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ISESCO's Role in the Development of Arab-Islamic Culture

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Preface

When it was set up in 1402 AH / 1982 AD, the Islamic Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization -ISESCO- was intended to serve as a lever to sustain the development of Islamic societies in the realms of education, science and culture as well as a mechanism entrusted with the planning of programmes and projects at the level of the Islamic World, while working towards ensuring their implementation within the framework of its mandate. It is self-evident that Arab-Islamic culture firmly stands as the very foundation and reference for any revival that emerges in the countries of the Islamic World. Therefore, the development and advancement of this culture, together with continuous endeavour to ensure its prosperity, enlargement of the scope of its creativity and consolidation of its impact on the individual and society are indeed among the compelling requirements to achieve Islamic societies' civilizational reconstruction - taken in the comprehensive and deepest sense of civilization - together with the edification of man and flourishing of civilization.

The Islamic Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization -ISESCO- has played a prominent role in the service of the Arab-Islamic culture, embracing a wide range in this regard. It has made this achievement through the refinement of its mission, renovation of its function, innovative deepening of its visions, while effecting the role with which it has been entrusted. This role actively seeks to sharpen man's sentiment, enlighten his mind, refine his spirit, embellish life and achieve a comprehensive development of society. It also takes into account the fact that to ensure comprehensive development, there should be an interaction between changes, renewals and development,

a complementarity between roles, functions and responsibilities, as well as a correlative combination of all efforts, potentials and energies. These are the very goals which are pursued through the action carried out by the Islamic Organization in the fields of education, science and culture, considering that every single domain of its activity is a tributary that helps to serve, promote and enrich Arab-Islamic culture, while enhancing ISESCO's performance, thus allowing the Islamic Organization to fulfil its mission of progress and prosperity of the Islamic World in all areas.

Indeed, ISESCO's role in the promotion of Arab-Islamic culture is characterized by the fact that it expresses the collective will of the Islamic Ummah as represented by the Member States. It is, therefore, a role that derives from a mission that has been carried out in order to meet Islamic countries' needs in ensuring educational, scientific and cultural progress as well as to achieve a civilizational revival that would be marked by the prosperity of Arab-Islamic culture and the resumption of its role in enriching and actively interacting with human cultures.

The study presented to the reader addresses various aspects of ISESCO's mission in the development of the Arab Islamic culture.

May Almighty Allah bless our endeavours.

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Introduction:

The establishment of the Islamic Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization -ISESCO- on 3rd May 1982 marked the beginning of a new era for the joint Islamic action in the fields of education, science and culture, as well as the actual initiation of an innovative phase in the Islamic solidarity and collective cooperation between the states of Islamic world. The standing purpose of this endeavour is to support the efforts exerted to bring about modern civilizational revival of the Arab-Islamic Ummah and effect coordination between the various institutions operating in these fields of activity.

Moreover, the establishment of the Islamic Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization completed the gathering of the complementary links in the chain of the joint Arab-Islamic action at the levels of the Organization of the Islamic Conference and the Arab League. This move has thus allowed us to gather momentum and have the necessary driving force for the advancement of Arab-Islamic culture in different areas and at various levels.

The ensuing result is that Arab-Islamic culture has been able to embrace a much wider range and set it in motion for the fulfilment of the objectives set in line with the collective will of the Arab-Islamic Ummah; Indeed, for the first time ever in modern Arab-Islamic history, the Ummah successfully endowed itself with two complementary bodies for its joint cultural action, which are successively the Arab League's Educational, Cultural and Scientific Organization -ALECSO) (1970) and the Islamic Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization -ISESCO- (1982).

Following the establishment of the Islamic Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization 37 years ago, the Islamic World has achieved a great stride, which continues to evolve towards further refinement, under a comprehensive cooperation in the Organization's areas of competence. In this regard, culture has enjoyed a keen interest with regard to all of the aspects pertaining to the cultural action at large, particularly in terms of authenticity and establishment, planning and future prospects. All these are being addressed both on a short-term and long-term basis, as materialized through a prospective vision that has been laid down in the "**Cultural Strategy for the Islamic World**", one of the major civilizational projects worked out by ISESCO.

Culture in ISESCO's Vision

In the preamble, the Charter of the Islamic Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization specifies the meanings of "**constructive culture**" as a concept, affirming, among other stipulations providing for the establishment of ISESCO, that Islam is altogether a tolerant faith, **constructive culture**, humanistic civilization and a guide for man's deeds and actions in life. It underlines that Islam which asserts itself as a major spiritual, moral, cultural and civilizational force has had and will continue to have a very important constructive contribution to the enrichment of human civilization, further stressing the awareness about the bonds which cement the peoples of the Islamic Ummah through a common faith and commonly shared spiritual, moral and **cultural** values.

Moreover, the seven objectives set out in the Organization's Charter emphasize the comprehensive concept of culture, perceiving the term as an integrating set of all the positive purports and constructive aspects. In this regard, Objective (f) of the Charter states:

- *“To make Islamic culture the basis of educational curricula at all levels and stages”.*⁽¹⁾

For its part, Objective (e) affirms:

- *“To consolidate authentic Islamic culture and to protect the independence of Islamic thought against all forms of invasion and all factors of cultural alienation, distortion and disfigurement”.*⁽²⁾

In the domain of culture, the Charter has also entrusted ISESCO with the task of working for the promotion of understanding among the Islamic peoples and contributing to the achievement of world peace and security through various means, especially education, science, culture and communication.

Based on the provisions of the Islamic Organization’s Charter, therefore, culture stands in ISESCO’s vision as a driving force behind civilizational edification, a tool for coexistence and understanding among the peoples and a means of achieving world peace and security. True enough, this is not but a lofty cultural mission that has civilizational and humanistic dimensions.

Seen from this angle, culture is a multi-faceted phenomenon; it includes:

- **Constructive culture** for man and civilization;
- **Unifying culture** both for the entity and the Ummah;

(1) This objective was replaced in the Charter amended by the 11th General Conference held in 2012 by the following objective:

“To take further interest in Islamic culture, highlight its specificities and publicize its landmarks in intellectual studies, scientific researches and educational curricula.”

(2) This objective was replaced in the amended Charter by the following objective:

“To encourage cultural interaction and to support the aspects of cultural diversity in the Member States, while preserving the cultural identity and protecting the independence of thought.”

- **Civilizational culture** for edification and prosperity;
- **Strong culture** for the preservation of entity and identity.

This academic meaning of culture is so deep and comprehensive that it integrates all the meanings, purports and lofty values, ideals and principles the prominent goal of which is to improve life. Thus, culture aims to achieve whatever target is conducive to man's happiness, populating the earth and constructing civilization.

For its part, the Cultural Strategy for the Islamic World which was elaborated by the Islamic Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization⁽³⁾ has integrated the meanings implied in the concept of culture, put them in a form that is in line with Islamic societies' specificities and regulated them in order for culture to have a sound basis in order to play a leading role in the advancement of society and the moulding of man in the first place.

Indeed, the above concept was given full substance in the **Cultural Strategy for the Islamic World** which underlines that "culture is the expression of the scope of progress and development in the different aspects of human life and its various fields and underlying the creativity displayed by man in his interaction with the universe bestowed on him by Allah for the service of his creed and human values, and the presentation of his latent characteristics of thinking and behaviour which are in line with the reality of the individual and

(3) ISESCO, in collaboration and coordination with the General Secretariat of the Organization of the Islamic Conference, elaborated the **Cultural Strategy for the Islamic World**. This Strategy was adopted by the 6th Islamic Summit Conference held in Dakar, Senegal, in 1991. The Second Islamic Conference of Culture Ministers, held in Rabat in 1998, adopted the implementation mechanisms of the Strategy which was published by ISESCO in a book in Arabic, English and French.

society in accordance with Islamic criteria and contents emanating from the pure Islamic creed.”⁽⁴⁾

In the civilizational vision, “Culture is supposed to promote mental elevation, refine the senses and strengthen consciousness and awareness. Therefore, it is included in the education of the individual, as a right to enjoy and a duty to fulfil. Man has been created with the element of love for knowledge and curiosity, to be acquired through his social senses. Culture has its impact on individual and collective behaviour in terms of morals and ideological, political and ethnic tendencies and inclinations.”⁽⁵⁾

In ISESCO’s vision, moreover, culture is the spirit of the Ummah and the token of its identity and stands as one of the essential pillars in the edification and enhancement of nations. Each nation has a culture from which it derives its inherent elements, values and specificities, bears its seal and is named after it. For its part, each society has its distinct culture while each culture has its distinct features.⁽⁶⁾

Overall, culture as perceived in ISESCO’s Cultural Strategy for the Islamic World has two basic characteristics: “Invariability in respect of absolute sources and creeds, laws, methodologies and values contained therein. The second characteristic is variability in respect of the efforts and creativity of Muslims which may be right or wrong and consequently are debatable. The part of the Islamic culture

(4) Cultural Strategy for the Islamic World, p. 39, Publications of the Islamic Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization -ISESCO- Rabat, 1997.

(5) Ibid, p. 37.

(6) Dr Abdulaziz Othman Altwaijri, Arab Culture and the Other Cultures, p. 7, publications of the Islamic Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization, Rabat, 1998.

which is absolute has the same characteristics as those of Islam as a religion and way of life. These characteristics reflect **universality, comprehensiveness, moderation, realism, objectivity and variety in unity**".⁽⁷⁾

ISESCO's Cultural Project

The mission of the Islamic Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization geared to serving Arab-Islamic culture is best displayed in an Arab-Islamic cultural, comprehensive project which grasps the full meanings of culture and addresses the various broad areas cultural action.

1. Project Nature and Identity

Within the framework of this clear vision as to the concept of culture, the Islamic Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization shoulders the responsibility of fulfilling the objectives of the Islamic Cultural Project.

The nature marking the Islamic Cultural Project is displayed through its capacity for action-taking within the scope of the living reality, its readiness to take up the challenge and its capability to engage in an interaction with intellectual and cultural phenomenon as well as with economic and social conditions. In pursuing this quest, the project keenly strives to rationalize and raise these conditions from their mere material dimensions to horizons that are much wider and more appealing to man's heartfelt aspirations and dreams.

True enough, it is this dynamic nature of the Islamic Cultural Project that makes its identity a driving force, not an obstacle hindering

(7) *Cultural Strategy for the Islamic World*, p.48.

its upward evolvement. This is due to the fact that this is a project of Muslim dynamic societies that develop, thrive and progress, regardless of the degree of development, the level of prosperity and the magnitude of the progress involved. What is involved therefore is a project that is the real expression of living societies pacing in the direction which they perceive as the one leading to the best and the most ennobling destination.

Thus, there exists a strong correlation between the nature of the Islamic Cultural Project and its identity. Indeed, its identity is derived from its very nature. Hence, there is no discrepancy or contradiction whatsoever between the two elements of this equation, i.e. The nature and identity of this project.

A wrong belief that prevailed for some time alleged that the Arab-Islamic identity generally involving thinking or an intellectual project limits the dynamism of the thought and hinders the evolvement of such project towards opening up to and interacting with the currents unfolding worldwide. The truth is that the Arab-Islamic identity is a high-standing civilizational characteristic that prevents deliquescence, evanescence and extinction. Indeed, this identity is constantly in motion, constitutes no obstacle for the thinking process and hampers in no way the free launching of thoughtful undertakings and wide opening up to all horizons.

Since the nature of the Islamic Cultural Project is dynamic, evolutive and developing and as the characteristics inherent in its identity include flexibility, opening up to the other currents and renewal within the scope of the Islamic constants, fundamentals and basic principles, realism stands therefore as its distinct feature. This is a realistic project which both stems from and expresses the very reality of the Islamic societies actually experiencing this reality and reflects the collective will and aspirations of these societies to work towards

renewing, upgrading and refining their status. From this realistic point of view, the Islamic Cultural Project has nothing to do whatsoever with dreamy, delusive projects that do not reflect the people's living reality, that abounds in undertakings, desires and hopes.

The realism of the Islamic Cultural Project, which is the end product of both its nature and identity, requires that the project be both liable for implementation and endowed with the various basic factors, justifications and qualifications which allow it to keep abreast of the unfolding changes and adequately respond to the aspirations of an active society seething with life, hope and strong will to shape its present and its future.

It is a fact that the Arab-Islamic arena was not devoid of other projects with their promoters labouring to attract people to embrace these projects in an attempt to provide guidance to Arab-Islamic societies. In this context, the Islamic World, particularly its part comprising the Arab countries, knew a multiplicity of cultural projects as a result of the active intellectual movement experienced by Arab-Islamic societies. Among these attempts existed the National Cultural Project and the Secular Cultural Project, whether of liberal or socialist obedience. The ensuing result is that such projects had a great impact on confusing the Arab mind at large, weakening the community's efforts and causing the loss of many development and edification opportunities.

However, if we examine carefully the numerous cultural projects of this nature, we will find that they are phenomena that illustrate the nature of a given period and reflect the will of the forces in power during that period. One clearly witnesses that after a certain interval of time, many of these projects came to collapse for they had been set up on foundations extraneous to Arab-Islamic societies and drawn their inspiration from ideas and visions that had no relations whatsoever with the Ummah's thought and civilization.

The Islamic Ummah, represented through its wise men and all those endowed among its sons with judiciousness and discernment, has come to adopt the Arab-Islamic Cultural Project for it represents the middle-of-the road school, illustrates the tolerance of the Islamic principles and translates the purity of origin and moderation of the Islamic thought. The ensuing result is that the influence exerted by the advocates of the other cultural projects receded, the glow having filled the minds of certain people with enthusiasm extinguished and, finally, these projects came to collapse for they clearly proved null.

2. General Scope of the Islamic Cultural Project

Owing to the realism which constitutes its prominent feature, the Islamic modern cultural project adopted by the Islamic Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization ranks among the major civilizational projects currently in the process of implementation. In fact, the Project was endowed with an integrated framework which it has fully displayed in an innovative, coherent form, in line with the Islamic joint cultural action set up through its official channels, thus fulfilling the collective will of the Islamic Ummah.

We can rightfully consider the scope of the Islamic joint cultural action at the levels of the Organization of the Islamic Conference and all the bodies, institutions and entities coming under the Organization or operating within its framework, to be this very innovative, coherent form expressing the Islamic Cultural Project in its civilizational and humanistic dimensions.

In this general framework, the Islamic Cultural Project was elaborated in the form entitled “**Cultural Strategy for the Islamic World**”. In all its aspects, fundamentals, objectives and ends, the Strategy has integrated the great ambition nourished by the first pioneers and builders who had paved the way for the Islamic Cultural Project. This

is to say, as indicated above, that for the first time ever in history the Islamic World has successfully endowed itself with a comprehensive cultural plan that integrates all the facets, aspects, elements and fields of cultural action.

This plan, which entailed an in-depth, comprehensive study, was elaborated thanks to the combined efforts exerted by an elite of scholars and academics. This elite has faith in the mission of culture in building civilization and is deeply aware of the pressing need for cultural action to impact on the Ummah's revival and to ensure its cultural development. Endowed with these assets, this elite was keen on devising and elaborating the plan in a precise, well-engineered form that grasps and incorporates all the elements and fields of culture, while considering the various facets of the concept of culture as outlined above.

The Cultural Strategy for the Islamic World, counting as the fruitful result of Islamic cooperation, stands as the full expression of the Islamic Cultural Project which is carried out within the framework of the Islamic joint cultural action, whether at bilateral level or at the level of collective cooperation between the member states of the Organization of the Islamic Conference -OIC. Moreover, the Strategy has taken into account the lessons learned from previous experiences and has enriched its content through genuine Ijtihad (independent judgement). From all these elements, the Strategy has derived whatever ideas and view points that it deemed useful and real reflections of the Islamic Ummah's aspirations, sentiments and dreams, as well as its perception of cultural action in its fullest sense.

On the basis of this analysis, we can say that with the adoption of the Cultural Strategy for the Islamic World, the Islamic cultural project has actually moved from the phase of conception, planning, experimentation and Ijtihad in search for the most appropriate and

useful form - this part constituted a long phase whose experimentations lingered on for nearly one century - to the phase of execution and Islamic joint action to make the project become a tangible reality. This is a new phase which came to complete a preceding phase beginning with the creation in 1972 of the Organization of the Islamic Conference -OIC-; it was initiated and clearly defined with the creation of a specialized body entrusted with the Islamic joint cultural action within the framework of OIC, i.e. the Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization - ISESCO.

Giving substance to this new phase of Islamic joint cultural action, ISESCO since inception has constituted the evolutive, modern and appropriate framework for the Islamic Cultural Project which has been the core of the dream, aspiration and undertaking of all those who are deeply aware of the necessity to improve the state of the Islamic Ummah from weakness to strength, from dispersal to grouping and from division to unity, all this to take place within the scope of a single faith, a collective civilization and a homogeneous culture.

3. Practical Dimensions of the Islamic Cultural Project

The Islamic Cultural Project, which materializes in the Cultural Strategy for the Islamic World and rises to the level of a civilizational project thanks to its comprehensive concept and intellectual depth, has a number of practical dimensions that may be summarized in the following three major dimensions :

- a) Elimination of factors of regression, dependency, weakness and shortcoming by conducting an in-depth diagnosis of these factors;
- b) Consolidation of factors of progress and development in Islamic societies on the basis of the Islamic vision and constituents;

- c) Work towards finding the supporting tools and the inducing moves required, while opening all ways for practical application.

These dimensions constitute active complementary elements of the Cultural Strategy for the Islamic World mentioned in Section 2 above. They are aimed at bringing about the major change sought at three levels, namely : (a) the Muslim individual; (b) the Islamic Ummah; and (c) Humanity at large. The Strategy's general objectives at these three levels may be summarized into four:

- i) to emphasize the Islamic civilizational identity through the clarification of its theoretical and applied features, while striving to make them become general phenomena within the Islamic societies;
- ii) to have an open-minded, humanistic personality for any constructive solidarity step, whether at the level of the Islamic society as a whole in order for it to contribute to the achievement of the Islamic objectives, or at the level of mankind at large with a view to working towards helping it achieve the objectives sought;
- iii) to enrich human culture at large in consideration of its rank as an aspect of global civilizational cooperation; this objective is to be achieved in all realms, both moral and material, through the consolidation of all the aspects of creativity and the creation of favourable environments thereof, together with achieving close human relationship among the various peoples worldwide and promoting dialogue between all cultures and civilizations; and
- iv) to work towards strengthening all the aspects of scientific innovations and progress so as to allow them to grasp and put into use scientific production as well as developing

research studies and resources, together with the continuous quest to explore unknown cultural, innovative and scientific areas⁽⁸⁾.

All of these are general objectives which obviously comprise multiple sub-objectives, all of which come under the general framework integrating all the facets of the Islamic cultural action whose purpose is to ensure both the civilizational advancement of Islamic societies and to bring about cultural development and prosperity for their peoples.

Cultural Development in the Service of Islamic Culture

The action of the Islamic Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization has a broad basis, i.e. cultural development. The expression “cultural development” is one of the new concepts of social action in its comprehensive meaning which extends to the various activities of human life and comprises all the aspects of human efforts. The emergence of the concept coincided with the advent of the modern intellectual awakening movement and took root clearly with the evolution of the world community’s vision regarding the mission of culture in man’s life and its role in the edification of modern societies. This meaning has evolved to such an extent that it nowadays stands among the bases for peoples’ progress and the constants of cultural and social policies in the states which consider development to be a major objective within the framework of their national policies.

Objectively, Cultural development is of equal status to both the development of society culturally and the development of culture

(8) Cultural Strategy for the Islamic World, p. 48.

socially and economically. Its goal is for culture to become an effective tool in the promotion of the means of growth and to sustain the efforts exerted in order to improve the living standards, lead man up, enhance his capacities and improve his social conditions.

For these reasons, cultural development has a broad meaning which is integrated into the scope of comprehensive development and is based on three major pillars, namely :

- a) Ensuring justice in the political, economic and social senses of the term.
- b) Honoring man by preserving all his rights and endowing him with righteous upbringing and full protection.
- c) Use of scientific methodologies in thinking of and planning for the ways of progress, the means of advancement and the modes of development in all fields.

On the basis of this understanding, development is thus an operation which has complementary elements and connecting links and whose causes are correlated and whose phases are evolutive. This is all the more so since there is an entanglement between the various elements constituting any operation geared to the comprehensive edification of society.

In this regard, therefore, cultural development stands as one of the solid foundations for sustainable comprehensive development. The latter can prevail solely through cultural development, cannot play its role without it and becomes productive only if culture is flourishing and productive.

Consequently, cultural development does not emerge from the vacuum and cannot be brought about in one leap. True enough, it is the product of an interaction between a certain number of

factors complementing each other and which, if gathered together quantitatively and constituting the right correlation as required, lead to the emergence of the impacting elements needed to ensure cultural development in a way that is in line with the other factors of development.

1. Development of Culture and Cultural Development

Cultural development basically begins with the development of culture and ends with its effective development, modernization and refinement to such an extent that it becomes a purposeful and constructive culture, first and foremost, for man and society, on the basis of a precise delimitation of the essence of culture and a general outline of the features of its vital area.

Since culture is the sum of human activity in the fields of intellectual, literary and artistic creativity - bearing in mind the multiple features of this creativity and the variance of the aspects of these fields - and as cultural action at large is closely related to the general social environment and economic condition, ensuring cultural development in the way it achieves cultural progress, intellectual prosperity and development of society is contingent upon the existence of objective motivations and subjective incentives with individuals and communities at official and popular levels alike.

Evidently, the nature of these objective motivations and subjective incentives should be liable to give free rein to capacities, unleash talents and spur bents for creativity and intellectual production, all of which are bound to stimulate life, grant enjoyment to man and efficiently contribute to the development of society at the intellectual, cultural, social and civilizational levels.

2. Bases of Cultural Development

Owing to the extreme importance which cultural development takes on and the noble goals and ambitions which it strives to achieve, the edification of an unimpaired, strong and capable society in which man can accomplish his own entity and his existence, achieve his mission in life as ordained to him by God, produce and establish the foundations for peaceful and dignified life, is contingent upon the range of cultural development, its quality and its magnitude as well as the degree of its impact on society.

Cultural development, which has a vast humanistic calling in the Islamic vision, proceeds from four bases that can be briefly discussed as indicated below.

a) **Determination of the Sources of Islamic Culture:** Culture in the Islamic societies is necessarily an Islamic culture due to the close link between culture, be it any culture, and society, whatever the identity and nature of this society. On this basis, cultural development in the countries of the Islamic World proceeds from the objective determination of the identity of culture, its essence and dimensions.

In accordance with the Islamic vision, the Qur'an and the Sunna constitute the solid foundations on which cultural development is based. Therefore, the combination of these two sources may be depicted as a huge, plentiful water tower from which derives the water which vitalizes the Islamic culture and provides it with strength, freshness as well as its durable capacity to display continuous radiance. Furthermore, the sources of the Islamic culture, in addition to the Qur'an and the authenticated Hadiths of the Prophet - may peace and blessing be upon him - include the whole living, huge and plentiful heritage passed on by the forebears of the Islamic Ummah to their successors. It is this profuse heritage in its entirety that constitutes the

broad basis for the Islamic culture in its large dimensions and stands as an inexhaustible asset for the Islamic civilization in all its features.

The fact that the Islamic culture springs from these sources means in no way whatsoever that it gives it a regional or racist colouring, nor does it imply that this culture has a propensity for detachedness or self-absorption. On the contrary, all of these sources enrich culture in the service of the Islamic societies, allow it to embrace a very large horizon and endow it with a deep content as well as the capacity to engage in cultural interactions and dialogues with all human cultures, without any exception.

b) Precise Definition of Terminology: The confirmation of the humanism of culture in the Islamic vision requires the implementation of an accurate operation in order to precisely define the terminology, clarify the meanings and terms and make them firmly rooted with a view to avoiding entanglements, hence confusion, in the senses of the terms. The compelling reason for such an undertaking is that the humanistic features deeply marking the Islamic culture - firstly including the characteristics of abundance, comprehensiveness, opening-up, flexibility and tolerance - should in no way be a cause that would disturb the fine and sublime meaning represented in this culture. This is all the more so since this is a culture that is altogether faithful, humanistic, purposeful and constructive, while it responds at the same time to man's longings, meets his ambitions, matches his innate character and strengthens in his soul incentives for hope, self-confidence and anticipation as well as bents for justice, good deeds and beauty.

In light of this refined understanding, the purpose of Operation "Development" since the aim of development is first and foremost to serve man in the first place spiritually, culturally, socially and economically, in all aspects and fields of activity.

Indeed, cultural development proceeds in the same direction. For it is a development that is of benefit to the individual and society and constitutes a comprehensive, humanistic and thorough operation where numerous factors interact, beginning and ending with the dispensation of good and benefit for man, together with continuous quest to sustain progress and development for him and society. All of these are to be undertaken with a good sense of balance and in a fine symbiosis and moderation. Suffice it to sum up by recalling that the last disposition - moderation - is an integral part of the nature inherent in the Islamic culture.

c) Defining the hallmarks of the Cultural Action to be Developed:

If the fields of cultural action as a general rule comprise the various aspects of human activity with no exception whatsoever, cultural development for its part is not limited to responding to the needs of this activity. Indeed, cultural development should not be confined to one of these fields to the detriment of another, since its aim is to effectively impact on all the fields. This is all the more so since cultural development embraces the various cultural fields which are commonly acknowledged as areas of cultural action, allowing for this basic exception that the starting points of the Islamic cultural action as well as the objectives set out for it are all marked by the distinct characteristics of the Islamic culture.

On this basis, all the fields involved in the cultural action to be developed go in one single general direction, i.e. the creation of incentives which lead to the achievement of an adequate level, as may be possible, of cultural unity among Muslims, based on the attachment to the values, principles and origins which constitute their religious, cultural and civilizational fundamentals and constants. All of these components are common denominators between the sons of the Islamic Ummah, throughout the globe. They stand at the same time as the solid foundation for the establishment of joint Islamic

cooperation and action in all fields, particularly the Islamic cultural action which constitutes the corner-stone for the edification of a new Islamic World in compliance with the right guidance of Islam, its tolerance, moderation, flexibility and fraternity.

d) Identification of Areas of mutual acculturation with Other Nations: The distinct feature of the Islamic culture is that it is creative and capable of adequately responding to the needs and new developments of any epoch, owing to the fact that its principles are marked by comprehensiveness and profusion entailing generosity, in addition to its originating from the last revealed religion addressed to all mankind, the Islamic creed.

Within the framework of this specificity, the Islamic culture, in ISESCO's vision, is endowed with so much flexibility and opening up to other cultures that it is able to both enrich them and benefit from the various creative contributions of these cultures which are likely to assist in renewing and developing culture, promoting cultural works and modernizing their tools.

All told, the above is an outline of the major features to be in the service of the Arab-Islamic Culture as appropriately recognizable by all those who are well informed and highly knowledgeable about the aspects of the general cultural action.

The Concept of Serving Culture

The concept of serving culture has a broad sense and extends to include multiple meanings and understandings. However, the general sense of serving culture can be summarized to embrace three major purports, namely:

- a) Preservation of culture fundamentals, constants and specificities;

- b) Cultural development and enrichment; and
- c) Harnessing culture to further the progress of the individual and prosperity of society.

The crux of the matter with regard to the concept of serving Arab-Islamic culture in ISESCO's vision is to be in the service of man in all aspects so as to allow him to mature mentally, emotionally and intellectually, while enjoying a righteous conduct.

We can rightfully assert that man's refinement is the goal of any action undertaken in the service of culture. Indeed, this goal constitutes the very end of any comprehensive development as a whole. Thus, the shaping of the Muslim individual, his training and preparation to face up to life struggle altogether with competence, potency, worthiness, brave heart and audacity of intellect, constitute the prime goal which the planners of cultural development in the Islamic World have to rank at the top of all of the objectives they are seeking to achieve.

Furthermore, the moulding of man cannot be fulfilled merely through teaching and education, culture and intellect, arts and literature. Sure enough, the shaping of man is based on all these components, together with other complementary elements comprising righteous social guidance, spirit purification and providing opportunities for a dignified life that allows unimpaired upbringing in a decent environment and the exercise of the rights bestowed by God upon mankind.

It is this Islamic civilizational perception of the service of culture, in all of the ingredients of culture as a mission, methodology and a scope of action, that opens for us future cultural prospects of the Islamic World. The Islamic Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization -ISESCO- operates in this general framework regarding the implementation of the cultural programmes set out in its successive

Three-Year Plans as well as the planning for the cultural future of the Islamic World.

1. Implementation of ISESCO's Three Year Plans:

ISESCO's Three-Year Plans include a series of programmes and activities geared to serving Arab-Islamic culture. The current three-year Action Plan (2001-2003), for example, comprises the following cultural programmes:⁽⁹⁾

- 1- Islamic cultural identity
- 2- Culture in the service of comprehensive development
- 3- Active and interactive Islamic culture
- 4- Communication capabilities of Islamic countries

These fields include the following axes:

- 1- The Memory's treasures
- 2- Intellectual heritage
- 3- Literary and artistic innovation
- 4- Investment in the field of culture

(9) The Three-Year Action Plan 2013-2015 includes the following action areas: Dialogue among cultures, civilizations and followers of religions, cultural diversity and linguistic and doctrinal pluralism, participatory approach to heritage, the role of cultural production and traditional knowledge in development, culture for all, support for freedom of expression, generalization of access to and circulation of information, building the professional capacities of information and communication staff and addressing mutual stereotypes in the media. The current Three-Year Action Plan 2019-2021 includes the following action areas: Protection and rehabilitation of cultural and civilizational heritage in Member States, promotion of the strategic role of culture in developing integrated sustainable development for Member States, anchoring the role of Islamic culture and coexistence in countering extremism, violence, sectarianism and islamophobia.

- 5- Culture and social categories
- 6- Islamic culture and human environment
- 7- Islamic culture and human values
- 8- Islamic cultural solidarity
- 9- Cultural exchange among Muslims
- 10- Interaction between cultures
- 11- Technical and human capabilities of mass communication
- 12- Information and communication exchange and complementarity between Islamic countries
- 13- Islamic countries and world communication

These programmes are divided into numerous sub-activities whose purpose is to serve cultural development objectives in all fields, in the fullest and broadest concept proper of culture.

2. Planning for the Future of Arab-Islamic Culture:

The Cultural Strategy for the Islamic World represents one of the prominent achievements of the Islamic Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization in the area of prospective planning of Arab-Islamic culture. In implementation of this Strategy, ISESCO secured the cooperation of the General Secretariat of the Organization of the Islamic Conference -OIC- with a view to holding the 2nd Islamic Conference of Culture Ministers⁽¹⁰⁾. The Conference adopted the document on the mechanisms to be used in the implementation of the Cultural Strategy for the Islamic World and issued important

(10) The Conference was held in Rabat during the period 19-23 November 1998 under the high patronage of the Moroccan Sovereign.

resolutions, including a resolution concerning the constitution of a **Consultative Council for the Implementation of the Cultural Strategy for the Islamic World** and entrusting ISESCO with the task of seeking sources to finance the cultural projects within the countries of the Islamic world.

It is to be indicated in this regard that the Islamic Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization had organized an international seminar earlier under the theme “**Cultural Future of the Islamic World in the light of its Reality Today**”⁽¹¹⁾. The following were among its most important recommendations in the service of Arab-Islamic culture which the Islamic Organization has been keen on implementing through its action plans:

- To link the educational institutions to the objectives of comprehensive cultural development so that the role assigned to these institutions becomes a complementary component in the development operation with a view to achieving the same goal, i.e. building the present and future of the Islamic World on the basis of an inter-relationship between intellect and work.
- To introduce Islamic culture, together with civilizational Fiqh (jurisprudence) and expounding of history on the basis of Islamic methodology as compulsory subjects in all the stages of the educational curricula in Islamic countries with a view to ensuring extension of the Islamic concepts and disseminating Arab-Islamic culture at all educational levels.

(11) The Seminar was held in October 1993 in Fez, Morocco; its research papers, documents and recommendations were published in a book in Arabic, bearing the same title in 1995, as part of the publications of the Islamic Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization -ISESCO-.

- To stress the importance of Arabic in the dissemination of Islamic culture and to rank it as a tool to be used in upgrading universities, to render curricula most original therein, in order to serve Islamic societies due to the existing connection between the Arabic language and Islamic culture, while consolidating the link between the Islamic peoples and the Islamic civilizational environment for which Arabic is one of the basic foundations.
- To work towards filling the gap existing between Islamic legislative studies and sciences, and between modern scientific intellectual and cultural reality, by enriching the educational curriculum in the Islamic universities with modern sciences so that students would graduate in Islamic sciences in a manner that would help them participate in society's scientific life and comprehend modern reality while interacting with it favourably from an outstanding cultural position.
- To keep abreast of the various positive aspects of the universal thought so as to identify additional foundations that would make dialogue between Islam and other cultures more serious and more fruitful.

In this context, the Islamic Organization is pursuing implementation of the activities set out in the Cultural Strategy for the Islamic World in particular, as part of its action, as well as at the level of cooperation with member states and with one hundred and six (106) international and regional organizations with which ISESCO is linked under cooperation agreements.

Thus, ISESCO's action in the service of Arab-Islamic culture is based on scientific foundations, planning considerations and a prospective vision. This endeavour aims at the development of Arab-

Islamic societies in such a way as to fulfil the Ummah's objectives of civilizational advancement in order to enrich life, ensure man's happiness and promote society through a cultural civilizational action - in its fullest and broadest sense - that proceeds from the Arab-Islamic fundamentals and constants, identifies future prospects, meets challenges, overcomes obstacles, imposes the Ummah's collective will in real life and fulfils the noble objectives of the joint Arab-Islamic action.

ISESCO, which is moving forward in this direction, is determined to bring about the Arab-Islamic cultural and civilizational revival through its successive action plans and cultural projects as well as the Cultural Strategy for the Islamic World which charts the way, sets objectives and suggests means of implementation and working methods.