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Islamic Diplomacy at the Service of Dialogue and Peace

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Introduction

Diplomacy is a reflection of the values of nations and peoples, their cultural and civilizational specificities, political choices, and their religious precepts and traditions. It is a portrait of the past, a reflection of the present and a vision of the future. Any form of diplomacy is built around the principles governing the political structure of the State it represents, whose interests it serves and whose entity it embodies abroad.

Diplomacy may represent the interests of a political or economic group, or those of a regional or geographical block. For example, we can refer to the Asian diplomacy, the European diplomacy, the African diplomacy, the non-alignment diplomacy, or the United Nations diplomacy. Diplomacy may also serve as an expression of the interests of a cohesive civilizational or cultural group or speak on behalf of a nation with a given religious specificity, such as the Islamic diplomacy, the Arab diplomacy or the European diplomacy. In all these cases, diplomacy mirrors the will of the grouping on whose behalf it acts, whose interests it protects and whose entity it represents.

The term 'Islamic diplomacy' emerged with the creation of the Organisation of the Islamic Conference early in the seventies of the previous century. It became part of the international political terminology and has since served to express the policy lines followed by this Organisation and adopted at Islamic summit meetings, Islamic conferences of foreign ministers and specialised Islamic gatherings. Islamic diplomacy is the diplomacy of the Islamic world and Ummah. It stands for the

spokesperson of this homogenous Islamic civilizational mass of which the far-reaching components share the common denominator of spiritual, cultural and civilizational belonging. This sense of belonging is a factor of paramount importance in shaping the regional and international policy framework within which Islamic diplomacy evolves and in the light of which it takes its decisions and stances.

The Moroccan Diplomatic Club, whose members are former Moroccan ambassadors, invited me, as part of its cultural activities, to present a lecture on the subject of 'Islamic Diplomacy at the Service of Dialogue and Peace'. In deference to this highly esteemed institution, I honoured the invitation and delivered the present lecture on 29 November 2007 at the Ahmed Taiebi Benhima Hall at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Cooperation in Rabat, capital of the Kingdom of Morocco. Before a host of diplomats and a select group of academics, intellectuals, media figures and a general public sharing interest in these issues, I delivered a lecture in which I spoke at length about the intellectual roots and principles of Islamic diplomacy, outlined the concept behind its methodology and described its characteristics. I also reviewed the stages it has gone through, its premises and the courses it has pursued, as well as the objectives it planned and the stances it adopted. I concluded that Islamic diplomacy was evolving in two parallel lines: one being joint Islamic action, and the other international cooperation, bilateral and multilateral.

I introduced in my lecture a new concept of Islamic diplomacy, as perceived from the legal meaning of diplomacy and international relations within the international political context, and from the Islamic principles that serve as its

foundation, starting with that of Islamic solidarity. I highlighted the exceptional nature of Islamic diplomacy as the carrier of a spiritual message addressed to all humanity and as the advocate of dialogue and peace.

I concluded my lecture saying that 'the Islamic world is a civilizational block that strives for dialogue and peace. These two objectives merge into one strategic objective since peace cannot be achieved without consolidating dialogue among nations and peoples at all political, economic, cultural and civilizational levels. Such dialogue needs to be constructive and fruitful, civilizational in depth and essence, and one that strives to enhance human life, and edify global human peace on foundations of justice, righteousness and virtue.'

In such broad framework and in the light of such righteous guidance, the Islamic Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization operates, defending the supreme interests of the Islamic Ummah, and supporting the efforts of the international community to spread the values of dialogue and peace. It is therefore possible to consider the role played by ISESCO in its fields of specialty as complementary of Islamic diplomacy at work through its official channels. Indeed, endeavoring to consolidate dialogue among cultures, bolster the alliance of civilizations and spread the values of coexistence and understanding, all are forms of parallel or alternative diplomacy that is not expected to emulate the conventional style of normal diplomatic channels. In fact, one of the objectives laid out in the Charter of ISESCO is 'to strengthen, promote and consolidate cooperation among the Member States in the fields of education, science, culture and communication, as well as 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.'

I trust that I have shed light on some aspects of Islamic diplomacy, namely those pertaining to the efforts made within the framework of joint Islamic action to serve dialogue and peace causes and which represent one among many of the fields in which this diplomacy operates. Islamic diplomacy is the civilizational and political face of the Islamic world and the voice speaking on behalf of the Islamic Ummah.

To generalize benefit and reach non-Arabic speakers, I have decided to publish the Arabic version of this lecture along with its English and French translations.

May Allah grant us success for none but Him can guide onto the right path.

Dr Abdulaziz Othman Altwaijri
Director General of
the Islamic Educational, Scientific
and Cultural Organization
-ISESCO-

It is with great pleasure that I take part in the series of lectures organized by the Moroccan Diplomatic Club with this lecture on 'Islamic Diplomacy at the Service of Dialogue and Peace', a subject that is closely linked to the crucial issues our world is battling with today in general, but that are of great concern to the Islamic world in particular. I would like to start this lecture by extending my ample thanks to Ambassador Ahmed Al Idrissi, president of the Moroccan Diplomatic Club, for kindly inviting me to speak in this beautiful hall named after a personality held in great esteem not only as an icon of Moroccan diplomacy but also as a prominent figure of the Arab and Islamic one, Minister and Ambassador Ahmed Taiebi Benhima, may Allah have mercy on his soul.

Diplomacy, in Language and Terminology

The word diplomacy is derived from the Greek word 'diploma', meaning the folded document issued by the country's top authority and granting the bearer special privileges. The word became part of international terminology in the mid 17th century AD.

Diplomacy can be defined as the art and science of conducting international relations. There are several forms of diplomacy:

First: Bilateral diplomacy, conducted between two countries directly.

Second: Multilateral diplomacy, practiced between several countries through international conferences and organizations⁽¹⁾.

1) *Arab Encyclopaedia*, vol 9, page 196, Arab Encyclopaedia Institution, Damascus.

Diplomacy, as a science that has its own laws, a form of art with specific rules and a profession with its own practices, does not differ from one country to another or from one regional block to the other. Interests and objectives may differ, and styles may sometimes vary in performance and practice, but diplomacy, in the sense common to all remains the set of international concepts, rules, processes, formal procedures, institutions and conventions which govern relations between countries, international organizations and diplomatic representatives, aiming to serve supreme security and economic interests and states' general policies, and harmonize the interests of various States through communication, exchanges, political negotiations and the conclusion of international conventions and agreements⁽²⁾.

Diplomacy has come to be known as the key instrument in fulfilling the foreign policy objective of influencing countries and groupings in order to secure their support through all means, as well as the channel par excellence for transmitting information to governments and for negotiating with them. Diplomacy seeks to consolidate and develop ties between countries in various fields, to protect the interests and persons of its citizens abroad, and to represent governments at functions and events⁽³⁾.

Since diplomatic conflicts are a cold war that uses the logic of interests as a weapon, the winner can only be the strongest in mind and judgment and the most knowledgeable about the issue at hand, and since international relations bow only to the logic of interests, and that the most extraordinary skill of diplomacy is to confer on actual interests the image of values and principles⁽⁴⁾,

2) *Encyclopaedia of Politics*, Part II, page 658, Arab Institution of Studies and Publishing, Beirut, 1987.

3) Ibid.

4) Chadhli Al Qulaibi in the preface he wrote to Dr Raymond Haddad's book '*International Relations*', page 22, Dar Al Haqiqa, Beirut, 2000 AD.

these moral values and human principles are what really distinguishes one diplomacy from another.

Diplomacy in Islamic History

Initially, diplomatic procedures were adopted in Islamic history as a means of spreading the word of Islam. The Prophet (PBUH) dispatched emissaries to the kings and princes ruling at the time, inviting them to embrace Islam, a practice that the Rightly-guided caliphs emulated following on the path of the Prophet. Islam consecrated the immunity of diplomatic envoys when the Prophet protected the messengers of Musailima Al Kaddab who refused to convert and profess faith in the Prophet. History books recorded that diplomacy, as a totally peaceful practice, was in use since the times of the Abbasid caliphs who made a regular practice of sending emissaries and welcoming those of others.

The diplomatic history of Muslims is a shining and prestigious one, whether in terms of the criteria that an envoy must fulfill, or of his mission, immunity and privileges.

Since Islamic diplomacy is one that serves the higher interests of the Islamic world, defends the rights of Muslim peoples and champions the causes of the Islamic Ummah, whether within the countries of the Islamic world - each within the framework of their sovereignty and according to their national choices and policies, or at the level of Islamic organizations, such diplomacy combines the respect of laws and fundamental principles in force with moral values and tenets. Thus, the commonality of objective between the diplomacy of fully sovereign Islamic States and the diplomacy that expresses the stances of the Islamic Ummah simply negates any differences that might come to mind in respect of these two forms of diplomacy.

Diplomacy through Joint Islamic Action

In this broad framework, I will briefly touch on Islamic diplomacy through joint Islamic action since it represents a vital field of activity within the Islamic context and on the international scene. Later on, I will review the various stages that international diplomacy went through in laying down its legal foundations within the framework of the laws and rules unanimously adopted by the international community. My aim is to highlight the relationship between the Islamic and international concepts of diplomacy, before I conclude by talking about the importance of joint Islamic action in consolidating dialogue among cultures and the alliance of civilizations, and in working hand in hand with the international community in order to bring about peace and security throughout the world.

First of all, I would like to point out a highly significant historical fact that I believe deserves mention here. I refer to the historically recorded fact that Muslims were the first to lay down the rules of international relations through the vanguard book '**Kitab as-Siyar al-Kabir**' written by Mohamed Ibn Al Hassan Al Shaybani in the second century of the Hijra. This book is considered the foundation and reference par excellence in the history of international of political thought in international relations. As the first book ever written on public and private international law, it makes its author Al Shaibani the uncontested pioneer of international law. In recognition of the international standing of this leading Muslim scholar in the field, an international society was created in 1955 in Guttengen, Germany, and named the Al Shaybani Society of International Law. The Egyptian jurist Dr Abdelahamid Badawi, former dean of the faculty of law at Cairo University and former member of the Hague Court of Justice

was elected back then to preside it. The mission of the Society is to shed light on the figure of Al Shaybani, showcase his opinions and publish his writings on the rules of international Islamic law⁵⁾.

Thus, Al Shaybani's book preceded the Westphalia Convention which was signed in 1648 and laid down the rules of permanent and resident diplomacy, inventing by the same token the concept of the balance of power in Europe. This convention was further consolidated in 1815 by the Vienna Conference, considered a milestone in the development of diplomacy and which laid down new international laws. With his vanguard scientific achievement, this Muslim scholar also preceded the Vienna Convention on Diplomatic Relations which was signed on 18 April 1961 and comes in 53 articles that cover all aspects related to the diplomatic apparatus, from the League of Nations to the United Nations Organization.

- Does Islamic Diplomacy differ from other types of diplomacy in any way?

In terms of rules, principles, foundations, and general framework, Islamic diplomacy does not differ much from other types of diplomacy. However, it is diplomacy with particular features derived from Islamic values and tenets and from the lofty human objectives it pursues in its bid to serve the causes of

5) Mohammed Ibn Al Hassan Al Shaybani (131-189 AH) was a lecturer and scholar. He was taught by leading imams such as Malik, Al Shafii, Al Awzaii, and Al Thawri. He was appointed by Harun Al Rasheed as the magistrate of Al Riqqa and greatly influenced the Hanafi jurisprudence. He catalogued several books considered as major references in Hanafi thought: Al Mabsut, Al Jamii Al Saghira, Assiyyar Al Saghira, and Assiyyar Al Kabira. He also wrote Al Athar and the Kitab Ar-Rad ala Ahl Al Madina. He died in a village of the town of Ar-Rai - *The World Arab Encyclopedia*, Vol 14, page 240.

peace and security, and to entrench the bases of dialogue, coexistence and cooperation among nations and peoples.

In this drive, Islamic diplomacy operates through joint Islamic action under the aegis of the Organization of the Islamic Conference, and through international cooperation conducted within the framework of the United Nations Organization and its system of affiliated international organizations. In so doing, Islamic diplomacy evolves in two parallel lines:

First: Joint Islamic Action

Second: International cooperation, whether through bilateral or international relations.

Let us then look at the concept of joint Islamic action and review its objectives to better understand the nature of Islamic diplomacy and to shed light on its efforts to serve the causes of dialogue and peace.

The Organization of the Islamic Conference was created in Rabat on 25 September 1969 on the occasion of the First Conference of Islamic World Leaders (*1st Islamic Summit*) which was held in the Moroccan capital at the kind invitation of His Majesty King Hassan II, may Allah have mercy on his soul, and with the support and assistance of His Majesty King Faical Ibn Abdulaziz, may Allah have mercy on his soul. The conference was convened in the aftermath of the criminal fire started by Zionists in the blessed Al Aqsa Mosque on 21 August 1969 AD; a hideous crime that was a violation of the honor and dignity of all Muslims. It was therefore the duty of Muslim leaders to respond to the blatant challenge represented by this desecration of the blessed Al Aqsa Mosque in Al Quds, first of the two *qiblas* and third Holy Mosque. The Muslim leaders, convening in Rabat

in reaction to this aggression which was condemned and denounced throughout the world, managed to muster the necessary strength to bypass their differences, close ranks and lay the foundations of this broad international body that is the Organization of the Islamic Conference to which a task of paramount importance was entrusted, namely the liberation of Al Quds from Zionist occupation.

Six months after this historic event, and in March 1970, the First Islamic Conference of Foreign Ministers was held in Jeddah, Kingdom of Saudi Arabia. During this conference, the Secretariat General of the Organization was created to ensure coordination between Member States and a Secretary General was appointed to head the Organization. The seat of the Organization was set up in Jeddah pending the liberation of Al Quds Al Sharif which would serve as a permanent seat. Two years and a half after the Rabat Summit, and in March 1972, the 3rd Islamic Conference of Foreign Ministers was held in Jeddah and approved and ratified the Charter of the Organization⁶⁾.

The Organisation of the Islamic Conference was created by virtue of *Chapter 8* of the *United Nations Charter* which states in paragraph 1 of *Article 52* that: **Nothing in the present Charter precludes the existence of regional arrangements or agencies for dealing with such matters relating to the maintenance of**

6) *The Charter of the Organization of the Islamic Conference* was adopted by the 2nd Islamic Conference of Foreign Ministers held in Karachi, Islamic Republic of Pakistan, (27-29 Shawwal 1390 AH/26-28 December 1970 AD). By virtue of *Article 1* of this Charter: **"The Member States do hereby establish the Organization of "The Islamic Conference"**". The Islamic Summit adopted the new charter of the Organization of the Islamic Conference in its 11th session held on 14-15 March 2008 in Dakar, capital of the Republic of Senegal.

international peace and security as are appropriate for regional action provided that such arrangements or agencies and their activities are consistent with the Purposes and Principles of the United Nations.'

In its original version, the Charter of the Organization of the Islamic Conference provided for the following objectives:

- **To promote Islamic solidarity** among member states;
- To consolidate cooperation among member states in economic, social, cultural, scientific and **other vital fields of activities**, and to carry out consultations among member states in international organizations;
- To Endeavour to eliminate racial segregation, discrimination and eradicate colonialism in all its forms;
- To take necessary measures **to support international peace and security founded on justice**;
- To coordinate efforts for the safeguarding of the Holy Places and support of the struggle of the people of Palestine, and to help them regain their rights and liberate their land;
- To provide a suitable atmosphere **for the promotion of cooperation and understanding** among member states and other countries.

The five founding principles of the OIC are as follows:

- **The total equality** between member states;
- The respect for the right of self-determination, and **non-interference in the domestic affairs of member states**;
- **The respect for the sovereignty, independence and territorial integrity of each member state**;
- The settlement of any conflict that may arise by peaceful means such as negotiation, mediation, reconciliation or arbitration;

- The abstention from the threat or use of force against the territorial integrity, national unity or political independence of any member state.

The objectives defined by *Chapter I* of the new Charter of the Organization of the Islamic Conference (15 March 2008) amounted to twenty in total, thus entailing the addition of 13 new objectives to the previous Charter:

1. To enhance and consolidate the bonds of fraternity and solidarity among the Member States;
2. To safeguard and protect the common interests and support the legitimate causes of the Member States and coordinate and unify the efforts of the Member States in view of the challenges faced by the Islamic world in particular and the international community in general;
3. To respect the right of self-determination and non-interference in the domestic affairs and to respect sovereignty, independence and territorial integrity of each Member State;
4. To support the restoration of complete sovereignty and territorial integrity of any Member State under occupation, as a result of aggression, on the basis of international law and cooperation with the relevant international and regional organisations;
5. To ensure active participation of the Member States in the global political, economic and social decision-making processes to secure their common interests;
6. To promote inter-state relations based on justice, mutual respect and good neighbourliness to ensure global peace, security and harmony;

7. To reaffirm its support for the rights of peoples as stipulated in the UN Charter and international law;
8. To support and empower the Palestinian people to exercise their right to self-determination and establish their sovereign State with Al-Quds Al-Sharif as its capital, while safeguarding its historic and Islamic character as well as the Holy places therein;
9. To strengthen intra-Islamic economic and trade cooperation; in order to achieve economic integration leading to the establishment of an Islamic Common Market;
10. To exert efforts to achieve sustainable and comprehensive human development and economic well-being in Member States;
11. To disseminate, promote and preserve the Islamic teachings and values based on moderation and tolerance, promote Islamic culture and safeguard Islamic heritage;
12. To protect and defend the true image of Islam, to combat defamation of Islam and encourage dialogue among civilisations and religions;
13. To enhance and develop science and technology and encourage research and cooperation among Member States in these fields;
14. To promote and to protect human rights and fundamental freedoms including the rights of women, children, youth, elderly and people with special needs as well as the preservation of Islamic family values;
15. To emphasize, protect and promote the role of the family as the natural and fundamental unit of society;

16. To safeguard the rights, dignity and religious and cultural identity of Muslim communities and minorities in non-Member States;
17. To promote and defend unified position on issues of common interest in the international fora;
18. To cooperate in combating terrorism in all its forms and manifestations, organised crime, illicit drug trafficking, corruption, money laundering and human trafficking;
19. To cooperate and coordinate in humanitarian emergencies such as natural disasters;
20. To promote cooperation in social, cultural and information fields among the Member States.

International Meaning of Diplomacy

In his book '**Networks of Interdependence: International Organisations and the Global Political System**', Harold K. Jacobson attributes the emergence of such a large number of international organisations in the 20th century to three main factors. The first factor is the desire to harness technological developments in order to enhance trade. The second motive is to preserve security and specific political regimes, and the third one is to serve humanitarian causes, enhance social welfare and guarantee the respect for human rights. The Organisation of the Islamic Conference deals with many issues in a manner similar to that of other international organisations. Yet, it represents a different type of international organisations since its roots were laid down fourteen centuries ago when a community of Muslims came together in the Arab Peninsula under the leadership of Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) and derived its philosophy from the Holy Quran. At the

Organization of the Islamic Conference, international cooperation is based on the Quranic concept of the Ummah⁽⁷⁾.

Burgeoning Stages of Islamic Diplomacy

This Islamic concept of the Ummah, as a distinguished form of regional alliance, confers on Islamic diplomacy a special character that guarantees its distinction in principles, objectives and goals, from conventional diplomacy styles. If the principles that triggered the French Revolution in 1789 AD, namely those of liberty, fraternity and equality, were a novelty for the European people, they were **original in the teachings of Islam** at the time of the Quran's revelation thirteen centuries earlier.⁽⁸⁾ Those principles drew the attention of Europe when they called for the right of nations to choose their constitutional regimes and served as a reference in the formulation of international law. Evolving within the framework of this international law, the rules of international relations achieved maturity and gave birth to European diplomacy. **Fair-minded Western researchers acknowledged the impact of Islam in the formulation of Europe's public international law⁽⁹⁾.**

One of the first indicators of a solidarity-based Islamic order was the conference held in Cairo in May 1926 AD. This conference issued a statement where it stressed that all Islamic States should be properly represented in an assembly that would convene in a country chosen by the representatives of Muslims.

7) Abdullah Al Ahssan, *Organization of the Islamic Conference, study of an Islamic Political Institution*, page 22, translated from English by Dr. Abdulaziz Ibrahim Al Faiz, World Institute for Islamic Thought, 2nd edition, Cairo, 1996.

8) Ali Mansour, *Islamic Sharia and Public International Law*, page 51, Dar Al Qalam, Cairo, 1962.

9) Ibid, page 28.

Such assembly would discuss the measures to be taken in order to create the caliphate and to meet all the prerequisites set by the *Sharia*⁽¹⁰⁾.

Obviously, the Cairo Conference, convened at the invitation of King Ahmed Fuad, son of the Khedive Ismail, came in reaction to the abolition of the Ottoman caliphate on 3 March 1924 AD. This Conference, which entered the annals of history, is not really of great concern to us as is the fact that the Cairo conference represented the **first gathering of Islamic powers** and embodied one of the forms of Islamic solidarity.

The second conference to be held within the framework of Islamic solidarity was called for by King Abdulaziz Al Saud, may he rest in peace, in Makkah Al Mukarrama in June 1926, only a month after the Cairo Conference. This conference culminated with the launch of a permanent structure called the **World Islamic Conference** which is still in existence today. The current president of the World Islamic Conference is Mr Abdullah Naseef, former Secretary General of the Muslim World

10) At the end of 1907 AD, Ismail Gasparsky, a Russian Muslim and editor of the Turkish magazine '*Turjuman Ahwal Az-Zaman*', came to Cairo and called for the organisation of an Islamic congress. He facilitated a meeting at the Continental Hotel in Cairo which drew a large number of people who welcomed the idea of the congress. In his address at the meeting, Garparsky, called for a diagnosis of the malaise that was eating away at the Islamic Ummah, as a first step towards finding a cure. He pointed out that exposing the causes of the Islamic Ummah's regression was not a simple feat to be carried out by one or two persons, and therefore it was crucial to consider the organisation of a general Islamic congress to be attended by scholars and ulama to debate the affairs of Muslims. Al Muayyed Magazine, 2/11/1907, Cairo, quoting Maher Hassan Fahmi in his book *Mohammed Tawfiq Al Bakri*, page 82, *Arab Prominent Figures*, issue No 64, Cairo, April 1967 AD.

League. The current Secretary General of this institution is Senator Raja Zafar-ul-Haq, and its headquarters are located in Karachi. The former president of the World Islamic Conference was the Pakistani diplomat Inaamullah Khan.

The third meeting which came together to consolidate the concept of Islamic solidarity was held in Al Quds in 1931⁽¹¹⁾ AD at the invitation of Haj Ameen Al Husseini, may he rest in peace, and was attended by a number of Muslim leaders and dignitaries from the Mashreq and the Maghreb. Morocco was represented at these three gatherings by three prominent figures, namely Sheikh Mohammed Mekki Naciri, Sheikh Mohammed Mekki Al Kettani and Haj Mohammed Bennouna, may Allah have mercy on them all. The Al Quds conference was a reaction to the decision taken by the Mandate authorities in Palestine regarding the Weeping Wall which forms the western wall of the Aqsa Mosque. One of the most important results achieved by Al Quds conference was ending the war that opposed the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia to Yemen in 1934 AD.

A fourth Islamic conference was organised in Karachi in Pakistan in 1949 AD⁽¹²⁾, followed by another meeting in 1951 AD⁽¹³⁾ in the same city. These two conferences proposed several projects in commerce, education and social welfare, such as the **creation**

11) This conference is considered as the second session of the Conference of the Islamic World, which was convened in Makkah-al-Mukarramah in 1926, at the invitation of King Abdulaziz Al-Saud.

12) This conference is the third session of the Conference of the Islamic World.

13) This is the fourth session of the Conference of the Islamic World. The fifth session was held in Baghdad in 1962, and during which the regulations of the Conference of the Islamic World, the formation of its organizational bodies and regional offices were all endorsed.

of an Islamic educational fund, encouraging student and teacher exchange programmes, and granting scholarships for higher education and research. The participants also submitted proposals to organise Islamic studies workshops that would address various aspects related to Islam in a scientific and objective manner.

Thus, the concept of Islamic solidarity evolved in this direction. The late Forties and early Fifties of the previous century witnessed many renewed endeavours to bring all Muslims under one political regime or at least within the same organised body. Islamic countries began to move actively on various issues at the sessions of the UN General Assembly, acting as a unified and harmonious body. There was much talk about the **Muslim Block** or the **Eastern Block**. Two key issues helped unify the efforts of Islamic states within the United Nations: **the first** was the shared interest of all Islamic States in the independence of the remaining Muslim countries, and **the second** one was the creation, backed by major powers, of a State of Israel at the heart of the Islamic world. It also seemed that non-governmental associations and organisations in the Islamic world in general had resumed their activities after independence from colonial powers⁽¹⁴⁾.

In the Seventies of the previous century, King Faical Bin Abdulaziz, may Allah have mercy on him, undertook a series of historical visits to a large number of Islamic countries, promoting in his rounds the idea of Islamic solidarity. His calls were welcomed and supported by all the countries he visited, including Morocco. On this subject, the late Iraqi poet Hussein Bastanah⁽¹⁵⁾ said:

14) Dr Abdullah Al Ahssan, *ibid*, pp. 41-42 (edited).

15) Hussein Ibn Ali Alkarawi from the Bastanah family, born in Baghdad in 1907 AD and graduated from Dar Al Ulum in Egypt. He died in 1968 AD.

You when you called to it, from Turkey and Africa
People responded in all grandeur and nobility
The rivers of Euphrates fed it with sparkling waters
And Oman embraced it as the jewel of its crown
In Pakistan and Persia, a loud shout was heard
By those who heed and those who from doing so shall benefit
Responding to the call from the Arab Maghreb were
Noble masters whose lineage links to Al Bathaa through Fatima Zahra
In verdant Tunisia and from the house of Oqbat
The call's echoes sent all racing on horseback
O Faical of Islam unveil the secrets of this call
for the discourse of the honed saber is always short-lived
Rally the brimming hearts around a unity
In which Islam's salvation, peace and bounty shall lie

The very close, fruitful cooperation and coordination in this regard between the late kings Hassan II and Faical Ibn Abdulaziz, May Allah have mercy on them, laid down the first foundations of Islamic solidarity, paved the way for joint Islamic action and boosted Islamic diplomacy.

Emergence of International relations

The convergence of States within a general international structure that would be conducive to cooperation and understanding and promote peace in the world was an old idea dating back to early in the 14th century. This concept was first introduced by the French legislator Pierre du Bois who presented a project to this effect in 1305 AD. Others followed suit, each with a project of his own including the project of French minister Sully presented in 1603 for the creation of a Christian republic that would unify all the nations of Europe. There was also the project of the Abbot of Saint-Pierre presented to the Utrecht Conference in 1713 and proposing the creation of the League of European Nations, in

addition to many other projects proposed by authors such as Jean Jacques Rousseau, Bentham, Kant and others. However, all these projects remained as mere proposals and only reached implementation stage early in the previous century in the aftermath of World War I. Countries affected by the horrors of war realised the need to create a supreme international body that would supervise the general affairs of the international community. The League of Nations was then created, performed its duties and exercised the powers it was invested with for almost a quarter of a century. Yet it failed to honour its first and foremost obligation, namely to put an end to aggressive acts and prevent wars. Its structure became weak and was finally blown to smithereens by World War II. As soon as fighting ceased, the international community hastened to meet under a new banner, thus creating the United Nations Organisation⁽¹⁶⁾.

One of the tasks of the League of Nations was the **promotion of intellectual cooperation among peoples**. It accomplished this mission by organising a large number of scientific and cultural conferences. It also created a number of commissions, of which the **Intellectual Cooperation Commission**.

Similarly, among the tasks of the Economic and Social Council, the UN arm in charge of implementing economic and social objectives as laid out in Article 55 of the Charter is: **'to promote international cultural and educational cooperation'**. This was the first step towards the creation of UNESCO on 4 November 1946 AD. UNESCO aims to contribute to the consolidation of peace and security through developing cooperation among nations in the fields of education, sciences and culture, so

16) Dr Ali Sadeq Abu Haif, **Public International Law**, page 601, Manshaat Al Maarif, Alexandria, 1991.

that respect for justice increases in all parts of the world, and so that the respect of law, human rights and basic liberties spreads. In its drive to fulfil those objectives, UNESCO discharges five missions of which:

- **Encouraging education among peoples and spreading culture;**
- **Ensuring mutual respect for cultural values of the East and the West.**

The preamble to the UN Charter reads after four preliminary commitments: '**And for these ends, to practice tolerance** and live together in peace with one another as good neighbours'.

Diplomacy of Dialogue and Peace

The call to the dialogue of civilizations was first made from the heart of the Islamic world and in the words of Mr Mohammad Khatami, former president of the Islamic Republic of Iran, when he chaired the 8th session of the Islamic Summit. He made this call from the pulpit of the UN General Assembly during a speech delivered before a host of Heads of State and Governments, ministers of foreign affairs and ambassadors of the UN Member States. The UN General Assembly adopted the idea proposed by the OIC President and issued its decision **to proclaim 2001 as the UN Year of Dialogue among Cultures and Civilizations.**

It is not a simple coincidence that the idea of dialogue among cultures and civilizations should start from the Islamic Summit presidency and that it should evolve and reach maturity through an international decision inviting the whole world to consolidate the values of dialogue among cultures and human civilizations, in order to overcome the problems that stand in the way of man's march towards stability, security, peace and harmony.

It was a matter of course for the Islamic world to wholeheartedly welcome the UN General Assembly's resolution and for the Islamic Conference of Foreign Ministers to adopt this resolution in its fifth session. The latter also entrusted the Islamic Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation (ISESCO) with a set of activities to be implemented regionally and internationally with the aim of spreading the culture of dialogue, enhancing awareness of its significance, and developing it into stances, processes and actual measures so that dialogue can become a feature of the times and consecrate the concept of cultural diplomacy from an Islamic perspective.

Unfortunately, the winds of change escalated into a violent worldwide storm after the 9/11 events, blowing in directions other than those of dialogue, and thrusting the international community into twisted courses and dark times that undermined faith in the idea of dialogue. The result was an international crisis fuelled by those who sought to exacerbate the situation and jeopardise the stability of human societies. Despite all this, ISESCO accomplished its mission in the best possible manner within the framework of the Islamic world's cultural diplomacy and as delegated by the Islamic Conference of Foreign Ministers. ISESCO engaged in well-orchestrated movements in this direction, following a properly devised action plan to spread the values of dialogue and coexistence as the only prelude and possible path to the reinstatement of peace and security in the world. It organised more than ten conferences and symposia of which three were international ones held in Morocco under the high patronage of His Majesty King Mohamed VI. These were: **the International Symposium on the Dialogue of Civilizations in a Changing World**, held in Rabat in 2001, **the International Education and Culture Forum on the Alliance of Civilizations**,

held in Chefchaouen in 2006, and the Scientific Symposium on **Al Qarawiyyine University and the Dialogue of Religions and Civilizations**, held in Fes in January 2007.

Many thinkers, researchers, academicians and media figures from the Arab and Islamic world, as well as from Europe, the United States and others parts of the world took part in those international conferences and symposia.

In an effort to document all the literature pertaining to the dialogue of civilizations and cultures, ISESCO published, in cooperation with the OIC General Secretariat, the **White Book on the Dialogue of Cultures and Civilizations** in three languages and two editions. ISESCO also published a number of studies and books on the same topic and included in two of its successive action plans a large scale programme on the dialogue of cultures and civilizations, and another programme on the culture of justice and peace under which several activities were scheduled. In order to consecrate the culture of dialogue, ISESCO approved in the 9th session of its General Conference, an amendment introducing a new objective in the Organisation's Charter, namely: **'to 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.'**⁽¹⁷⁾ ISESCO also drew up the programme of the Ambassadors of Dialogue of Cultures and Civilizations and appointed high ranking figures from Malaysia, Jordan, Senegal and Azerbaijan as its first team of goodwill ambassadors. These were Ahmed Mahathir Mohammad, former Prime Minister of Malaysia, His Highness

17) Cf. the documentary book: **ISESCO: 25 Years of Achievements**, published on the occasion of the 25th anniversary of the Islamic Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation, Rabat, 2007.

Prince Al-Hassan Ibn Talal, former Crown Prince of Jordan, Mr Ahmed Mahtar M'bow, former UNESCO Secretary General, and Mrs Mehriban Aliyeva, First Lady of Azerbaijan. A number of other ambassadors will join these four in the year 2008, inshallah.

ISESCO at the Service of Islamic Diplomacy

The action carried out by ISESCO in this regard is derived from the core missions of Islamic cultural diplomacy in serving the interests of dialogue and spreading the culture of justice and peace. It is a continuous action that has expanded and acquired further importance through the organisation of a series of specialised Islamic conferences such as the Islamic Conference of Culture Ministers and the Islamic Conference of Information Ministers. The first one is organised and supervised by the Islamic Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation -ISESCO-⁽¹⁸⁾, and the second one convenes under the aegis of the Organisation of the Islamic Conference. These two sets of conferences serve the objectives of Islamic diplomacy just as the Islamic Conference of Foreign Ministers serves those of peace and security, not only within the Islamic world but throughout the entire world. Topping all other issues in importance is the Palestinian cause which initially prompted the creation of the Organisation of the Islamic Conference and can be described as the pivotal axis of Islamic diplomacy in all its fields and at all levels.

There is no distinction between **Arab diplomacy** and **Islamic diplomacy** in promoting the issues of security and peace. For example, I recall that the '**Arab Peace Plan**' adopted by the Arab League was the same plan adopted by the Organisation of the Islamic Conference, and that the resolutions issued by the

18) Idem.

Arab Summit with regard to the Palestinian cause differed in no way from the resolutions issued by the Islamic Summits. Thus, it becomes possible to speak of an Arab-Islamic diplomacy.

In all these cases, Islamic diplomacy adheres to the rules of international law and never swerves from international legitimacy in its stances and decisions. Therefore, associating the consolidation of dialogue among civilizations and cultures with the endeavor to consecrate peace and security is but one aspect of the Islamic diplomacy's commitment to international legality on the one hand, and of its loyalty to universal moral values and human principles.

In addition to being an expression of the political will of States, diplomacy also reflects the balance of the economic, industrial, scientific and technological power held by these states. Consequently, the weight of Islamic diplomacy- and the Arab one as well, lies in the capacities, potentialities and resources available to the countries of the Islamic world, and in the position they hold within the world.

Although the skies of the Islamic world are heavily laden with dark clouds for reasons too numerous to address here, objectivity and realism force us to admit from this pulpit that the capacities of OIC Member States and the position held by the Islamic world within international fora, provide Islamic diplomacy with ample opportunities to move at many levels in support of the international community's efforts to consolidate the values of dialogue among religions and cultures and the alliance of civilizations, and to pursue the goals of peace and security throughout the world.

Mention should be made of the fact that the Islamic world acts as a partner of the **High-Level Group for the Alliance of Civilizations** created by the former UN Secretary General. In

addition to Turkey which is a founding member along with Spain, the Group consists of personalities from Morocco, Qatar, Iran and Indonesia. ISESCO takes part in the meetings of this group¹⁹⁾.

Islamic World as a Civilizational Block

This is a new field for Islamic diplomacy in its cultural, civilizational and human action. It opens broad horizons before the Islamic world to present its civilizational vision to the whole world and to take part in consolidating lofty cultural and civilizational values.

The Islamic world is a **civilizational block** that strives for dialogue and peace. These two objectives merge into one strategic

19) I attended the First International Forum of the Alliance of Civilizations which was held in the Spanish capital Madrid on 14 and 15 January 2008 AD. I delivered an address at this international rally, the first of its kind, attended by the Senegalese President, the Heads of the Spanish and Turkish Governments, the UN Secretary General, the UN High Commissioner for the Alliance of Civilizations, a number of prime ministers and foreign ministers from various parts of the world, as well as the OIC Secretary General. In my address, I underlined that the core principle used by the Islamic world as a premise in laying down the bridges of dialogue among cultures, civilizations and religions is elemental since it is inspired by the deeply-entrenched principles adhered to by the billion and a quarter people who believe in the message of Islam, a message of enlightenment, tolerance and brotherliness that believes in the commonality of human origin, the equality of all mankind in dignity and the right to life while enjoying security, peace, harmony and mutual understanding.

On this occasion, I invited the Spanish government to launch a new historical initiative to consolidate the reconciliation of the Islamic world with the West, and spread the spirit of trust and serenity. This could only boost the esteem in which the international community holds Spain, a country that has always played a pioneering role in highly creative civilizational and cultural initiatives.

objective since peace cannot be achieved without consolidating dialogue among nations and peoples at all political, economic, cultural and civilizational levels. Such dialogue needs to be constructive and fruitful, civilizational in depth and essence, and one that strives to enhance human life, and edify global human peace on foundations of justice, righteousness and virtue.

Islamic diplomacy operates within this broad context and advances on this righteous course. It protects the lofty interests of the Islamic Ummah and supports the efforts of the international community to bring about dialogue and peace.

In this context, I would like to highlight an interesting excerpt of a recently published English book in the American University of Cairo: “**Islam: Past, Present and Future**” by its author the Swiss thinker Hans Kung, patron of the World Ethics Institution. In this book, the author says: 'The options have become clear: either rivalry of the religions, clash of civilizations, war of the nations - or dialogue of civilizations and peace between the nations as a presupposition for peace between the nations'. Then he wonders: 'In the face of the deadly threat to all humankind, instead of building new dams of hatred, revenge and enmity, should not we tear down the walls of prejudice stone by stone and thus build bridges of dialogue, particularly towards Islam?'⁽²⁰⁾.

This is the question that serves as a framework for Islamic diplomacy.

On the course of publication of this paper, I followed the echoes of the lecture delivered by Dr Charles Saint-Prot, the Director of the Observatory of Geopolitical studies in Paris, at

20) A detailed synthesis of the ideas of Hans Kung are available in the magazine '*Points of View*', issue No. 106, November 2007, Cairo.

the Emirates Center for Strategic Studies and Research, on 20 October 2008. This lecture, which was highly acclaimed by most researchers concerned with the issues of dialogue between the Islamic world and the West, featured some of the mostly hoped-for ideas to hear especially from a western thinker. The lecturer stated that “Islam cannot be allied with rigid conservatism or minority, radical sectarianism. Far from encouraging extremism and terrorism, the Islamic pure tradition is the wise voice which tries to reconcile faith and respect through ijthihad (effort at reasoning to find a solution to a legal question). Ijthihad is the way of the future for Islam. The Islamic tradition constitutes a better response to the problem of Islamic sectarian extremists and to any Westernization tendency, which would lead to a negation of the Muslim identity.” Most important here is that the lecturer believes “**Ijthihad**” to be “**the way of the future for Islam**”. This is a very significant idea that is worth a deep reflection. The lecturer has indeed excelled in bringing such a sound and accurate wording; because Ijthihad is a religious duty and a necessity for life in order to deal with changes and shape a prosperous future. The French unbiased lecturer highlighted the pivotal standing of Islam in contemporary international relations, arguing that there are more than one billion and half Muslims in the world, the equivalent of 20% of the global population, let alone the fact that Islamic States are the main oil-supplier, which makes Islam an influential player in the world.

The prominent thinker added that the image of Islam is extremely distorted in the West, and that there was a lot of unjustified apprehension from Islam, nurtured by an erroneous understanding of the nature of the Islamic religion. He put it clearly thus: “*the West fails to distinguish between Islam as a religion and civilization, on the one hand, and what has become*

known as “Islamism” which is the product of an extremist thought and has nothing to do with the main sources of religion, on the other”. He underlined that Western communities allied to Zionism wickedly contributed to the formation of such a distorted image of Islam. He pointed out that it would be grossly wrong to link Islam with terrorism, for Islam is a tolerant religion that completes the previous religions. He added that *“this association in the West results from a lack of understanding and intellectual laziness that hinder the comprehension of Islam from its original sources, and not according to certain writings of which most are misinterpreted.”*⁽²¹⁾ This description of the West's vision with regard to Islam is an accurate judgment of the actual situation.

There is no doubt that the wise voice of this Western thinker calls on us to embrace more openness onto our times, to gain, further partial or complete supporters of the key principles underlying Islamic diplomacy. Such a fair attitude of this prominent French thinker is likely to back our efforts at the international scene, given that action at the intellectual and cultural levels is an integral part of **parallel diplomacy or popular diplomacy**. And this is precisely what we need most to develop in order to promote the role to be assumed by Islamic diplomacy at present time and every time.

21) “A voice of a wise thinker from the west that we need to support”, an article published in Arabic by Dr Abdulaziz Othman Altwaijri, in “**Al-Hayat**” newspaper, London, 30 October, 2008.