

OIC Independent Permanent Human Rights Commission concludes its 9th Regular Session in Jeddah held from 01 – 05 May 2016

Jeddah 05 May 2016: The OIC Independent Permanent Human Rights Commission (IPHRC) held its 9th Regular Session in Jeddah, Kingdom of Saudi Arabia (KSA) from 01-05 May 2016. Beside Commission Members, the Session was attended by His Excellency Iyad Ameen Madani, Secretary General of OIC, Dr. Abdul Salam Al Abadi, Secretary General of Islamic Fiqh Academy, Amb. Ismat Jahan, Member of the UN Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women and Dr. Suhair Hassan Al Qureshi, President of Dar Al-Hekmat University, KSA. Representatives of OIC Member and Observer States their NHRIs and media also attended and actively participated in the open proceedings of the Session.

The traditional thematic debate of the Session was held on 4 May 2014 on the subject of “*Impact of Women Empowerment on Sustainable Development of Member States*”. An outcome document on the subject was also adopted by the Commission at the end of the Session.

In his opening remarks in thematic debate, the IPHRC Chairperson, Ambassador Abdul Wahab, mentioned that gender equality and women empowerment in all fields of social, economic and political spheres are imperative from the perspectives of both their human rights as well progress of respective societies. He emphasized that gender sensitive development strategies register stronger economic growth as such an approach enables policymakers to develop appropriate policy responses and actions to ensure equitable distribution of resources, which leads to promotion of just and inclusive societies.

Mr. Iyad Ameen Madani, Secretary General of the OIC, in his statement, reaffirmed that women empowerment remains a key priority for the OIC, not only to ensure their human rights but as an enabler and transformative force for sustainable development, peace and security. He highlighted OIC initiatives, which among others include revision of OPAAW and recently adopted 2nd Ten Year Program of Action, which calls upon all Member States to take practical measures to reduce the maternal mortality rates, incidence of violence against women and improve literacy and labor participation rates among women in Member States. He also advised the Commission to continue to assist the Member States in identifying prevailing gender gaps, integrating women empowerment and importance of family into their Human Rights Education plans, reviewing various institutional frameworks and legislations pertaining to women, family wellbeing and development with a view to improving their enforceability and creating synergies with the gender sensitive international development mechanisms.

While making a realistic assessment of the progress made so far, Commission Members highlighted that, despite numerous international and OIC led initiatives and mechanisms, slow implementation has hampered substantive progress of the cause of development and empowerment of women in Member States. They, accordingly, underlined the need to benchmark the progress on (i) revision of OIC Plan of Action for Advancement of Women (OPAAW) to make it more representative and action oriented by involving civil society and media (ii) creation of synergies between respective national plans and strategies of the Members States and 2nd Ten year Plan of Action (iii) signing and ratification of treaties and agreements in particular the OIC Women Development

Organization by Member States to ensure gender equality and strengthen family well-being. The Commission also expressed willingness to work with the OIC General Secretariat, Islamic Fiqh Academy and other specialized institutions to assist Member States to adopt legal measures and policies to increase the participation of women in all sectors of society.

During the five days session, the Commission had in depth discussion on all items on its agenda including human rights violations in the Occupied Palestinian Territories; civil, political, economic, social and cultural rights in OIC Member States as well as specific mandates given to it by the Council of Foreign Ministers such as Islamophobia and incitement to hatred, Negative impact of unilateral economic sanctions on Member States; Standing Mechanism for monitoring human rights situation in the Indian Occupied Kashmir, human rights situation of Muslim minorities in Myanmar and Central African Republic. The Commission also received briefings and inputs from OIC General Secretariat and experts on these subjects, which were instrumental in making informed and comprehensive decisions and recommendations on these subjects.

IPHRC Members, who recently visited Palestine, briefed the Commission on the appalling human rights situation witnessed in Palestine, which was the manifest result of the worst-ever Israeli occupation regime imposed on them for decades. Detailed report of the visit will be shared with the CFM in due course. The Commission also condemned the recent Israeli assertion of illegitimate claim on the occupied Syrian Golan Heights and urged the international community that such unlawful pronouncements should be out rightly rejected and condemned. IPHRC also called for immediate action by all relevant actors including the Security Council to put an end to the continuing sufferings of innocent Palestinians at the hands of Israeli occupation forces. A detailed press release on the subject is issued separately.

In its deliberations on the situation of Rohingya Muslims, the Commission noted that the initial euphoria, associated with the victory of the National League for Democracy to power under the leadership of Aung San Suu Kyi, has fizzled out. The democratic dividend has not translated into letting up of human rights violations against the persecuted Rohingyas. However, despite initial disappointments, it was agreed that the OIC and IPHRC would continue their attempts to engage with the Myanmar government through formal and informal means, which include public advocacy, humanitarian support and engagement with the civil society to secure basic human rights for the marginalized Rohingyas. Further, the Commission reiterated the need to hold a roundtable conference or a seminar to raise public awareness and mobilize support for the human rights cause of Rohingya Muslims.

The Commission noted that islamophobic incidents were increasing in frequency and severity not just in Europe and the United States but other regions such as Myanmar and CAR mainly due to rise of far right groups and lack of understanding of Islam. It was, therefore, recommended that OIC and IPHRC in collaboration with institutions like King Abdullah International Centre for Interreligious and Intercultural Dialogue should organize interfaith dialogue to dispel misperceptions and promote better understanding of Islam in West and elsewhere. Also, it was suggested that IPHRC may closely follow up on the Istanbul Process, attending its meetings, extending legal assistance to the OIC

member states in the preparation of reports and the fulfilment of obligations arising out of Resolution 16 /18, and conducting related research studies.

As part of its efforts to present Islamic perspective and counter misperceptions on contemporary human rights issues, the Commission discussed and adopted three studies prepared by its sub-committees on the subjects of : (i) *“Women and Men’s inheritance in Islamic Sharia”*; (ii) *“Human Trafficking in OIC Member States”* (with focus on Women and children); and (iii) *“Rights of Minorities in Islam”*. These studies will be presented to the next session of OIC Council of Foreign Ministers for consideration of Member States.

The Special envoy of the OIC Secretary General on Kashmir also briefed the Commission on the human rights violations in the IoK and continuous denial of the Indian Government to receive fact-finding mission to the region. The Commission welcomed his plans to visit Azad Jammu and Kashmir in which he is expected to visit the refugee camps and assess human rights violations by the Indian side, exchange views with the representatives of the government, civil society and media. Both sides also agreed to continue to cooperate on this important subject.

To celebrate the 30th anniversary of the adoption of the Declaration on the Right to Development and to support its effective and consensus universal implementation, the Commission decided to hold its 2016 annual seminar on *‘Right to Development’*. The Seminar will be held in collaboration with the UN Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights and would take place in UAE in October 2016.

As a follow up to the recommendation made in the outcome document of IPHRC’s 2014 Seminar on *“Negative impact of economic and financial sanctions on the full enjoyment of human rights by people of the targeted OIC States”*, endorsed by the 42nd CFM, the Commission reiterated the request to the OIC Secretary General to establish a monitoring mechanism in the General Secretariat to collate data on the consequences of unilateral coercive measures. At the same time, the Commission welcomed the decision of the OIC Secretary General to establish a Working Group comprising of OIC General Secretariat, Islamic Educational Scientific and Cultural Organization and IPHRC, which will compile a matrix/guidelines of best practices for harmonization of national educational strategies of Member States from Human Rights Education (HRE) perspective by the end of 2016. This was one of the key recommendations made during the IPHRC’s 2015 Seminar on HRE.

The Commission held a joint workshop with the US State Department on the implementation of the Human Rights Council Resolution 16/18. The open-ended meeting witnessed an exhaustive discussion among Commission Members and representatives of Member States that covered existing challenges and best practices from different countries. Participants stressed that effective implementation of Res 16/18 requires political commitment at the highest level and emphasized the importance of developing long-term communication channels between civil society and governments in order to improve policies based on feedback and understanding. While highlighting the importance of ensuring freedom of expression as a key to exercising the right to freedom of religion, Commission Members stressed that freedom of expression must be distinguished from negative stereotyping and insults to all religions and religious

communities, which leads to incitement to hatred and discrimination that are legitimate subjects of proscription in International human rights law. Commission Members called upon all stakeholders to make use of Istanbul Process as a shared framework to achieve greater international clarity and understanding around freedom of expression and hate speech, to ensure the uniform application of the prohibitions prescribed in international human rights law for effectively combating the incidents of incitement to hatred and discrimination based on religion.

In his concluding remarks, IPHRC Chairperson, expressed profound gratitude to all Member States including the Government of KSA, which hosts the Commission's Headquarters, and H.E Iyad Amin Madani the OIC Secretary General for their steadfast logistical and moral support in smooth and effective running of the Commission during its crucial formative years. He reaffirmed Commission's firm resolve to working in tandem with the OIC General Secretariat and other specialized institutions for further developing and strengthening of human rights respecting and protecting societies in OIC countries.

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