genuine will to coexist on the basis of the common values shared by humans, and respect for the peoples' rights to safeguard their respective identities, cultures and civilizations, which only enriches the cultural and civilizational heritage of humankind altogether.

Peace requires respect for others as well, along with their cultures, civilizations as well as religious and ethical systems, together with the actual will to rationalise the use of national resources and to protect the environment, while taking into account the interests of the coming generations. This calls for emphasizing what follows:

- Safeguarding and advocating cultural diversity and helping poor countries safeguard their heritage and rehabilitate their civilizations are the key to establishing the culture of peace as they are an essential and mandatory component in settling disputes and fighting all forms of terrorism and extremism, be they originating from individuals, groups or states.
- Working towards forming stronger bonds between Islamic culture and other cultures than they used to be in the past, and towards enhancing interaction between them, in a bid to achieve security and peace without all the more jeopardizing cultural diversity and innovation amidst these peoples.
- Considering the right to cultural diversity and plurality, as well as mutual respect for the civilizational and cultural components as a prerequisite to a balanced dialogue and peaceful coexistence, as well as supporting the system of the cultural rights of peoples.

Article 7: Cultural Diversity and Creativity

The preservation of cultural diversity requires unstinting endeavours, including the appropriate orientation of cultural policies and support of their projects and initiatives as well as the promotion and development of cultural industries, the extension of support to cultural actors and innovators, the preservation of cultural properties and services, let alone the adherence to all forms of cultural heritage, be they tangible or intangible, and the enhancement of the ability to innovate and communicate at the international, national and regional levels, especially through partnerships between the private and public sectors and civil society, through an approach based on tradition and openness.

Mastering the new information and communication technologies (NICT) should contribute to enriching the Arabic language and the languages of Muslim peoples so as to promote them, with a view to keeping abreast of the latest scientific developments worldwide.

In the same vein, translation should contribute to promoting cultural interaction and exchange and the transfer of modern sciences and techniques, especially those pertaining to computer sciences and the upgrade of cultural heritage.

In this respect, we should call for what follows:

- Energizing the creative powers available to Muslim peoples, through a vigilant cultural policy which takes stock of cultural production in the Islamic world, analyzes its constituents and ensures its documentation and upgrading into an industry that confers extra quality on it, further enriches it and gives it an added value.
- Providing the appropriate conditions to help innovators assert themselves as self-sufficient and liberal producers in society who are qualified to invest in new fields likely to provide them with self-generated resources.
- Promoting cultural exchange and interaction between innovators in Islamic countries and their counterparts from other countries, giving impetus to creativity, and ensuring the effective and balanced participation of innovators in the various cultural activities.
- Sponsoring promising talents among the youth in various Islamic countries and taking care of the cultural material designed for children and teenagers in terms of content and the cultural media used, in such a way as to ensure their qualification, provide them with various tools of self-immunization, and facilitate their integration into the knowledge-based society as well as their training in deploying and capitalizing on intelligence.

The role of the Islamic Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (ISESCO):

As ISESCO is the main instrument of publicizing this Declaration, following up its implementation and assessing the status of such implementation, it is called upon to:

- Work towards disseminating the principles enunciated in this Declaration, publicize them and see to it that they are observed and complied with by governmental and local community bodies, and urge the states of the Islamic world to integrate them into their cultural and developmental policies and to take them into account in their relations at the inter-Islamic and international levels.

- Redouble efforts directed towards promoting cultural interaction and inter-civilizational dialogue, and encouraging cultural diversity inside and outside the Islamic world.
- Develop cooperation and partnership with the national, regional and international cultural institutions and bodies, so as to further coordinate views and stances and unify goals and objectives, with a view to promoting culture, consecrating such principles as justice and peace, and sensitizing the public opinion and international community to the adverse effects of globalization.

The role of the Member States:

- To feature the issue of cultural diversity and dialogue among civilizations as an axis in the programmes on the celebration of the capitals of Islamic culture.
- To energize the role of universities in publishing this Declaration and achieving its objectives, through conducting researches and studies, concluding partnership and twinning agreements, designing the appropriate curricula and programmes, and creating chairs specialized in this field.
- To mobilize universities, intellectuals, writers, artists, film makers, youth, women and third-age movements, local community organizations and associations, the private sector, journalists and media figures, with a view to enhancing the culture of justice, peace and dialogue among cultures and religions, as well as peaceful coexistence and mutual understanding, through mechanisms, means and methods that suit all parties.
- To discharge an effective role aimed at highlighting such values as dialogue, coexistence and tolerance in Islam, and advocating the principles of cultural diversity, through cooperation with the specialized organizations and bodies in the Islamic world, while abiding by the conventions and laws in force in their respective countries.