



## Challenges for Change: The Role of the Organization of the Islamic Conference (OIC) in the Islamic World

Ekmeleddin Ihsanoglu , Joanne J. Myers

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### Introduction

**JOANNE MYERS:** Good morning. I'm Joanne Myers, Director of Public Affairs Programs. On behalf of the Carnegie Council, I would like to thank you all for joining us this morning.



[Joanne J. Myers](#)

Today it is a great pleasure to welcome His Excellency, Secretary-General of the Islamic Conference, Ekmeleddin Ihsanoglu. He will be discussing "Challenges for Change: The Role of the OIC in the Islamic World."

I also want to thank Ambassador Wahab, the Permanent Observer of the OIC to the United Nations, for suggesting that we host the secretary-general.

For centuries, there has been a struggle between the Orient and the Occident, between the East and the West, but never more so than at the present time. The lack of mutual understanding that plagues so much of the world, and in particular the misperceptions that exist between Islamic and Western society, is one of the major issues that merits our attention today.

As a leading multilateral Islamic organization, the [Organization of the Islamic Conference](#), also known as the OIC, has a major role to play both within the Islamic world and without. The overriding mission is to help its 57 member countries face and adapt to the profound challenges of the 21st century. Representing over 1 billion Muslims around the globe, this intergovernmental organization celebrated its 38th anniversary on September 25.

In coming together, the member states decided that if they combined their efforts, pooled their resources, and spoke with one voice, they would be able to safeguard their interests and to ensure the progress and well-being of Muslims everywhere. To be most effective, they are focusing their efforts in OIC countries by working on issues central to politics, economics, science, culture, and trade. In addition, they hope to initiate a dialogue with the outside world to develop methods to improve the image of Islam and devise tactics to seize the initiative from deviants and terrorists that sully our notion of these countries and their religion.

I know that His Excellency Secretary-General Ihsanoglu and the OIC have been promoting East-West dialogue as a top priority. Many questions still remain. For example, will the leaders of the member countries be able to formulate solutions to the plethora of problems that exist? Can they promote

tolerance, equality, and development? In the end, will the OIC member states be able to have a more constructive dialogue with non-member nations, which is the first and vital step required if we hope to achieve a better and more peaceful world?

In addressing these and other issues, I know we are all very eager to listen to what the secretary-general has to say. At this time, I ask that you join me in giving a very warm welcome to our guest, His Excellency Ekmeleddin Ihsanoglu.

Thank you for joining us.

## Remarks

**EKMELEDDIN IHSANOGLU:** Good morning, ladies and gentlemen. I am really delighted to be here in this prestigious institute. I am more delighted to see that the interest of this institution for foreign relations is coupled with ethics, something we really need to practice in our difficult times.

I accepted this kind invitation to address such a distinguished gathering as I think nowadays we need more to understand each other, because all of us are going through difficult times— difficult times because of the perceptions that are formulated. Some of these perceptions do not relate to reality. This is where the problem starts. Some of these perceptions are formulated by certain schools of thought. I am speaking of the two sides. They want us not to understand each other and use their knowledge in a way conducive not to understanding, but to misunderstanding.

I have been asked to speak about the organization that I have the honor to be the secretary-general of and its role, as it has been described here, "Challenges for Change: The Role of the OIC in the Islamic World."

Before doing so, let me just give you some basic information about OIC, where it stands. Then I would like to speak on the challenges and, in an attempt to meet these challenges, what we are doing, what we are planning, and what we have done so far. Then I will have the pleasure of answering your questions.

OIC, as it stands today, is the second intergovernmental organization after the United Nations. It has 57 member countries and five observers: As you can imagine, it includes the Arab countries, from Morocco to Iraq; many African countries, spread across the regions of South Sahara, East Africa, West Africa; Central Asian countries; countries in Southeast Asia, South Asia —Pakistan, Bangladesh, Maldives—and then you have Turkey, Albania, both members of OIC. You also have two countries here in this hemisphere—Suriname and Guyana.

Among the five observer member countries, the Russian Federation joined in an observer capacity in 2005. Last June, President [Bush](#) announced that he is going to appoint a special envoy to OIC.

OIC, as any other intergovernmental organization, deals with a variety of activities. It has many subsidiary organs, specialized organs, which deal with different sorts of activities, from development-bank institutions to those working in the fields of culture, science, historical research, academic, statistical, and economic research, et cetera.

To put my words in a better context, let me tell you that I am the first secretary-general to be elected democratically, if this is a proper qualification. Beforehand, secretaries-general were selected by consensus or by arrangement among member countries. I am the first secretary-general who sought election within OIC and, out of three candidates, won this position. I think that makes a little bit of difference, which I hope everybody appreciates.

Today the Muslim world stands at a historical crossroads, amidst global changes and challenges, with immense repercussions for the Muslim world itself and the world at large. These repercussions, these

changes and challenges the Muslim world is facing, not only affect Muslims themselves and the vast geography which I described, but also affect the world at large.

What we see of bad or good, positive or negative developments in our part of the world have an immediate influence on others all over the world.

So we are going through, really, a difficult time. If I may borrow the catchy title of [Greenspan's new book](#), this is the age of turbulence which we are going through. The Muslim world is trying, through this collective will which is represented by OIC, to change itself for the better.

Here, in this context, I would like to say that I do believe that changes and challenges can only be dealt with through a forward-looking strategic vision that empowers the Muslim world to tackle these problems by its collective will and joint action.

To understand the challenges the Muslim world is facing, we have to go a little bit beyond the surface, beyond the appearance of things which we are seeing today here and there. It is no secret to anybody. We have to go beyond what we see today—conflicts, wars, problems, crises—to see why this is happening, what the reasons are behind this emanating from within the Muslim world and imposed from outside the Muslim world. Without making this analysis, I think our understanding of these problems will be not sound; it will be a superficial assessment.

To understand the problems of the Muslim world, we have to go back at least two centuries, to see that the Muslim world was one of the parts of the world outside Europe which faced the outcome of the Industrial Revolution. The history of nations, the history of civilizations, went parallel. You can always say that this part of the Mediterranean, along with south and north, east and west—Central Asia, South Asia, India, China, and Japan—had parallel civilizations. In certain periods of history, you have advancement here, you have a brilliant age here, you have a dark age here, et cetera, et cetera. This is well known for us all.

But what made the difference in the course of the history of mankind was the Industrial Revolution, which happened in England, France, Germany, Holland, and the north of Italy. Then, from this triangle, it spread east and west. It went to Russia, and then other nations started to deal with this—the Japanese, the Ottomans, et cetera. Some of them failed; some of them succeeded.

But the Muslim world was one of those that really could not cope with the outcome of the Industrial Revolution. This empowered the Europeans to conquer these lands and the Age of Colonization started.

So emanating from within you have this lack of progress and underdevelopment, which carried on until the First World War, the Second World War, until many countries became independent. You have this inertia coming from within. But at the same time, you have certain European powers that dominated these countries, and these countries became colonies.

Then regimes started in independent countries. Of course, national governments started to fall. We had good starts in some countries, where a kind of constitutional monarchy or republican democracy started. But immediately these regimes failed, and coups d'etat took place, dictatorial parties, first formed on the Nazi model and then adopting the Soviet model, under the banner of a mixture of socialism and nationalism, and so on.

Development didn't go in the proper direction. Dictators and autocrats tried to do their own vision of development in their countries, which were built on personal cults and other considerations.

This is why the Muslim world came to this point. Then the interference of superpowers, the balance between the Soviet Union and the Western camp, gave some margin of political maneuvering in parts of the Muslim world. Then we came to the end of this balance by the fall of the [Berlin Wall](#).

The fall of the Berlin Wall started a new era in the West. Here, you have a search for a balance. This is at least my reading. The sense of balance in the Western world had a problem, because the overweight on the other side had already disappeared, and there were attempts to try to find how this balance could be readdressed, what the next threat to the Western world would be. When you go to statements of [Mrs. Thatcher](#) and others, you can feel that search. Then you have the great theories of [Francis Fukuyama](#) about [the end of history](#), Professor [Huntington](#)'s article and then his book on [the clash of civilizations](#). These, in my understanding, were a search for the future: What would be the potential threats for the West?

What has happened—this is unfortunate for Muslims—is that Islam has become the real threat, the great threat. Of course, 9/11 was the unfortunate reason for considering this opinion, which I think is not true. But this is a different subject.

The challenges emanating from within: The Muslim world faces, as I said, setbacks which result from economic problems, insufficient human development, inadequate education systems.

Where does OIC stand to solve these problems? This was the question, where I started thinking when I was elected secretary-general. Of course, OIC existed for almost 35 years before I came to the job. But it was going by a kind of action/reaction, addressing certain political issues. There were economic projects, et cetera. But there was no kind of overall conceptualization of the problem.

I tried to do that. I don't know how far I succeeded, but at least I managed to present to the summit which was convened in December 2005 a blueprint for a ten-year plan of action. I have to, in a few lines, explain to you how this happened.

I had the golden occasion, given by the then-crown prince of Saudi Arabia, whom we invited for a summit, and building on this, I invited around 100 scholars, political scientists, strategists, economists, scholars from different disciplines, academic disciplines, and some leaders who have experience in development. We organized the meeting in a way that we had a fixed agenda, three days of brainstorming. From this, we came out with an extensive report. Then we reduced this report, or crystallized it, distilled it, into a ten-year plan of action, which addresses different problems of the Muslim world.

I think this is, in a way, a revolutionary change of paradigm in the Muslim world. For the first time, there is an official document which encourages the Muslim world to have good governance, to have an independent body on human rights.

A few days back, one of the representatives of the OIC here in New York, in the General Assembly, was telling me that for years they had instruction from the [member] countries to avoid these words—"good governance," "human rights"—and to fight against these concepts. Now you can see that the Muslim world leaders committed to such concepts of changing to good governance, human rights.

I am sure this will not happen in one day. We should not expect this to change in one day. But this will happen in the long run. Now we have a basis for this.

Second—there are many others, but I am just giving the salient points—we have agreed that Islam is the religion of tolerance and moderation. I think this caption includes a lot. As we all know, we are going through a difficult time, a time of turbulence, where radical movements are hijacking Islam. The reaction in the West to these radical movements is also demonizing Islam. The Islam we see today, depicted here and there, has nothing to do with the doctrine itself, the historic facts themselves, the literature, or the practice of people for centuries. This is a totally different, deformed understanding on both sides.

So we are working on that.

Related to this, terrorism and combating terrorism has become a permanent issue on the agenda of OIC.

When we come to the social and economic agenda, I think the ten-year plan of action has depicted a very wide scope of cooperation in this field. I do believe that underdevelopment, backwardness in socioeconomic development progress, is the key to all the problems in the Muslim world.

When you look to the vast geography, you cannot speak about one monolithic Muslim world. You have countries which have very much progressed, and now they have developed their industry, developed their economy, to a great extent. They became a partner in the international economy, a partner of international society, in general terms. You have countries that are aspiring to do so.

But you have so many countries that are still either going through a tribal society structure or a ruler society structure, a pre-industrial society structure. Here is a social problem, because within these kinds of societies, you cannot expect to have first-class democracy à la America or à la Scandinavian or European kind of multiparty system, despite the fact that the elites in these countries are for these values. I have no doubt about that. The elites in these countries are for these values.

But we cannot expect that advanced institutions of governance would be implemented or implanted in societies which are far behind the level of development that can accommodate this. This is why to have this kind of development is a must for us. We have really to see to it that we don't expect these societies to come forward with all that we believe for developed societies, for a multiparty system, and for the values that the West is advocating.

So when you look to this document, you find plenty of projects and plenty of objectives with which we tried at OIC to make it parallel or to make it related to the [Millennium Development Goals](#) (MDGs), which were accepted in the United Nations. My argument there was that our 57 countries are members here, in OIC, but they are also members of the United Nations. They already have agreed on the MDGs, so we should really correlate our program with the United Nations.

The foremost among these projects which were stipulated by the ten-year plan of action was the Poverty Alleviation Fund. The Poverty Alleviation Fund is a fund to help with the alleviation of poverty. It is a fund of \$10 billion. It was announced at the end of May, the first of June. We have around \$1.5 billion-to-\$2 billion now already pledged, and we are building up this.

One of the major objectives is to develop economies and enhance trade between OIC countries, and their system of preferential trade, which is supported by the [\[Islamic\] Development Bank](#), et cetera.

On the social level, I think one of our major objectives is to fight pandemic diseases. We have been cooperating with [WHO](#) (World Health Organization), [UNICEF](#), and other UN institutions. We have made some success in fighting polio. There were about five or six OIC countries which were suffering from polio; now there are around two. We hope to finish with these two. The target is Nigeria, because it is the source of this problem. I am planning at the beginning of next year to fly to Nigeria. The director of WHO will join me. We will try to make an effort there to get rid of the polio.

Malaria, tuberculosis, AIDS, et cetera, are all on our agenda. Here I must say that we are receiving very good support from the international community. We managed to have the first meeting of ministers of health last June. The American Department of Health showed great interest in this. Two weeks ago, I was in Washington and I had the pleasure of meeting the secretary of health, who has clearly expressed his department's willingness to cooperate with us in fighting these pandemic diseases. We welcome this. I think we are going to act together, to a great extent.

Also among the objectives of this ten-year plan of action is to give special care to science and technology, to R&D [research and development]. We are encouraging the capable countries to increase their R&D expenditure to reach 1 percent, which is half of what an almost-advanced country would spend for R&D. This is the first time in OIC that such concepts appear in any document. We have it here now, under the authority of the summit. I can see that some countries are heading towards increasing their expenditure

for R&D. Turkey, three or four years back, was 0.6 percent. The other day, I was told it became 0.9 percent, which is around 1 percent. I am sure other countries, hopefully, will follow this.

Coming to other important social aspects of this plan of action, women, families, children, last November we managed to organize the first ministerial meeting on women in OIC. That was in Istanbul. We are working on this now, to gradually build up a better understanding of empowerment of women, allowing women to have more share in decision making, a better position in society, to solve this misunderstanding, which mainly comes not from the religion itself; it comes from social values predominant in societies, which have nothing to do with Islam.

I know we have ladies among us who are very much interested in this, so let me just say that many of these manifestations or practices against the freedom of women have nothing to do with religion. They are contrary to religion. But these are customs. This is sometimes customary law, which dates back in the societies. It has nothing to do with the emancipation Islam brought to women in the seventh century. It was ahead of any other religion or civilization, until the 20th century, the beginning of the 20th century. I think this is a scholarly fact which is well known by specialists on Islam.

These are, ladies and gentlemen, some of the challenges the Muslim world is going through in this age of turbulence. These are some of the proposals for how to deal with these challenges.

As for the relations between Islam and the West—I think this is one of the questions raised here—as a student of history, I must say that I became astonished to see that theories now are constructed that Islam has always been targeting the West, that there is something called Islam which has a mastermind from the seventh century until today, and this mastermind is telling Muslims, "Go and attack the West," and this mastermind has asked the Muslim to go and invade Western societies with poor immigrants who cannot find jobs in their countries and go for a better life in the West—or the Western countries ask them to come and do work which their own people don't like to do.

I think this is really a very wrong simplification of the history of mankind. I am really astonished to see that people are doing this.

I think this is not the case. The case is that we have differences, but we have commonalities. The three religions, Judaism, Christianity, and Islam, all emanate from the same tradition, the Abrahamic tradition. So we have a common root.

You cannot understand this common root until you compare these three religions with religions of the Far East. When you compare the three religions, Judaism, Christianity, and Islam, you find many common things among those. Of course, there are differences. But when you compare the three of them with Buddhism, Confucianism, Hinduism, et cetera, you find that they are two different categories. This is proof that we have more in common than we have differences. This is number one.

Number two, when you look to the two civilizations and how they developed, you find also a rational root for both. Here you have the religious root and the next example I will give you is the rational root, common root.

The rational common root is Greek philosophy. The Muslims, from the second century, third century of the Islamic era, or [Hijri](#) era, started, by the expansion of the Muslim world, to acknowledge the importance of the Greek legacy. They started translating the works of [Aristotle](#), the works of [Plato](#), [Socrates](#), and works of [Galen](#), [Hippocrates](#), and others in physics and medicine and mathematics—all these.

On this basis of Greek philosophy, the Islamic tradition in philosophy formed, and you have great names like [al-Farabi](#), [Avicenna](#), [Averroes](#), and many others. These people, who wrote Islamic philosophy, who translated Greek philosophy, who produced Islamic philosophy—they are the ones who influenced the European Renaissance. Their books were translated into Latin, translated into Hebrew. These texts were used in nascent European universities. This is how [Thomas Aquinas](#) formulated his theology, on this

basis. So you have here another root, the rational root.

So Islam and Christianity, Islam and Judaism don't conflict. There have been good episodes and bad episodes. This is a very good academic subject to discuss. But to conceive that there is a mastermind behind Islam which asks Muslims to target the West, attack them, knock them down—that does not exist. What happens—terrorist attacks, 9/11 and others—this is the work of marginal groups. We have to understand these groups, that they don't represent Islam. They represent themselves. These are terrorist people, like any other terrorist, like the IRA [[Irish Republican Army](#)], like [Baader Meinhof](#), like the [Red Brigades](#), like whatever terrorist group in this part of the world or that part of the world. We should not really think that all Muslims are like [bin Laden](#). This will only help bin Laden and his people. It will not help anybody else.

This is why I am saying that we have in common a very vast background, common roots, the Abrahamic tradition, the Greek philosophy, more than today, in the 21st century.

I was the other day attending a ceremony where Chancellor [Merkel](#) was given an award. Dr. [Henry Kissinger](#) was there. He made a small speech. He said that the center of gravity has moved to Asia. To hear Dr. Kissinger saying that the center of gravity has moved to Asia is an important assessment.

I don't go to that extent. But I am saying that we are going through a reshaping of the world. A new configuration of the world is to come. We don't know how this will be shaped, but it's coming. In this new configuration of the world, it's for the benefit of the Muslim world, to start with, it's for the benefit of the Western world, it's for the benefit of the United States of America, not to have this theory of clash, brinkmanship. It's better that we really understand each other better and we try to build bridges, to get rid of these prejudices and wrong perceptions. Then we have to tackle these problems in a different way.

I think there is a need for creativity in dealing with the hot issues which the Muslim world is suffering from and the whole world is suffering from.

Madame Chairman, thank you.

**JOANNE MYERS:** As you said, in this age of turbulence, it's very nice to hear a moderate voice. So thank you for your comments.

### Questions and Answers

**QUESTION:** It's a pleasure to hear you this morning, sir. I actually have two questions. It may stem from my lack of understanding of the degree to which the OIC is involved in the political sphere.

The first question: Has the OIC taken a position on the genocide in Darfur?

The second question: Given your statements, which certainly we welcome, that the Islamic terrorists, the radical elements of the Islamic world, are not centrist, that they are marginal, has the OIC taken steps, or is there a ten-year action plan within the OIC, to remove or minimize or marginalize still further these radical terrorist groups?

Thank you, sir.

**EKMELEDDIN IHSANOGLU:** Thank you, madam, for these two important questions.

On Darfur, we have announced a position on that. You can kindly go through this on our [website](#). I won't go through all these details now.

We are encouraging now the Sudanese government to cooperate with the United Nations. We have been

working with the government of Sudan to solve these problems. We acknowledge that there is a human crisis there.

I don't think "genocide" would be the proper word to use in Darfur, under the international definition of "genocide," because there is no planned, systematic killing of a certain race or ethnicity. I think it's a clash between people living in the same area and a failure of solving this clash, where the international community had to intervene.

We are supporting the international community. We are supporting the United Nations' decisions, the Security Council's decisions. We are working with the United Nations. We are working with the Sudanese government. I think now there is the prospect of cooperating with the European Union on this.

Coming to your second question, I would just ask a simple question: Why are you saying "Islamic terrorists"? Why not say "terrorists"?

**QUESTIONER:** You're right. The Baader Meinhof, the Red Brigades were terrorist groups—

**EKMELEDDIN IHSANOGLU:** IRA. We don't say "Catholic"—

**QUESTIONER:** At present, when one considers terrorist groups that are active around the world, they tend to come from that radical wing of Islam.

**EKMELEDDIN IHSANOGLU:** I agree with you, but I don't agree with your qualification. Why here, in this case, do we qualify and in other cases—I think we will better help ourselves by not qualifying, because that gives them the justification they want. They want to go to the people—public opinion in the Muslim world—and say, "Look, we are Islamic. We are defenders of the faith against these infidels."

So, you being part of the infidels, please don't help them. [Laughter]

**QUESTIONER:** [Not at microphone]

**EKMELEDDIN IHSANOGLU:** That is the second part. But I hope you understand me, madam. We should not really qualify them, or we will help them. And we should not help them. We should not give them the credit they ask for. They are asking for this credit. We should not give them this credit.

Coming to the second point, this is a most difficult question. I think there is no single answer; there is no single way of doing this. This is a big question. This is the first time in the history of Islam that we have such a curse. This is the first time in the history of humanity that we have such a curse called "terrorism," whether it be Islamic, Christian, whatever. But terrorism as such—this is the first time we have this, in the 20th century, and we are going into the 21st century and we are suffering from this.

How to deal with this? I will tell you, from my point of view, at least what we can do and what we are trying to do.

First of all, we are trying to get out of the hands of these people this qualification of "Islamic." We say, "You are not Islamic." We say, "You are not representing Islam." We say, "Islam does not stand for what you are doing, and what you are doing is against the basic tenets of Islam, as it is enshrined in the Holy Qur'an and the sayings of the Prophet," and we quote this for them.

Of course, here, we need to have concerted efforts. We are doing this through political statements which I make, through decisions we take at the ministerial level, the summit level. But more important, we have to do this through a religious instrument, because these guys are using religion. You cannot address them or argue with them politically. Politically, they win, thanks to international developments.

I will give you one example. With the [Korean hostages](#) [held by the Taliban in Afghanistan], I made a

statement saying that abducting civilians, noncombatants, is against Islam and this is not Islamic. They stopped killing. This was first.

We have an academy of jurisprudence, the National Academy of Islamic Jurisprudence. It's a getting-together of scholars. I asked them to issue a religious statement. They based it on Holy Qur'an and jurisprudence, the tenets, et cetera. Then they [the Taliban] stopped everything.

Then the Koreans came to me. I told them, "You have to talk with this voice. Now they will not carry on killing because if they kill your people, they are under the verdict that this is against Islam."

That happened; they stopped killing. Then they started negotiating with them, and then they released them.

This is one example. It succeeded. It doesn't mean that every time this will succeed. But there are different contexts.

So there are ways of doing this. I think one of them is, under the umbrella of the United Nations, we have to agree on the definition of "terrorism." We have to agree on the definition of "terrorism," and we have to have international concerted efforts.

**QUESTION:** Mr. Secretary-General, you stated that part of the ten-year plan talks about the importance of human rights and civil liberties. How meaningful is that commitment in the ten-year plan unless the OIC takes some forceful action against admittedly Islamic states, such as Saudi Arabia and Iran, where there are great abuses of civil rights and human liberties?

**EKMELEDDIN IHSANOGLU:** The human rights issue is a difficult issue, because it's loaded with many different values. But there are basic values of human rights, rights of speech, rights of social activities, organizations, and other rights which are enshrined in the [Universal Declaration](#).

I think we have to go gradually here. We cannot, as I said in other cases, expect the U.S. standard or Scandinavian standard on these issues in one day. It needs to be long-term.

What we managed in the ten-year plan of action was to have this concept. If we have time, I can read you what we have written on that. But you can find this on our website. The most important thing is to establish an independent body on human rights. We are going through this now. We are changing our charter. This is one of the radical reforms we are going through in OIC. We hope that this will be adopted at the next summit, in the middle of March, in Dakar in Senegal. When this charter gets into force in the middle of March, we will start working on establishing this body.

I cannot guarantee you that in May of next year, one month or two months after the summit, everything will be wonderful. But we will start the process. It will take time. By then, I think maturity is coming. There are now groups—NGOs, intellectuals, media—that are fighting for these values. In some places they are vocal and they can express their voice, their mind. In some places they cannot.

But I tell you, this is going on. There is no other way. This will come. But we have to be a little bit patient. We have to see that it differs from country A to country B because of the difference of background, of the legacies they have, the historical process they went through. They are totally different cases, so there will be different tracks.

But I think the target is towards these values.

**QUESTION:** Thank you, Mr. Secretary-General, for mentioning the polio work that we at Rotary International do with every state in the world. Particularly, as we speak right now, we are immunizing again in northern Nigeria and also in India and Pakistan.

Thank you also for your brilliant analysis of what makes us similar to the Islamic states—the Abraham factor, which makes Islam primarily a Western religion and different from the Far Eastern religions.

My question is about another unifying factor which we are working on. Our 32,000 clubs are all committed to helping solve the world water crisis. My question is—I think I know your answer—about the unifying factor of climate change and how all nations are addressing it. Would you just comment on that? It's so terribly important.

**EKMELEDDIN IHSANOGLU:** We, of course, recognize these two issues, the water crisis and the climate change. We think that we have to reach a consensus on these two issues through international cooperation, through the UN framework. The water crisis is one of the crises in the Middle East. What has been called once "the Fertile Crescent" is no longer as fertile as it was, because of the lack of water.

As for climate change, I must say that some OIC countries will be the great sufferers from these changes because of the sheer fact of their geographical locations.

We will certainly be cooperative with any international agency on these two issues.

**QUESTION:** Mr. Secretary-General, it is a great honor and very heartening to hear you speak and tell us what is going on within the Islamic world. This is what we've been hoping is going on, and here you are, leading a very rational approach to all the issues in the world today.

Could you expand on what oil-rich countries are doing for their poorer neighbors? For example, I believe that the Dubai sheikh established a \$10 billion fund to encourage science and technology in Islamic countries, last May. Are there other efforts like this, both within the OIC—you mentioned something that is beginning, but so much more could be done—and independent efforts, as in Dubai?

**EKMELEDDIN IHSANOGLU:** Thank you, madam. Thank you for your kind words.

Yes, you are right; Dubai Sheikh [Maktoum](#) has established this \$10 billion endowment. I have met him, and we have started cooperating with him on certain projects.

I must say that this is a very courageous project. It aims to help education and cultural activities, and address the needs of the Muslim world mainly in these fields. That helps a lot in developing these societies and bringing in new intelligentsia, a new elite, which will help in spreading the modern understanding of the societies and help modernize the societies.

I tried to explain that the problem of the Muslim world is the failure of modernization, and so there are attempts to bring these societies up to the level of modernized, advanced societies.

Before the endowment of the sheikh of Dubai, we had envisaged, in December 2005, in the summit which I spoke about, a \$10 billion endowment—a \$10 billion fund for the alleviation of poverty. This has been already established, last May, the end of May, beginning of June. Today we have already pledged \$1 billion from the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia. We are getting near to \$2 billion now. I don't have the exact figures, but we are above \$1.5 billion, near to \$2 billion.

We hope that other endowments and other big funds will come.

I must say that we are ready to cooperate with international funds on projects which help in developing modernization, in accelerating development in the Muslim world, because we see this as the way out of this crisis, which everybody is suffering from.

**JOANNE MYERS:** Under your leadership, I think the West and Islamic worlds have a lot to look forward to. I thank you very much for being with us this morning.

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