

Dr Abdulaziz Othman Altwaijri

The Islamic World and Millennium Challenges

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Preface

Today, the Islamic world is confronted with many challenges. Some of these challenges have accumulated over past decades and others are collateral consequences of the transformations experienced by the world at the current juncture. Others yet grew out of specific factors inherent to the approaches adopted in tackling these critical issues. The gravity of these problems has worsened to such extent as to constitute a serious source of alarm, in the absence of a suitable resolution applied with strength of mind, clear vision and a realistic approach that takes cognizance of all elements and can delve to the core of matters while steering clear of the phantasms and delusions that result from lack of civilizational vision and a flawed understanding of the nature of all these challenges.

Before all the challenges endured by the Islamic world at many a level, and particularly the wars, conflicts, sectarian strife, division, extremism and terrorism shaking many parts of this world today, the wise and farsighted observer will recognize that the challenges besieging Muslim countries from ocean to ocean in these critical times are too great to be met with limited endeavors, within a narrow framework and with means that are too poor to apprehend the dimensions of the global development battle the Islamic world has to fight and win, and to move from there to the battle of rebuilding the civilizational edifice, a mission involving political, economic, scientific and technological, as well as cultural and intellectual edification.

This is not a pessimistic look at the current reality of the Islamic world, nor is it a short-sighted vision that falls short of anticipating the future

from the perspective of today's reality. Instead, this is an appraising take relying on actual facts and phenomena that have been addressed at length in field studies, academic research and scientific analyses that pored over issues of concern to the Islamic world from various angles and penetrated to the roots of the civilizational crisis behind these myriad crises. Indeed, the Islamic world is not immune to the fast-paced changes experienced by the world at large and the repercussions of the conflicts raging on between superpowers in their drive to serve strategic interests defined by the policies they adopt and that define their actions on the international scene as they set out to accumulate more power and control many parts of the world, predominantly located in the Islamic world.

With the intense pressures faced by countries of the South and the exacerbated difficulties weighing down on developing countries in their struggle to master the conditions of sustainable global development, we note an exacerbation of the challenges barring the road before the Islamic world to achieve its full potential of global sustainable development and bring about the desired advancement, progress and prosperity within an enabling environment of peace, security and stability and with the capacity to protect achievements, and preserve the national independence and territorial integrity of each of its states while soaring towards a bright and prosperous future.

Today, the Islamic world has chosen to tackle the challenges of a millennium that is witnessing an increased responsibility of states in the fight against economic, social and developmental crises at all levels. This calls for total mobilization in the different fields of joint Islamic action, for combining well-coordinated and harmonious efforts and solidarity to overcome a difficult juncture where the available resources are too meager to bring to fruition the great Islamic civilizational project considering the insignificant impact of the Islamic solidarity mechanisms adopted thus

far, despite the lapsing of more than four decades since the inception of the Organization of Islamic Cooperation (OIC).

The Islamic world is standing at a crossroads today, besieged by difficulties from all sides and fielding onslaughts from all fronts, yet it is endeavoring to forge ahead as it battles the pressures of superpowers to keep it in the shackles of helplessness, hesitation and vulnerability, unable to set out in the right direction and embark on a new civilizational cycle that would link the present to the past and lay the foundations of the future.

*For many years now I have taken a keen interest in studying the general situation in the Islamic world from different angles. I have pored over its many causes and dedicated myself to deciphering the developmental map of the Islamic world and the configuration of this map from an academic angle. In 1995, I published the first part of my book **'On the Civilizational Edification of the Islamic World'**, then the other parts followed till they reached fourteen today. In 1994, I published a study in Arabic, English and French on the **'Situation of the Islamic World and Future Prospects'**. In 2004, the Cairo-based Dar al-Shorouq published my book **'The Islamic World at the Era of Globalization'**. I published another five studies in Arabic, English and French titled **'The Islamic World and the West: Challenges and Future Prospects'**, **'Muslims of the West and the Islamic World'**, **'ISESCO and the Islamic World's Educational, Scientific and Cultural Prospects'**, **'Globalization and cultural life in the Islamic world'**, and **'America and the Muslim world'**. The study being published today, **'The Islamic World and Millennium Challenges'** is in essence a continuation of the previous studies and part of my endeavors over more than three decades to study the situation in the Islamic world from perspectives that are consistent with the fields of expertise of the Islamic Educational, Scientific and Cultural*

Organization (ISESCO). As such, the present study encompasses issues that are of a much broader scope, tackled in light of new statistics and data and of the scientific papers published on issues that are of key relevance to the Islamic world in these times.

The focus on conditions in the Islamic world shall remain the responsibility of those involved in political, social and economic studies, and more particularly of joint Islamic action leaderships and the intellectual, academic and cultural elites dedicated to researching such crucial issues for the present of the Islamic world and its future prospects which we shall strive to make bright, prosperous and safe, by the grace of Allah.

It is my sincere hope that this study, which comes complete with its English and French translations, will be a useful addition to the endeavors of researchers and academics engaged in this scientific field.

May Allah grant us success and guide our steps on the righteous path.

Dr Abdulaziz Othman Altwaijri

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

Connotations of the term 'Islamic World'

The Islamic world is the spatial extent of the Nation of Islam about whom Allah (SWT) said: [*Verily, this brotherhood of yours is a single brotherhood, and I am your Lord and Cherisher: therefore serve Me (and no other).*]⁽¹⁾

But from the political and strategic points of view, what could be meant by this term which first appeared in the writings of Orientalists late in the 19th and early 20th centuries?

The phrase '**Islamic world**' refers to the states and societies, located in different parts of the world, whose religion is Islam and who embrace its history, or those strongly influenced by this religion and history. Muslims are spread out to all continents and account for about a quarter of the earth's population. Islam has marked and continues to mark with its seal all the political, cultural and spiritual aspects of the Islamic world through a multitude of experiences that etched the distinct features of the Islamic world.

'Islamic world' refers to countries that are predominantly peopled by Muslims. These are divided over 86 countries with high concentrations in the Asian and African countries, and their numbers are on the increase.

Additionally, 'Islamic world' is a wide-sweeping term conveying the notion of a unified Muslim Ummah (nation), a unity based on the

(1) *Al-Anbiaa*, verse 92.

common denominators of the Islamic culture and embodied by the unity of religion and the religious causes close to the heart of this nation.

Geographical location and natural resources

The Islamic world stretches between longitudes of 120° east and 30° west. The extreme eastern point of the Islamic world is in Indonesia, and its western frontier lies in the eastern coast of the Atlantic Ocean.

To the north, the Islamic world stretches between the latitudes of 56° north and the equator in the south.

The Islamic world overlooks 18 seas, three oceans and four lakes shared with other countries.

The oceans are the Indian, the Atlantic and the Pacific Oceans.

The seas are the Mediterranean Sea, the Red Sea, the Caspian Sea, the Gulf of Eden, the Arabian Gulf, the Black Sea, the South China Sea, Marmara Sea, Timor Sea, the Aegean Sea, the Dead Sea, the Adriatic, and many others.

The lakes shared by Islamic and other countries are Lake Victoria, Lake Tanganyika, Lake Malawi and Lake Turkana.

The Islamic world is also where the most important maritime passes and straights are located. These include Bab al-Mendab, the Strait of Hormuz, the Strait of Malaga, the Strait of Singapore, the Dardanelles Straits, the Bosphorus Strait, the Mozambique Strait, the Strait of Gibraltar, the Torres Strait, the Strait of Jopal, the Strait of Otranto, the Strait of Tiran, the Suez Canal and Makassar Strait.

There are more than 250 rivers and about 10 000 tributaries in the Islamic world. The world's major rivers are located in the Islamic world: the Nile, the Euphrates, the Tigris, the Seyhan, Jeyhoon (in mid Asia), the Niger River, the Senegal River, the Volga River, the Ural River, the Sindh River, the Sebou River, etc...

Population density

According to 2012 statistics, the population of the Islamic world is estimated at 1 571 198 000. Muslims represent 24% of the world's total population, but considering that the fertility rate in the Islamic world is higher than in any other part of the world, the number of Muslims is constantly on the increase.⁽²⁾

The surface area of the Islamic world is estimated at 41 707 540 square kilometers, representing 28% of the earth's land surface area.

Member States of the Organization of Islamic Cooperation are divided into geographical groups: Asian countries representing the majority, African countries, Arab countries, four European countries which are Kosovo, Bosnia-Herzegovina and Albania, and the two Latin American countries of Surinam and Guyana.

Most countries in the Islamic world came under European colonialism, and then successively obtained their independence.

(2) According to 2012 population projections by the PEW Research Center's Forum on Religion and Public Life, the Muslim world population is expected to increase by 35% over the next score of years (from 1.6 billion in 2012 to 2.2 billion in 2030).

Today, there are 57 Member States in the Organization of Islamic Cooperation of which 52 are also members of the Islamic Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization. There are also large Muslim communities living in India (about 280 millions), in China (around 60 millions) and in the Russian Federation (about 30 millions).

There are Muslims in all continents. Estimates and statistics indicate that about five hundred million Muslims, i.e. one third of the Muslim Ummah, live outside the borders of the OIC Member States.⁽³⁾ Muslims are scattered all around the world, some of them living in large communities of original inhabitants as an integral part of the demographic fabric of these communities such as in India, China and Russia. Others live in small communities scattered all over the world in Europe, Asia, Africa and Latin America.

In recent times, and after the end of World War II, new and expanding communities of Muslims have emerged as a natural result of easier travelling and free movement in search of employment opportunities, in addition to the successive migratory fluxes, particularly to North America.

Linguistic diversity and civilizational coexistence

In view of the great expanse of the Islamic world and the diversity of the ethnicities and cultures that bind its peoples together, languages in wide use in the Islamic world exceed 20 native languages from

(3) Statistical overview on OIC Member States (SESRIC).

which many dialects and local languages are derived. Arabic is spoken by 20 to 30% of all Muslims, while non-Arab peoples of the Islamic world speak various languages such as Urdu, Farsi, Turkic, Kurdish, Kazakh, Pashto, Uzbek, Swahili, Bahasa, Malawi, Amazigh, Hausa, etc...

Along with the noble religion of Islam, many part of the Islamic world host other religions and faiths such as Christianity, Hinduism, Buddhism, Judaism, Zoroastrianism, Confucianism, Sikhism, etc... Sunni Muslims represent 90% of all Muslims while the Shia stand for the remaining 10%, particularly followers of the Jaafariya Tariqa of the Twelve Imams.

Despite this religious mosaic and the diversity of languages and cultures, Muslim peoples live in harmonious coexistence. Along with the followers of other religions, creeds and doctrines with whom they have coexisted from times immemorial, Muslims have contributed to edifying the Islamic civilization in cross-pollination with other ancient civilizations: Jebusite, Canaanite, Phoenician, Aramaic, Ghassanid, Nabatean, Sabaeen, Himyarite and Tobbah civilizations, Persian, Greek, Roman and Ethiopian civilizations, as well as the civilizations of the lands beyond Mesopotamia: Uzbekistan, Kazakhstan, Turkmenistan, and Turkic civilizations. The Islamic civilization served as a vessel which enfolded all these civilizations in the sense that it embraced their deeply-entrenched values and virtues, intellectual and scientific contribution, literary and artistic creations, architecture and the ways of peopling the earth and wandering it in pursuit of a livelihood to guarantee the decent life that Allah deemed worthy for man: *[We have honored the sons of Adam; provided them with transport on land and sea;*

given them for sustenance things good and pure; and conferred on them special favors, above a great part of our creation.}]⁽⁴⁾

A homogenous civilizational block

Today, the Islamic world represents a civilizational mass that carries a universal human Islamic message, and whose presence on the international arena is continually growing despite the many problems endured by Muslims today and that are chipping away at the great Islamic edifice and worsening under the pressures of the violent challenges besieging the Islamic world and preventing it from soaring towards the vast prospects of progress, prosperity and sustainable global development.

Illiteracy: a main impediment to development

Looking at the challenges facing the Islamic world today and undermining its potentialities and development plans, we find that illiteracy, rife throughout all Muslim countries, comes at the top of all these challenges. It is indeed the mother of all banes plaguing Muslim societies. According to data collected by the UNESCO Institute for Statistics, ISESCO's statistics and to the annual human development reports drawn up by international organizations, illiteracy rates in Islamic countries range between 45% of all males and 65% of females. These rates are higher by almost 10% in rural areas and drop to 30% in a few countries. A very small proportion of Islamic countries have achieved significant progress in eradicating illiteracy with rates in these countries dropping to 1%. Such highly positive phenomenon will be addressed in further details later.

(4) *Al-Israa*, verse 70.

Illiteracy is not only a shameful stigma for the Ummah of ‘Iqraa’ (Read). It is also a **critically important issue** that deserves to be tackled in the same way as the core issues warranting the utmost attention from the higher spheres of authority in the Islamic world.

Unfortunately, illiteracy continues to hold a low priority status on the agenda of most Islamic countries which continue to consider it as a purely educational and moral issue and not an economic, social, developmental and political issue in the first place, and even a matter that falls within the scope of homeland security whether at the level of the country itself or at that of the Islamic world as a whole since the Islamosphere is the most comprehensive state and represents the broader framework of Arab and Islamic regimes which span both the Arab League and the Organization of Islamic Cooperation.

In some Islamic countries, illiteracy rates have climbed to alarming levels and become a dangerous social phenomenon, surpassing in its gravity the phenomena of poverty, ignorance, disease, instability and the disruption of peace and security in many Islamic countries. In fact, illiteracy lies behind many of these phenomena which in turn hinder growth and weigh down societies despite their efforts to overcome these obstacles and lay the foundations of a global sustainable development that can radically change these societies. One of the factors behind poverty is illiteracy, ignorance is the outcome of illiteracy, and one of the causes of sickness is illiteracy. Generally deteriorated conditions can result from illiteracy because the latter deprives a person of knowledge of their rights and obligations and prevents them from serving his community and protecting their higher interests. The disruption of the chain of

security is often the result of illiteracy, either in its traditional sense or in its general connotation, ignorance of the law for many of those who commit crimes punishable by the law, and ignorance of the true facts of religion for those who engage in terrorist acts under the cover of religion because they are blinded by a distorted and fanatic understanding of religious texts.

As it monitors literacy indicators in the Islamic world, ISESCO notes that instead of shrinking, illiteracy is on the increase in many parts of this world, that the efforts expended by relevant government authorities are stumbling and hardly produce any positive outcome while a small number of Member States are achieving a variable measure of success in eradicating illiteracy. Studies recently conducted by ISESCO indicate that the need for development at many levels and for improving social conditions calls for doubling up the efforts made in this regard and for developing appropriate mechanisms for the battle against illiteracy. Conventional methods must be relegated to the side and replaced by novel approaches and innovative processes, coupled with bold measures taken by an informed and responsible political will.

Widespread illiteracy, the faltering development efforts, the scarcity of resources, the poor strategic planning can have no other outcome but a general inadequacy of the educational system at all its levels. Annual human development reports and reports by ISESCO indicate that the quality and accreditation levels of education in most Islamic countries are so degraded as to trigger alarm bells.

There is no doubt that the high percentages of children in the Islamic world constitute a real challenge with most of these countries unable to absorb the huge contingents of children in

childcare and early educational programmes. A good education dispensed in early growth stages impacts on the remaining phases of the educational process. Studies contained in the 2010 World Bank Report on Higher Education⁽⁵⁾ confirm that investment in secondary education has a high economic return while investment in tertiary education provides suitable opportunities for economic growth and social change. The studies carried out by ISESCO, and the reports of UNESCO and the World Bank show that in many parts of the Islamic world, and despite the national efforts to boost the educational process, education, from the primary to junior and senior high school and university, still shows many failings and has no impact whatsoever on social or economic levels but for a few exceptions here and there.

Educational indicators prepared by the OIC Statistical, Economic and Social Research and Training Centre for Islamic Countries (SESRIC), based in Ankara, reveal the following highly significant and interesting information which calls for profound reflection if they are to be put to contribution.⁽⁶⁾

The highest rates of adult functional literacy are encountered in the following OIC Member States:

- Uzbekistan: 99.9%
- Kazakhstan: 99.6%
- Turkmenistan: 99.5%

(5) Statistical overview on OIC Member States (SESRIC).

(6) SESRIC educational indicators for OIC Member States in 2012 (Indicator Selection).

- Tajikistan: 99.4%
- Azerbaijan: 99.4%
- Kirgizstan: 99.3%
- Albania: 99%
- Maldives: 97%
- Brunei Darussalam: 94.9%
- State of Kuwait: 93.9%
- State of Palestine: 92.4%
- Malaysia: 91.9%
- United Arab Emirates: 90.4%
- State of Qatar: 90.1%
- Republic of Turkey: 88.4%

Educational conditions in the Islamic world

Many Islamic countries are failing to generalize primary education, improve the quality of secondary education and develop university education. This failure impacts on scientific research which is struggling to rise to the status it deserves within adopted action plans and strategies. ISESCO's reports, which concur in their findings with UNESCO's, indicate that budget percentages allocated to scientific research in Islamic countries are below 1% of each country's GDP when scientific research in advanced countries benefits from financing that exceeds 3% of the GDP. Although ISESCO devised a **Strategy for Sciences, Technology and Innovation** which was approved by the Islamic Summit meeting, this strategy, similar to the other sixteen strategies developed by

ISESCO, falls short of implementation which remains conditional upon a strong and efficient political willpower that is capable of reform, development and modernization.

Statistical data on sciences and technology indicate that the percentage of GDP spending on scientific research in Islamic countries remains extremely low. In some countries, this percentage drops below 0.1%, and more than half of the OIC Member States do not allocate any GDP percentage whatsoever to scientific research. The highest rates of spending on scientific research occur in the following countries:⁽⁷⁾

- Tunisian Republic: 0.73%
- Republic of Turkey: 0.69%
- Kingdom of Morocco: 0.60%
- Islamic Republic of Iran: 0.59%
- Malaysia: 0.59%
- Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan: 0.34%
- Republic of Azerbaijan: 0.30%
- Islamic Republic of Pakistan: 0.24%

With such dismal figures, we are facing bleak prospects of scientific regression which prevails in the quasi majority of Islamic States and generates weak economies, stumbling progress, exacerbated economic crises and social problems that impede the fulfillment of the goals set out in global sustainable development plans.

(7) Science and technology indicators for OIC Member States in 2012 (SESRIC).

The 10-year Programme of Action to Meet Millennium Challenges

In 2005, an extraordinary session of the Islamic Summit meeting was held in Makkah al-Mukarramah during which the **Ten-year Programme of Action to Meet the Challenges Facing the Islamic Ummah in the 21st Century** was adopted. The second article of this programme of action, dedicated to development and economic, social and scientific issues urges *“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, and promote activities aimed at achieving economic and social development in African countries, including supporting industrialization, energizing trade, transferring technology, alleviating their debt burden and poverty and eradicating diseases.”*

On higher education, sciences and technology, the ten-year programme of action emphasized the need to *“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 urging the Member States to strive for quality education that promotes creativity, innovation, and research and development.”*

But the sad reality reflects the terribly slow pace at which the implementation of this part of the 10-year programme of action is moving when it is not at a complete standstill since many of the countries affected have not even initiated it. Poverty continues to be endemic in most parts of the Islamic world. According to UN reports, the poorest of the world’s countries are to be found in

the Islamic world where Muslim populations are now worse off, victims of wars, sectarian strife, displacement and killings, and even constituting the largest contingent of refugees in the world.

When we peruse the statistical indicators of the OIC Member States, prepared by the OIC Statistical, Economic and Social Research and Training Centre for Islamic Countries (SESRIC), we come across the following economic data:⁽⁸⁾

The lowest GDP per capita in US dollars is found in the following five countries:

- Guinea Bissau: US\$ 211
- Niger: US\$ 289
- Somalia: US\$ 291
- Islamic Republic of Afghanistan: US\$ 341
- Islamic Republic of Bangladesh: US\$ 428

The highest GDP per capita in USD is found in the following five countries:

- State of Qatar: US\$ 76 391
- United Arab Emirates: US\$ 47 866
- Brunei Darussalam: US\$ 31 835
- Republic of Iraq: US\$ 15 519
- Kingdom of Saudi Arabia: US\$ 15 481

(8) SESRIC BASEIND (Basic Social and Economic Indicators) Database.

The Islamic world has a number of assets that could empower it to move from a position of weakness to one of strength if it diligently embarks on an optimized utilization of its resources with the help of excellent knowledge of administration, management and investment systems. These strengths are, inter alia, a powerful economy, an abundance of natural resources, vast expanses of land that stretch over a quarter of the earth's surface area, a multitude of rivers, large stretches of arable lands (equivalent to Australia's entire surface area), a high predominantly young demographic density, as well as a cultural and civilizational wealth that plays a key role in boosting the morale of populations. But more than anything else, the Islamic world has at its disposal a driving force to work and to advance, and that is the noble religion of Islam and religious tenets that consider hard and fruitful work on par with the act of worshipping Allah.

ISESCO's strategies for the advancement of the Islamic world

The immense challenges faced by the Islamic world are compounded by other challenges that are no lesser in gravity, such as the prevalence of sectarian conflicts, doctrinal fanaticism and religious strife tearing apart people who share the same Qibla (praying direction for Muslims). Today, sectarian expansion, fuelled by clashes that are no longer discreet or undeclared between the Sunnah and the Shia, is on the increase, gravely jeopardizing the spiritual and cultural unity of the Muslim Ummah and constituting a hard core of tension and mistrust within Islamic 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 seriousness, sincerity and sense of responsibility it calls for. 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 (jurisprudence) Closer Together**, approved by the Islamic Summit meeting along with the mechanisms of its implementation. As one of these mechanisms, the **Supreme Consultative Council for the Rapprochement of Islamic Jurisprudence Schools** was created under the aegis of ISESCO and brought together a select group of scholars from different Islamic schools of thought.

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 kindling sectarian strife and endeavoring at all costs to advocate a sectarian philosophy that promotes such division, the result being the grave crises and hotbeds of instability that have erupted in many parts of the Islamic world.

There is no denying that the wars and conflicts tearing to shreds the unity of the Islamic world and undermining its entity are mostly the fruit of a sectarian expansionism that aspires to lay claim to the Islamic world from east to west, a design that is certainly doomed to failure: [*For the scum disappears like froth cast out; while that which is for the good of mankind remains on earth.*]⁽⁹⁾

(9) *Ar-rad*, verse 17.

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 Islamic countries, and provide a gateway for their penetration of Islamic 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 conditions of Muslim populations, ultimately propelling the Islamic world back into regression or stalling its march towards the future.

A glimpse of the future

These 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?

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 colleagues and students, knowledgeable about modern sciences and the culture of their societies. The financial standing of these teachers needs to be imperatively improved.

Secondly, by modernizing curricula and renovating the schooling system, and by reforming and modernizing university education in terms of the knowledge base, organizational structure, technological structure and 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, political corruption, administrative corruption, and 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 access the information society which represents the gateway to balanced growth, economic prosperity, scientific advancement, creativity and innovation in all fields.

Fourth: the Islamic world cannot achieve stability and sally forth on the path of progress without first fighting the sectarian thought, 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 Islamic 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.

Confronting external challenges

The tumultuous crises gripping the Islamic world today as a result of escalating conflicts and multiple disputes cannot always be attributed to external factors. Let us consider the Palestinian issue for example, already more than 65 years old (since 1948) and the result of Israeli occupation of Palestinian lands, the crimes of war and crimes against humanity committed by Israel against the Palestinian people, the atrocities perpetrated by Israel's repressive regimes, and all the criminal acts and oppressive practices that have weakened the greater Islamic edifice and impacted negatively on the Muslims' present reality, all 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 the conflicts and wars between Muslims.

In this respect, we can mention in this respect 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, to the occupation of parts of the Islamic world such as Palestine, Ceuta and Melilla and the Malwiyya Islands⁽¹⁰⁾ in Morocco, the Azeri province of Nagorno-Karabakh under Armenian occupation, Western Thrace (annexed by Greece and where a Muslim minority is subjected to oppression and persecution),

(10) These are mistakenly known as the Zaffarinas Islands. Attention was drawn to this common widespread error by Professor Abdelwahab Ibn Mansour, the late historian of the Kingdom of Morocco, may he rest in peace.

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, victims of 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 four past decades, since the creation in 1972 of the Organization of the Islamic Conference (now the Organization of Islamic Cooperation) and following the first summit meeting held in Rabat in 1969 at the invitation of His Majesty King Hassan II, may Allah's mercy be upon him, and in close cooperation with his Majesty King Faical Ibn Abdulaziz Al Saoud, may Allah's mercy be upon him.

Reforms required for deliverance

Nine years ago, the Cairo-based Dar al-Shourouq published one of my books under the title '**The Islamic World at the Age of Globalization**'. In this book, I set out three prerequisites for changing conditions in 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, it also involves modernizing public lifestyles in general. I explained that educational systems cannot be developed, nor can scientific research be boosted and encouraged and given a topmost priority status if general conditions in the Islamic 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. I said in my book: *“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.”*

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 Islamic 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.

After clarifying 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 the Muslim Ummah. If most Islamic countries had the sincere desire, strong determination and capacity to carry into action all the decisions and recommendations of the many Islamic conferences, particularly Islamic summit meetings and 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.

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.

Global sustainable development

Recent studies, whether political or socio-economic, set no distinction between these forms of development which are

considered a fully-integrated development process. Countries pursuing economic and social development cannot reach their set goals unless they address political development at the same time and set it as one of their goals. Indeed, no endeavor for economic, social or political development can bear its fruits if it does not rely on solid and broad bases of educational, scientific, technological, cultural and communication development that span the entire Islamic world, from ocean to ocean.

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.

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.

These commitments embody the international determination 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 Islamic societies, achieve a global educational, scientific and cultural sustainable development of

which the fruits would be reaped by the Islamic world in its battle to overcome the millennium challenges.

Millennium Development Goals

Gathered at the World Millennium Summit, the United Nations Member States, all 192 states and no less than 23 international organizations, resolved to achieve the **Millennium Development Goals** by 2015. These are eight main goals that constitute an international programme for global development (**United Nations Development Programme**).⁽¹¹⁾

As we review these noble goals that embody international willpower and provide a broad framework for the achievement of a global sustainable development, we realize that they carry a strong similarity to the goals pursued by ISESCO within its fields of expertise and contained in its successive three-year action plans and in the **10-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.

(11) United Nations Millennium Development Goals, NY, USA.

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.

With the exception of the first axis of the third goal (**addressing the equality of genders**) about which we have some reservations where it contradicts the tenets of the Islamic Sharia (Islamic law), all the other goals enjoy full international consensus.

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 **10-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.

Responsibility of ISESCO in meeting the Millennium Challenges

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 (2013-2015) adopted in December 2012 by the 11th General Conference held early in Riyadh and which aspires to bring about the Islamic world's advancement and meet the millennium challenges.

In education, the plan focuses on two sector-specific priorities which are **developing educational systems in Member States, and consolidating the role of education in consecrating shared human values and in addressing development issues**. From these two priorities flow a number of axes that drive towards supporting global sustainable development in the Islamic world.

In the field of sciences, the new three-year action plan focuses on three sector-specific priorities which are **building scientific and technological capacities to achieve development, preserving the vital environment, and harnessing human and social sciences to reinforce social peace**. These priorities break down into a number of axes that address several issues of relevance and importance.

In culture and communication, the action plan focuses on these two sector-specific priorities: **cultural exchanges and diversity in the service of dialogue, stability and peace, and culture and heritage as instruments of social integration and economic values**. In communication, the plan focuses on the sector-specific priority relating to **building the information and knowledge society and addressing mutual stereotypes**. From this priority flow three related axes.

In terms of sector-specific projects to be jointly carried out with other international, Arab and Islamic partner organizations, ISESCO's plan identified five programmes pertaining to childhood, women, youth and people with special needs, the issues of environment, health and population, cultural and educational action targeting Muslims outside the Islamic world, correcting misconceptions about Islam and Muslims, and higher education and scientific research.

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 the renaissance of the Islamic Ummah.

And since 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 theorizing, 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 Islamic countries to build their capacities and improve the performance levels of national policies in these fields.

However, being this eminent house of expertise with international extensions does not prevent ISESCO from participating in the actual implementation of major civilizational projects and in building the practical, technical and academic capacities of Member States in fields that fall within its scope of action, formulating executive programmes and endeavoring to implement and integrate them in the national endeavors of Member States in educational, scientific, cultural and communication development.

Strategic planning for the future of the Islamic world

Considering that strategic planning of the future of the Islamic world is a solid pillar of the action of the Islamic Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization, ISESCO has so far developed sixteen (16) 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 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 to 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 **10-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 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 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 fora 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 10-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 the 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 Muslim world, develop a comprehensive strategy in order to utilize their expertise and prevent brain migration phenomenon.*
3. *Entrust the General Secretariat to study the creation of an OIC Award for Outstanding Scientific Achievements by Muslim scientists.*
4. *Call upon Islamic 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 Tunis Phase of the World Summit on the Information Society, in which all Muslim 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 Muslim 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 Malaysia (IIUM).*

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 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.*

These were the commitments made by the OIC Member States at the 3rd Extraordinary Islamic Summit meeting in the hope of meeting the millennium challenges that besiege the Islamic world. ISESCO also undertook to contribute to the implementation of some of these commitments which fall under its broad scope of action. ISESCO's action plans, particularly the previous three-year action plan (2010-2012) and the current one, cover all these fields with no exception, and for that reason we chose at ISESCO to derive our inspiration from the OIC's 10-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 2013-2015.

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.

For these considerations, ISESCO considers the Islamic world's development to meet the millennium challenges in its fields of

action 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 and laboratories of universities, 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, and within a framework of good governance, social justice and respect for human rights that Islam guaranteed for all mankind.

