[**Pakistan and the OIC**](https://www.dawn.com/news/1680584/pakistan-and-the-oic)

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PAKISTAN will be hosting the [48th meeting of the OIC](https://www.dawn.com/news/1679875) Conference of Foreign Ministers (CFM) from March 22 to 23 this year, which will coincide with the 75th anniversary celebrations of Pakistan Day.

This event will highlight Pakistan’s consistent commitment to the principles and purposes of the OIC, in particular to foster greater unity and solidarity within the Muslim world so as to address the multiple challenges facing the ummah.

As a founding member of the OIC, which was established in September 1969 in response to the Israeli terrorist attacks on [Al Aqsa Mosque](https://www.dawn.com/news/1635960) in occupied Jerusalem, Pakistan has been at the forefront of the OIC’s efforts to champion Muslim causes — from freedom of the Palestinian and Kashmiri peoples struggling under foreign occupation, to upholding the rights of Muslims in Myanmar and Bosnia, to ending conflicts in Muslim lands such as Afghanistan, Yemen, Syria and Libya. Pakistan has also played a key role in the OIC, the second largest international organisation after the UN with 57 member states, to combat transnational threats such as Islamophobia, the Covid pandemic and poverty.

A measure of Pakistan’s commitment to the OIC has been its hosting of several events of the organisation, including the Second OIC Summit in 1974 and the Second Extraordinary OIC Summit in 1997, as well as meetings of the CFM in 1970, 1980, 1993 and 2007.

Pakistan is also the headquarters of the OIC Commission on Science and Technology (Comstech) and the Islamic Chamber of Commerce and Industry. Moreover, Pakistan played a pivotal role in the formation of the Islamic Development Bank, the Independent Permanent Human Rights Commission and the Observatory on Islamophobia.

The 48th CFM in Islamabad will be guided by the theme of ‘partnering for unity, justice and development’ and will consider over 100 resolutions on major contemporary issues facing the OIC. Pakistan’s endeavour during the CFM would be to promote greater unity and a common sense of purpose to address multiple challenges before the Muslim world; promote the cause of justice for all Muslims, such as the ones in Palestine and Kashmir; encourage cooperation for the promotion of development and prosperity in the Muslim world in keeping with the SDGs; and ensure complete recovery from the Covid pandemic. From Pakistan’s perspective, the forthcoming CFM would be especially important to underscore two specific issues — the realisation of the right of self-determination of the Kashmiri people and the need to effectively combat the rising threat of Islamophobia.

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For many observers, the OIC has not lived up to its expectations, especially to help resolve the Palestine and Kashmir issues, despite adopting several resolutions and declarations. However, a realistic appraisal of the OIC’s role is required.

The OIC, like other multilateral bodies, does not have any ‘enforcement’ machinery to implement its decisions. It can only rely on moral pressure and persuasion as tools for encouraging states to comply with its decisions. This does not always happen. More importantly, Muslim countries do not have the military, political or economic clout to compel other states to do the OIC’s bidding. Even so, OIC should aspire for greater unity for the organisation to become a force to be reckoned with in the international community.

Accordingly, Pakistan has consistently stressed the need for greater unity and solidarity among OIC members. It has always given preference to OIC issues, at times by overriding its own national interests, such as consistent support for the Palestinian struggle and refusal to recognise Israel unless the two-state solution to the dispute is implemented.

Contrary to the view of some observers, the OIC has forcefully taken up the Kashmir dispute in its deliberations. Of course, due to the reasons mentioned, the OIC is not in a position to enforce its decisions on India, but these decisions do have the force of moral pressure.

Apart from several resolutions on Kashmir, the OIC has set up a [Kashmir Contact Group](https://www.dawn.com/news/1465810), while also appointing a number of inquiry commissions and addressing direct communications with India. These have not only called for the implementation of UN Security Council resolutions for a plebiscite in Kashmir but also for an immediate end to the repression of the Kashmiri people.

Just the fact that India sought to address the CFM in 2019, maintains constant communication with the OIC and desperately seeks to join the organisation, signifies the importance of the moral pressure of the OIC on India.

Another area where Pakistan has taken a leadership role in the OIC is [countering Islamophobia](https://www.dawn.com/news/1680383/pakistan-plays-key-role-in-adoption-of-un-resolution-on-combating-islamophobia). As coordinator of the OIC Group in the Geneva-based UN Human Rights Council, Pakistan has ensured annual adoption of resolutions against defamation of religions ever since the publication of blasphemous cartoons against the Holy Prophet (PBUH).

In 2011, in order to promote universal acceptance of the issue and to bring opposing Western states on board, Pakistan ensured the emergence of consensus on a resolution adopting an action plan to combat Islamophobia, called the Istanbul Process.

After 10 years, this consensus still exists, including on the need to criminalise hate speech against Muslims. Prime Minister Imran Khan took this initiative further during his speech to the UN in 2018, leading to the recognition of [Islamophobia](https://www.dawn.com/news/1507827) as a form of religious and racial discrimination. Due to his efforts, the leaders of Russia, Canada and New Zealand, among others, have endorsed Pakistan’s position.

In the future, Pakistan should also take the lead in the area of science and technology. It already hosts Comstech, which should become the vehicle to revive the past glory of Islam’s contributions in this vital field. In particular, given Pakistan’s achievements in nuclear technology and its track record of the flawless operation of civil nuclear facilities, Pakistan is uniquely placed to offer cooperation, training and education to OIC member states in the peaceful uses of nuclear technology in areas such as power generation, medicine and agriculture. This could be one of the areas that Pakistan should promote in the forthcoming 48th CFM.

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