

Muslim Ummah
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OIC

Wake up, OIC!

The News

The 31st Islamic Foreign Ministries Conference ended in Istanbul with a whimper like the previous thirty conferences, after putting on record the usual, and oft repeated speeches of foreign ministers on the issues of Iraq, Palestine and Kashmir etc and issuing a bland declaration at the end of the conference. That's about all these conferences have been doing since OIC came into being in 1969 after the burning of Al-Aqsa mosque by Israel. The main objective was to punish Israel for this sacrilege, and to help Palestinians in their resistance movement against Israeli occupation of their territories. It could not achieve these objectives beyond speeches and declarations because it failed to foster pan Islamic unity and solidarity to meet challenges faced by the *Ummah* in a spirit of co-operation and collective action. The reasons are many, but the cardinal flaw has been the affiliation of major Muslim nations with power blocks of the United States, and the erstwhile Soviet Union and now Russia. They are dependent on these blocks for economic and military assistance, which are crucial for their survival. They cannot take any independent action bypassing these power blocks, and per force have to tow their line overtly or covertly. Other than this, kings and dictators rule most Muslim nations; they are under-developed, illiterate and poor. These are great impediments in the path of their unity and progress. OIC, which has been sponsored and funded by kings, and dictators cannot obviously demand change in Muslim countries' system of governments, nor can it plead for the freedom of thought and action by the *Ummah* in an enlightened and democratic framework.

The Istanbul Declaration endorsed the concept of "enlightened moderation" in Muslim countries and called for early establishment of a Commission of Eminent Persons to enable the *Ummah* to meet the challenges of the 21st Century. The communique paid special tribute to President Pervez

Musharraf for his timely and important initiative of "enlightened moderation", which

had been adopted by the 10th Islamic Summit Conference. The conference felt that the establishment of the Commission of Eminent Persons was inevitable for meeting the challenges facing the *Ummah*. The commission will formulate a comprehensive plan for promoting universally, and in particular within Islamic societies, the policies and programmes for enlightened moderation and true emancipation of



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show resolve, rise above self-interests for our common good in the very spirit that Islam teaches us. The world at large, and the powers that be, must realize that confrontation and use of force is no more an option available to bring ultimate peace. Justice must be done, and be seen to be done. Let it not be said by our future generations that we, the leaders of today took humanity towards an apocalypse.

One can only appeal to OIC to "wake up" after its long slumber and do something worthwhile for the Muslim Ummah, which is passing through a great crisis of identity and the image of its religion. The big powers, which are not seriously addressing the causes of unrest in the Middle East, Chechnya and other trouble spots, are also indirectly promoting terrorism against their own people

The report and recommendations of the Commission would be considered by the extra ordinary session of the Islamic Summit Conference to be held at the end of 2004. This is a very positive development, provided these lofty ideas could be implemented in the sea of darkness, which has surrounded the Muslim *Ummah*.

The concepts of "enlightenment" and "moderation" are the two values that are presently alien to Muslim nations. Expounding his doctrine of enlightened moderation, President Musharraf says OIC has to be restructured to meet the challenges of the 21st century, to fulfil the aspirations of the Muslim world and take us towards our emancipation. The Committee of eminent persons being formed to rec-

ommend a restructured OIC is indeed a big step in the right direction. We have to show resolve, rise above self-interests for our common good in the very spirit that Islam teaches us. The world at large, and the powers that be, must realize that confrontation and use of force is no more an option available to bring ultimate peace. Justice must be done, and be seen to be done. Let it not be said by our future generations that we, the leaders of today took humanity towards an apocalypse.

It may also be emphasized that the "Commission of eminent persons" should be entrusted with the task to open the doors of *ijtihad* and set up a universal institution, which could reinterpret the Qur'aanic concepts of religious tolerance as against prejudice, sectarian harmony as against conflict, peace and respect for human life as against terrorism and enlightenment as against fundamentalism. Unfortunately, terrorism has become synonymous with Islam the world over, due to terror unleashed by some misguided radical Muslims associated with fundamentalist *jihadi* groups Al-Qaeda and others, which have mushroomed to retaliate against the suppression of Muslim freedom movements in Palestine by Israel, aided and abetted by the US;

in Iraq, now under the occupation of America and its European allies; in Chechnya by the Russian government. The suppressed Muslim nations, which cannot wage a conventional war against world powers, have resorted to hit and run terror attacks to take their revenge, killing thousands of innocent people in the process.

The time has come that OIC, which has been lying dormant since its inception should play a pro-active and collective role to crush terrorist groups operating from within Muslim countries, and project the correct image of Islam as a tolerant and peaceful campaign through an international mass media. OIC can launch its own satellite channel and news agencies for the press and electronic media for this purpose. It may be recalled that shortly after the inception of OIC, a news agency was launched at Jeddah for the positive coverage of news from Muslim nations, but it was wound up after a few years, probably due to lack of interest, paucity of funds and mismanagement. Should affluent Muslim countries pool their resources, they can set up a powerful satellite TV Channel broadcasting in several languages of Islamic countries, as well as in English and French, they can play a historic role in boosting Islam's positive image worldwide and counter anti-Islam propaganda by western media, which is projecting a handful of terrorists as the sole embodiment of Islamic teachings. This propaganda can only be dispelled by a forceful media campaign launched by OIC, which represents seventy-five Muslim countries. One can only appeal to OIC to "wake up" after its long slumber and do something worthwhile for the Muslim *Ummah*, which is passing through a great crisis of identity and the image of its religion. The big powers, which are not seriously addressing the causes of unrest in the Middle East, Chechnya and other trouble spots, are also indirectly promoting terrorism against their own people.