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**ISESCO AND THE SHAPING OF THE
FUTURE OF THE ISLAMIC WORLD**

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PREFACE

The Islamic Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (ISESCO) was established in 1982, before the notion of “comprehensive sustainable development” had gained its profound significance in global literature. Nonetheless, supporting educational, scientific and cultural development of the Islamic world, through capacity-building of Member States in these three vital fields has always been one of the Organization’s main objectives. Therefore, development, in its deep sense and comprehensive meaning, has long been the main objective which ISESCO committed itself to pursue with the view to advancing the Islamic world through educational progress, scientific development and cultural prosperity in such a way as to achieve present and future comprehensive sustainable development goals.

Developing the Islamic world in the areas falling within ISESCO’s realm of competence is the solid foundation of the future in which Muslim countries can sally forth on the path to more progress, prosperity, stability and peace, because building the future is a process that starts with building creative and innovative minds, and high capacities that can provide societies with work and production tools and help them move in the right direction towards multifaceted progress. Thus, ISESCO has revolutionized the academic concept of comprehensive sustainable development and brought forth a method that can be adopted in practice, through its tireless and sustained efforts, which fall within its future vision, and strategic

planning, and in line with its consecutive three-year action plans by which it contributes to shaping the future of the Islamic world.

In a lecture dubbed **“ISESCO’s Contribution to Shaping the Future of the Islamic World”** which I delivered at the Baku State University on Friday 22 December 2017, I dealt with these deep and holistic notions and meanings, which are embodied in the Organization’s achievements, gains, initiatives and ongoing civilizational projects. In the course of my lecture, I emphasized that achieving educational, scientific, cultural and communication development in the Islamic world to fulfill the objectives contained in ISESCO Charter entails joining efforts and providing the necessary means and resources. I also underlined that ISESCO proceeded in this direction, guided by a crucial strategic goal, namely shaping the future of the Islamic world which faces a multitude of political, economic, and developmental and security challenges. Then, I concluded that ISESCO is actively engaged in the multidimensional international efforts aiming to establish an international partnership for development in which the Islamic world should be fully engaged with its available and diverse resources, capacities and potentials. The Organization’s engagement is epitomized in its contributions, within the scope of its action and to the extent that its resources allow, to the implementation of the “Ten-Year Programme of Action to meet the Challenges facing the Muslim Ummah in the 21st Century” which was adopted by the Extraordinary Session of the Islamic Summit Conference, held in Makkah Al Mukarramah in 2005, hence making ISESCO an active contributor to the shaping of the future of the Islamic world on many levels.

Through ISESCO's holistic vision, mission and goals, and based on the expertise it accumulated during the last three decades, I strongly believe that the first step towards building the future of the Islamic world consists of ending all forms of illiteracy; developing education and improving its quality; modernizing curricula and updating the educational system; and reforming and modernizing higher education. This also entails fighting corruption; promoting economic complementarity among Muslim countries; spreading the culture of academic and critical work, production and thinking; and creating the conditions suitable for competitive production. I elaborated on these issues and gave an overview on ISESCO's efforts in these fields. However, given the heavy burdens that exceed its capacities, ISESCO's key role lies in contributing with academic thinking, practical methodology, realistic conceptualization, future planning, and general guidance through the implementation of consecutive action plans. This is what makes ISESCO a high-level and a far-sighted house of expertise.

Moreover, ISESCO views the development of the Islamic world to face the millennial challenges as a civilizational mission, a joint task and a collective responsibility that can only be shouldered through the concerted efforts of all the parties involved in joint Islamic action. The major challenges facing the present and future of our Islamic Ummah call for joining efforts at different levels, employing Muslim societies' capacities and competencies to address these challenges with the necessary wisdom, courage, firmness, resolve and strong Islamic solidarity.

The future of the Muslim Ummah is being created in the lecturing halls of universities and think-tanks, taking shape in innovative minds, edified by the determination of people who realize the magnitude of accountability before Allah (SWT) then before their own conscience and their communities. It is a future that ISESCO contributes to its building within its areas of competence, in line with its civilizational mission and in implementation of its Charter's objectives.

May Allah grant us success and guide us onto the straight path.

Dr Abdulaziz Othman Altwajri

Director General of
the Islamic Educational, Scientific
and Cultural Organization (ISESCO)

Disrupted balance of values and law system

At the outset, I would like to point out that the subject I was asked to talk about will cover two main issues, namely: the future of the Islamic world, and ISESCO's contribution in this connection.

Today's world is experiencing a critical stage which will usher into a new historical era where humanity will be facing tough challenges that will be difficult to cope with and to eventually overcome. On top of such challenges whose precursors are already bearing on modern societies is **the anticipation of the future** in a bid to lay the ground for a brighter era to emerge. This is a very complex process called "**shaping the future**" in futurological literature.

These challenges and all associated difficulties originate in the **disrupted balance of values, principles and the international law system**, which has resulted in an atmosphere of uncertainty in international politics. As you know, when such uncertainty permeates into the spheres of law and politics, it gives rise to multifaceted crises whose severity threatens the stability of societies and undermines world peace.

Despite this somehow bleak introduction, we should not despair of reversing the situation, nor should this dash our hope and confidence in securing a better future, and rebuilding our strength on solid foundations, based on a vision that anticipates the future in such a way as to shape it according to our own aspirations to comprehensive progress and prosperity, sustainable security and peace.

The Islamic Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (ISESCO) was founded in 1982 to serve as a driving force of joint Islamic action to ensure the development of Muslim societies and to promote their advancement in the areas of education, science, culture and communication.

ISESCO's development objectives

Its objectives as laid out in its Charter are as follows:

- a) To strengthen, promote and consolidate cooperation among the Member States and consolidate it in the fields of education, science, culture and communication, as well as to develop and upgrade these fields, within the framework of the civilizational reference of the Islamic world and in the light of the human Islamic values and ideals.
- b) To consolidate understanding among peoples inside and outside the Member States and contribute to the achievement of world peace and security through various means, particularly through education, science, culture and communication.
- c) To publicize the correct image of Islam and Islamic culture, promote dialogue among civilizations, cultures and religions, and work towards spreading the values of justice and peace along with the principles of freedom and human rights, in accordance with the Islamic civilizational perspective.
- d) 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.

- e) To consolidate complementarity and coordination among the specialized institutions of the Organization of Islamic Cooperation in the fields of education, science, culture and communication and among the Member States of ISESCO, and promote cooperation and partnership with the similar governmental and non-governmental institutions sharing the same interest, inside and outside the Member States.
- f) To take further interest in Islamic culture, highlight its specificities and publicize its landmarks in intellectual studies, scientific researches and educational curricula.
- g) To work for establishing complementarity and correlation among the educational systems of the Member States.
- h) To support the efforts of the educational, scientific and cultural institutions for Muslims in non-Member States of ISESCO.

Working towards the educational, scientific, cultural and communicational development of the Islamic world as part of the pursuit of these goals requires concerted efforts, tapping the full existing potentials and provision of the necessary resources. To this end, ISESCO is heading forward with a crucially important strategic objective consisting in ensuring a better future for the Islamic world, which faces a multitude of political, economic, developmental and security challenges.

These challenges are compounded by others that are no lesser in gravity, such as the prevalence of sectarian conflicts, doctrinal fanaticism and religious strife tearing Muslims apart. Today, sectarian clashes that are no longer discreet or undeclared are on

the increase, gravely jeopardizing the spiritual and cultural unity of the Muslim Ummah and constituting a hard core of tension and mistrust within Muslim societies. This danger is besieging us all and we have time and again drawn attention to it and appealed to the wise of the Muslim Ummah to confront it with the necessary seriousness, sincerity and sense of responsibility. This is probably a good opportunity for me to shed some light on the efforts of ISESCO in this regard. The Islamic Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization prepared a **Strategy for Bringing Islamic Madhahib Closer Together**, approved by the Islamic Summit Conference along with the mechanisms of its implementation. As one of these mechanisms, the Supreme Consultative Council for Bringing Islamic Madhahib Closer Together was created under the aegis of ISESCO and brought together a select group of scholars from different Islamic schools of thought.

Obstacles to development

But out of scientific integrity and in recognition of the painful truth, we can but admit that the provisions and orientations of this Strategy are not implemented and a hidden hand within the community of Muslims is persistently igniting sectarian strife and endeavoring at all costs to advocate sectarianism, undermine the security of Muslim societies and incite strife within them. This only leads to more acute crises and creates hotbeds of instability that have erupted in many parts of the Islamic world.

There is no denying that the conflicts and wars tearing to shreds the unity of the Islamic world and undermining its entity are mostly the fruit of a sectarian frenzy whose protagonists are planning to lay claim to the Islamic world from east to west. For sure, all such schemes are certainly doomed to failure, as Allah says in the Holy Quran [***For the scum disappears like froth cast out; while that which is for the good of humankind remains on earth.***]⁽¹⁾

It is interesting that the instability, wars, conflicts and chaos prevailing in many parts of the Islamic world are giving license to foreign powers to interfere in the internal affairs of some Muslim countries, and provide a gateway for their invasion of Muslim societies, controlling national policies and breaking the ranks of national unity in unstable countries in pursuit of their own interests. This has placed the Islamic world in the position of a target in many plots that wreak havoc with its stability and jeopardize security and general economic and social Islamic conditions of Muslim populations, ultimately propelling the Islamic world back into regression or stalling its march towards the future.

Such are the broad lines and distinct features of the Islamic world as they were in the past and as they happen to be today.

But what about tomorrow?

What have we prepared for the future?

(1) *Surah Ar-Ra'd*, verse 17.

First step towards building the future of the Islamic world

The first step in building the future of the Islamic world as we aspire to, is to eradicate illiteracy in all its forms, functional illiteracy, digital illiteracy and information illiteracy. It also entails developing and improving the quality of education by adopting modern and world class educational systems, starting with the training of teachers who believe in the vision of change, capable of leading the drive for change, mastering information technologies, resourceful, seasoned professionals who are capable of interacting with students and colleagues, knowledgeable about modern sciences and the culture of their societies. By the same token, the financial standing of these teachers needs to be imperatively improved.

Quadrilogy of education development

Secondly, by modernizing curricula and renovating the schooling system, and by reforming and modernizing university education in terms of the knowledge, organizational and technological structures, taking into consideration the global context. This is referred to as **“the quadrilogy of educational development”** and aims to develop the university and promote its mission and role in supporting global sustainable development, support and develop scientific research, and encourage innovation and creativity in sciences and technology.

Thirdly, by fighting corruption in general, be it political, administrative, or judiciary corruption, and by reinforcing economic complementarity

among countries of the Islamic world, expanding intra-Islamic trade, the exchange of professional technical, financial and administrative expertise, and spreading the culture of work, productive, scientific and critical thinking in all spheres, and competitiveness in productivity and creativity. Such is the path to integrate the information society which represents the gateway to comprehensive growth, economic prosperity, scientific advancement, creativity and innovation in all fields, in such a way as to enable the Islamic world to be active player in the development of knowledge.

Moreover, the Islamic world cannot achieve stability and sally forth on the path of progress without first fighting the sectarian ideologies, doctrinal and ethnic radicalism, and conflicts raging on between Muslims. In fact, when sectarian thought and doctrinal and ethnic fanaticism spread their tentacles and prevail, they carry within them the seeds of self-destruction and result in a general weakening of the Muslim entity, paralyze the movement of the Islamic world and prevent it from rising, advancing or progressing. To a large extent, all of this hinges upon the implementation of the OIC Charter on conflict resolution and on reinforcing Islamic solidarity in the face of foreign covetousness and designs.

The tumultuous crises gripping the Islamic world today as a result of escalating conflicts and multiple disputes cannot always be attributed to external factors. Most of this is in fact the fruit of internal oppression and the tyrannical mentality and abuse of an authority that should have been a national authority. However, this does not obviate the fact that foreign hands played a role in one way or the other, in triggering and exacerbating fratricidal conflicts and

wars between Muslims that obstruct the course of comprehensive sustainable development.

Towards eradication of conflict hotspots

In this respect, it is necessary to mention the many hotspots that span the entire surface area of the Islamic world, from Afghanistan to Somalia, Syria, Iraq, Yemen, Lebanon, Mali, Nigeria and many others. Worthy of mention too is the occupation of parts of the Islamic world such as Palestine where the occupying Israeli entity continues to persecute the Palestinian people; in addition to the Azerbaijani province of Nagorno-Karabakh being under a heinous Armenian occupation which defies all relevant international laws. Other examples include the Spanish-occupied Moroccan cities of Sebta and Melillia and the Malwiyya Islands⁽²⁾; as well as East Turkestan in China known today as Xingiang Uyghur, and the terrible ordeals experienced by Muslims in Myanmar, Thailand, the Philippines, Angola and Central Africa, who are subjected to persecution and genocide and deprived of their rights as citizens living in their one and only homeland.

Many efforts have been made to advance the Islamic world in many aspects over the five past decades, since the creation in 1972 of the Organization of the Islamic Conference (now the Organization

(2) Widely mistaken for the "Chafarinas Islands" by the media. This mistake was pointed to by the late Abdelouahab Benmansour, ex-historian of the Kingdom of Morocco.

of Islamic Cooperation) in the aftermath of the first Islamic Summit Conference held in Rabat in 1969 at the invitation of His Majesty King Hassan II, and his Majesty King Faical Ibn Abdulaziz Al Saud, may Allah's mercy be upon them.

There are three clues to changing the conditions of the Islamic world through a wise Islamic approach, and using this approach as a starting point to draw an outline of the future. In addition to modernizing educational systems, developing the educational process and supporting scientific research in all the fields of knowledge, they also involve modernizing public lifestyles in general. Indeed, educational systems cannot be developed, nor can scientific research be boosted and encouraged and given a topmost priority status if general conditions in the Muslim and Arab countries remain as they are, in the grip of poverty, instability and vacillation between political and economic experiences and policies that have proven their inefficiency and pointlessness. Profound reforms are needed to restore the dignity of human free will, spread trust, revive hopes, diffuse the fires of anger and anxiety, disperse the clouds of fear and suspicion and banish any hesitations and reluctance to partake of the general issues preoccupying society.

The OIC Ten-Year Programme of Action

In its eighth section dedicated to **human rights and good governance**, the **Ten-year Programme of Action to Meet the Challenges Facing the Muslim Ummah in the 21st Century**, adopted in 2005 in Makkah al-Mukarramah by the 3rd Extraordinary Islamic Summit, calls on Member States to: "*Seriously endeavor*

to enlarge the scope of political participation, ensure equality, civil liberties and social justice and to promote transparency and accountability, and eliminate corruption in the OIC Member States."

The adoption of this programme of action embodies the commitment of Muslim countries to global reform of general conditions, in philosophy, practice and policy. It also reflects their commitment to change, renewal and modernization in order to catch up with the march of advanced nations and embark on a new Islamic civilizational cycle.

Having clarified the above facts, it becomes legitimate to ask the following question:

How would conditions in the Islamic world have been had the recommendations of this extraordinary Islamic summit, held eight years ago and many other recommendations, decisions and strategies adopted within the framework of joint Islamic action, been implemented, or at least in their first stages of implementation?

The Islamic world is squandering one opportunity after the other, and it is high time such a negative streak was brought to an end in the lives of Muslims. If most Muslim countries had the strong will, determination and capacity to carry into action all the decisions and recommendations of the many Islamic conferences, particularly Islamic Summit conferences, the sessions of the OIC Foreign Ministers Council and the sector-dedicated conferences organized by ISESCO, conditions in the Islamic world would have been so much improved in many aspects. The Islamic world has numerous abundant resources and great geographical and demographic advantages to advance at all levels, free its willpower from the

foreign pressures arising from greedy neo-colonial policies, and assert its position on the international scene.

Challenges that will never break the will of the Islamic world

These weighty challenges facing the Islamic world today and for long eras before that, cannot annihilate hopes or weaken the will and desire to act. Rays of hope peek at the horizon and positive signs can be perceived by those who ponder and scrutinize the situation at hand. The Islamic world will rise from its stumble and will, by the grace of Allah, overcome all the challenges barring its way to progress and prosperity by consolidating Islamic solidarity, reinforcing unity within the respect of diversity and multiplicity, and within the national sovereignty of each OIC Member State, face up to external designs with well coordinated if not unified policies, and with strong positions that are inspired from the OIC Charter, the UN Charter and the rules of international law.

The evolution of the development notion has resulted in a nobler concept in content, broader in scope and deeper in significance. This is known today as global sustainable development and is the most recent international concept adopted by the United Nations and its affiliated agencies. Many international conferences were held in the last two decades to address global sustainable development, ISESCO taking part in some of these as the Islamic entity specialized in the development of education, sciences, culture and communication in the Islamic world.

The United Nations Millennium Declaration

In view of this significant evolution of the concept of development in the global sense, the United Nations issued the **Millennium Declaration** in September 2000. The third chapter of this Declaration, dedicated to Development and Poverty Eradication affirms the following commitments:

- 1. We will spare no effort to free our fellow men, women and children from the abject and dehumanizing conditions of extreme poverty, to which more than a billion of them are currently subjected. We are committed to making the right to development a reality for everyone and to freeing the entire human race from want.*
- 2. We resolve therefore to create an environment - at the national and global levels alike - which is conducive to development and to the elimination of poverty.*
- 3. Success in meeting these objectives depends, inter alia, on good governance within each country. It also depends on good governance at the international level and on transparency in the financial, monetary and trading systems. We are committed to an open, equitable, rule-based, predictable and non-discriminatory multilateral trading and financial system.*
- 4. We are concerned about the obstacles developing countries face in mobilizing the resources needed to finance their sustained development. We will therefore make every effort to ensure the success of the High-level International and Intergovernmental Event on Financing for Development, to be held in 2001.*

5. We also undertake to address the special needs of the least developed countries. In this context, we welcome the Third United Nations Conference on the Least Developed Countries to be held in May 2001 and will endeavor to ensure its success.

But for lack of a firm international resolve, only little has been done to implement these commitments made by the international community to support global sustainable development efforts around the world. In terms of depth and political, economic, social and civilizational dimensions, these commitments are correlated and crosscut in one way or the other the fields of action of ISESCO. Through them, ISESCO endeavors to develop Muslim societies, achieve a global educational, scientific and cultural sustainable development whose fruits would be reaped by the Islamic world in its battle to overcome the millennium challenges.

Gathered at the World Millennium Summit, the United Nations Member States, all 192 states and no less than 32 international organizations, resolved to achieve the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) by 2015. These are eight main goals that constitute an international programme for global development. Unfortunately this deadline has elapsed, but the fixed targets were not met⁽³⁾.

As we review these noble goals that embody international willpower and provide a broad framework for the achievement of a global

(3) Millennium Development Goals, United Nations, New York.

sustainable development, we realize that they carry a strong similarity to the goals pursued by ISESCO within its fields of competence and contained in its successive three-year action plans and in **the Ten-year Programme of Action to Meet the Challenges Facing the Muslim Ummah in the 21st Century**, as adopted by the 3rd extraordinary Islamic Summit meeting held in Makkah Al Mukarramah in 2005. These goals are:

- First:** to eradicate extreme poverty and hunger.
- Second:** to achieve universal primary education.
- Third:** to promote gender equality and empower women.
- Fourth:** to reduce child mortality.
- Fifth:** to improve maternal health
- Sixth:** to combat HIV/AIDS, malaria, and other diseases.
- Seventh:** to ensure environmental sustainability.
- Eighth:** to develop a global partnership for development.

ISESCO: a key player in the international efforts

We can generally say that ISESCO is a key role-player in the international endeavors to create an international partnership for development of which the Islamic world would be an integral part with its diverse resources and tremendous capabilities. ISESCO participates in the implementation of **the Ten-year Programme of Action to Meet the Challenges Facing the Muslim Ummah**

in the 21st Century within the scope of its fields of expertise and the limits of its resources. **ISESCO is therefore involved at many levels in shaping the future of the Islamic world.**

This Islamic and international partnership in bolstering the efforts to bring about a balanced and fully integrated growth in such vital fields as education, sciences, technology, innovation, culture, communication, the environment and childhood, is the seal marking ISESCO's new Three-Year Action Plan adopted in 2015 by the 12th General Conference held in Baku and which aspires to bring about the Islamic world's advancement and meet the millennium challenges.

In education, the plan focuses on two major priorities which are **1)** renewal of Member States' educational policies towards a transition from teaching to learning, **2)** and enhancing the role of education in development and coexistence. From these two priorities flow a number of axes that drive towards supporting global sustainable development in the Islamic world.

In the field of science, the Three-Year Action Plan focuses on two main priorities: **1)** gearing science and technology output to achieve socio-economic gains, and **2)** science-based effort to conserve biodiversity and natural resources.

As for culture, the action plan centers on two principal priorities:

1) Promotion of cultural diversity, reinforcement of cultural rights and intercultural dialogue, and preservation of heritage within the cultural policies of Member States, and **2)** strengthening cultural

roles of the civil society's different social classes towards the achievement of sustainable development in the Islamic world.

As what concerns social and human sciences, the two following major priorities were determined:

- 1) Activating the role of social and human sciences in entrenching social peace and cohesion,
- 2) Harnessing the results of social and human studies in the service of society's prosperity.

Moreover, in terms of giving body to the partnership and cooperation with Arab, Islamic and international organizations, civil society institutions during the next three years, it was decided that this endeavor, undertaken as part of the prerogatives of the Directorate of External Relations and Cooperation, would espouse a perspective that strengthens the important and positive achievements of the cooperation policy adopted by the General Directorate under the Organization's successive action plans and where the outputs of cooperation and its executive mechanisms translate into integrated programmes and projects that address fundamental issues and propose radical and effective solutions, within set timeframes, in coordination with the beneficiaries and executive and cooperating parties, and based on quality criteria and assessment indicators that properly assess the impact on the ground of these programmes and projects. In this regard, two projects will be implemented:

- Project on consolidating cooperation with governmental and non-governmental organizations and bodies,
- Project on consolidating cooperation with civil society institutions and promoting humanitarian work.

As for developing the action of the Center for Planning, Information, Documentation and Publishing (CPIDP), two priorities were determined namely, improving methods of strategic planning, follow-up and evaluation of ISESCO's activities; and working towards integration into the society of knowledge and ICTs. These priorities will be carried out through three projects:

- Project on boosting the capacities of the human resources working in the fields of planning, follow-up and evaluation, and providing data and statistics in the Organization's fields of action,
- Project on promoting the use of ICTs to develop the action of ISESCO and the competent parties in Member States,
- Project on strengthening the capacities of ISESCO's human resources and providing electronic and computer equipment used in printing, documentation, publishing, and distribution.

With regard to the Center of Information and Communication, created within the framework of the present Action Plan, the following three priorities were set: enhancing the Organization's intellectual radiance and publicizing its activities; consolidating the right of access to information; and finally the professional and legal handling of stereotypes about Islam and Muslims in the Media. These priorities will be concretized through the following three projects:

- Project on harnessing information technologies and public relations to further enhance the international radiance of ISESCO,
- Project on access to information and the right to responsible expression in the media and communication sectors,

- Project on the professional and legal handling of stereotypes about Islam and Muslims in the media.

As is evident from this brief overview, ISESCO's different points of focus, which are broken down into programmes and activities implemented within the framework of a good planning process and carefully considered projects and from a clear vision and a profound sense of responsibility, reflect the support that ISESCO extends to development efforts undertaken in the Islamic world to bring about a firmly-grounded renaissance of the Muslim Ummah.

ISESCO: a high level and well-informed house of expertise

And as the magnitude of the task exceeds by far ISESCO's capacities, and since the buildup of problems hindering the Islamic march of development is growing in the midst of the instability prevailing in most Muslim countries, the role of ISESCO is to contribute with practical reflection, realistic conceptualization, future planning and general guidance through its successive action plans. Through this process, ISESCO rises to the status of a prestigious house of expertise open onto far horizons in all aspects related to education, sciences, culture, communication, environment and childhood. It shares its comprehensive and sagacious expertise with Muslim countries to build their capacities and improve the performance levels of national policies in these fields.

Based on the famous postulate of modern scientific practices, which considers the strategic planning of the future of the Islamic world as

a solid pillar the action aimed at developing societies and individuals, ISESCO has placed the strategic planning for the development of the Islamic world among its priorities. To this end, ISESCO has developed seventeen (17) strategies which, combined together, represent a global development strategy in its fields of action. These include **the Cultural Strategy for the Islamic world, the Strategy for Science, Technology and Innovation, the Strategy of Cultural Action outside the Islamic World, the Strategy for Cultural Takaful in the Islamic World, the Strategy for Development of Biotechnology in the Islamic World, the Strategy for Management of Water Resources in the Islamic World, the Strategy for Development of University Education in the Islamic World, the Strategy for ICTs Development in the Islamic World, the Strategy for Development of Renewable Energies in the Islamic World, and the Strategy for Development of Cultural Tourism in the Islamic world.** These strategies, of which the majority were adopted by the Islamic Summit at its successive meetings, cater for the educational, scientific, cultural and communication development needs of the Islamic world. Should the need arise for new strategies, ISESCO will again take the lead in preparing them and monitoring their implementation.

If we revert to **the Ten-year Programme of Action to Meet the Challenges Facing the Islamic Ummah in the 21st Century**, in the implementation of which ISESCO plays a part, we will find the following commitments under the heading 'Development, Socio-Economic and Scientific Issues':

- 1. Call upon the Member States to sign and ratify all existing OIC trade and economic agreements, and to implement the provisions*

of the relevant OIC Plan of Action to Strengthen Economic and Commercial Cooperation among OIC Member States.

- 2. Mandate COMCEC⁽⁴⁾ to promote measures to expand the scope of intra-OIC trade, and to consider the possibility of establishing a Free Trade Area between the Member States in order to achieve greater economic integration to raise it to a percentage of 20% of the overall trade volume during the period covered by the plan, and call on the Member States to support its activities and to participate in those activities at the highest possible level with delegations possessing the necessary expertise.*
- 3. Promote endeavors for institutionalized and enhanced cooperation between the OIC and regional and international institutions working in the economic and commercial fields.*
- 4. Support the OIC Member States in their efforts to accede to the World Trade Organization (WTO), and promote concerted positions between the Islamic Member States within the WTO.*
- 5. Call upon the OIC Member States to facilitate the freedom of movement of businessmen and investors across their borders.*
- 6. Support expanding electronic commerce among the OIC Member States and call on the Islamic Chamber of Commerce and Industry to strengthen its activities in the field of data and expertise exchanges between chambers of commerce of the Member States.*
- 7. Call upon the Member States to coordinate their environmental policies and positions in international environmental forums*

(4) The Standing Committee for Economic and Commercial Cooperation of the OIC.

so as to prevent any adverse effects of such policies on their economic development.

Under the heading “Supporting Development and Poverty Alleviation in Africa”, the Ten-year Programme of Action sets the following undertakings:

- 1. Promote activities aimed at achieving economic and social development in African countries, including supporting industrialization, energizing trade and investment, transferring technology, alleviating their debt burden and poverty, and eradicating diseases; welcome the New Economic Partnership for African Development (NEPAD), adopt to this end, a special programme for the development of Africa.*
- 2. Call upon the Member States to participate in international efforts to support programmes aimed at alleviating poverty and capacity building in the Least-Developed Member States of the OIC.*
- 3. Urge donor Member States to cancel bilateral and multilateral debts to low-income Member States.*
- 4. Urge international specialized institutions and organizations to exert greater efforts to alleviate poverty in the Least-Developed Member States and assist Muslim societies, the refugees and displaced in the OIC Member States, and Muslim Minorities and Communities in non-OIC Member States; urge States to contribute to the World Fund for Solidarity and Combating Poverty.*

With regard to “Higher Education, Science and Technology”, the programme of action sets the following commitments:

1. *Effectively improve and reform educational institutions and curricula in all levels, link postgraduate studies to the comprehensive development plans of the Islamic world. At the same time, priority should be given to science and technology and facilitating academic interaction and exchange of knowledge among the academic institutions of Member States, and urge the Member States to strive for quality education that promotes creativity, innovation, and research and development.*
2. *Assimilate highly-qualified Muslims within the Islamic World, develop a comprehensive strategy in order to utilize their expertise and prevent brain drain phenomenon.*
3. *Entrust the General Secretariat to study the creation of an OIC Award for Outstanding Scientific Achievements by Muslim scientists.*
4. *Call upon Muslim countries to encourage research and development programmes, taking into account that the global percentage of this activity is 2% of the Gross Domestic Product (GDP), and request Member States to ensure that their individual contribution is not inferior to half of this percentage.*
5. *Take advantage of the important results of the World Summit on Information Society, held in Tunis, in which all Member States actively participated with a view to close the digital gap between the developed and developing States and request the General Secretariat to follow up these results in order to build the capacities of Member States to adhere to the*

information society which, in turn, will sustain development in Member States.

- 6. Encourage public and private national research institutions to invest in technology capacity-building, in areas of advanced technologies, such as the acquisition of nuclear technology for peaceful uses.*
- 7. Review the performance of the OIC-affiliated universities so as to improve their effectiveness and efficiency, and call for participation in the two Waqfs (Endowments) dedicated to the two universities in Niger and Uganda, and provide support to the International Islamic University in Malaysia.*
- 8. Call upon the Member States to extend enhanced support to the Islamic University of Technology in Bangladesh in order to enable it to contribute more towards capacity building of the OIC Member States through human resources development.*
- 9. Urge the Islamic Development Bank (IDB) to further enhance its programme of scholarships for outstanding students and Hi-Tech specializations aimed at developing the scientific, technical, and research capabilities of scientists and researchers in the Member States.*

Commitments honored by ISESCO

These were the commitments in whose implementation ISESCO is involved at the level of those falling under its broad scope of action. ISESCO's action plans, particularly the previous Three-Year Action Plan (2013-2015) and the current one which will expire by the end

of 2018, cover all these fields with no exception, and for that reason we chose at ISESCO to derive our inspiration from the OIC's Ten-year Programme of Action and to be enlightened by its general guidelines when we set out to devise the Three-Year Action Plan and Budget for 2019-2021.

Such is the roadmap for ISESCO's contribution to shaping the future of the Islamic world.

For all these consideration, ISESCO is an integral part of the joint Islamic action system operating under the aegis of the Organization of Islamic Cooperation for the advancement of the Islamic world. It is committed to assisting Member States in devising their national policies in the fields falling within its scope of action, implementing and developing these policies and guaranteeing their quality at all levels.

Development of the Islamic world: a civilizational mission

By the same token, ISESCO considers the Islamic world's development to meet the millennium challenges as a civilizational mission and a collective responsibility that no party can shoulder without the support and participation of other parties dedicated to joint Islamic action. It also considers that the major challenges, with emphasis on the attribute 'major', facing our Ummah in its present and future call for joining hands at all levels, mobilizing the Islamic societies' dynamic powers to face these challenges with the necessary degree of wisdom, courage and strong Islamic solidarity.

The future of the Muslim Ummah is being created in the lecturing halls of universities and think-tanks, taking shape in innovative minds, edified by the determination of people who are accountable before Allah (SWT) then before their own conscience and their communities. The future is also created on the arenas of constructive action, fruitful production and tireless dynamism, within a framework of good governance, social justice and respect for human rights that Islam guaranteed for all mankind, in an atmosphere of concord, tolerance and coexistence, and based on Islamic solidarity, the ultimate aim being to promote world peace.

