



**Opening Statement by H.E the Secretary
General
of the OIC**

at the

**Third Regular Session of the OIC
Independent Permanent Human
Rights Commission
(IPHRC)**

**Jeddah October 26,
2013**

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**Distinguished Members of the OIC Independent Permanent Human
Rights Commission,
Distinguished Heads of Missions, Members of the Diplomatic Corps,
Excellencies,
Ladies and Gentlemen,**

Let me take this opportunity to extend a very warm welcome to all of you to the Third Regular Session of the OIC Independent Permanent Human Rights Commission.

I am grateful to the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia for hosting this session and presence of H.E. Ambassador Mohamed Al-Taib, who in his speech has eloquently highlighted the importance of this Commission for the work of OIC. Commitment of Saudi Arabia and other Member States to the work of this Commission remains crucial to achieving desired objectives set out by the Ten Year Programme of Action and the Charter of OIC in the field of human rights.

**Excellencies,
Ladies and Gentlemen,**

As I have repeatedly stated, establishment of IPHRC is a milestone achievement in the four decade long history of OIC. IPHRC was among my priorities when I assumed the office and it provides me with a sense of fulfillment that it has come into being during the period of my tenure.

While I take pride in zealously working for the establishment of this important organ in the OIC, I would like to put on record my sincere acknowledgement and appreciation for the Member States' overwhelming support in creation of this institution in half the time stipulated by the Ten Year Programme of Action. Granting this body the statutory status of an independent organ as well as adoption of its Statute and Rules of Procedures were also done in a remarkably short time.

All these developments reflect the defining characteristics of the new OIC, best summarized as “moderation and modernization process”. I am confident that such developments would ensure the resolute joint Islamic action that was envisioned by the Member States through the OIC Charter, Ten Year Programme of Action and bring added credibility to this respected international organization.

I would also like to put on record my deep appreciation for the work done by the esteemed Members of this Commission. In a very short span of time, they have been able to produce a good set of rules of procedures and have been actively involved in crafting various aspects of their organizational and substantive work mandated by the Member States. Their interaction and participation in various human rights forums and organizations have also been widely appreciated by relevant international actors, which is a source of satisfaction for all of us.

**Excellencies,
Ladies and Gentlemen,**

The importance of this Commission in the OIC cannot be underestimated from any stand point. This advisory mechanism is needed not only for introspection and helping Member States in crafting, devising and implementing appropriate policies that are in line with fundamental human rights but also to dispel the growing misperception about the incompatibility between Islam and human rights.

As a student of history and religion, I firmly oppose this notion. Islam is not merely a body of metaphysical doctrines, or a set of rituals, or even a set of rules of individual conduct. It indeed is a way of life, the basis of which lie rooted in divine revelations; a way of life, which is oriented to doing God’s will and actualizing good and righteousness in human life.

Islam was the first religion that laid down universal fundamental rights for humanity, which are to be observed and respected in all circumstances within or outside the boundaries of an Islamic State. Islam called for full equality among human beings regardless of their race, religion, language, ethnic origin or social status, etc. and placed ‘*hukook ul ibad*’ or ‘rights of the people’ on a very high pedestal.

Distinguished Commission Members,

An important task of the Commission would, therefore, be to bring about, through its work, the relevance of Islam to the problems and concerns of mankind in the present age. As recognized experts in the field of human rights and *a think tank* of the OIC on the subject, you must act to highlight the importance and relevance of Islamic values and teachings to addressing serious challenges faced by the present day humanity.

Your expert advice could help the OIC to formulate policies and chart plans to addressing challenges faced by Ummah at national, regional and international levels in the field of human rights. I would recommend the Commission to appropriate creatively the healthy and beneficial elements from the cumulative treasure of human experience, and to employ them to serve the higher end of life embodied in the Islamic tradition.

Your work would go a long way in dispelling misperceptions about our religion and projecting its true values. It would also help mainstreaming the human rights dimensions in the OIC programmes and activities aimed at facilitating the full enjoyment of human rights for Muslims and non Muslims in Member States as well as of Muslim communities and minorities in non Member States.

As I said on previous occasions, we have resolute confidence that this Commission would help bring a paradigm shift within OIC in the way universal rights and freedoms flow together with Islamic values to offer a coherent and strong system aimed at facilitating the full enjoyment of all human rights.

Respected Commissioners,

You are also aware that there is a high degree of expectation in terms of your future work. The OIC believes that the human rights framework to be pursued by the IPHRC should be based on structured engagement. An engagement that could underwrite global peace, security and stability by removing misperceptions and promoting interfaith harmony. Assisting the Member States in this important area could form a primary focus of the Commission's work.

The advantage of your expertise must be utilized to its maximum potential to review and update the OIC instruments on human rights such as the Cairo Declaration. I am sure that the Member States would draw on the full potential of your expertise both vis-à-vis OIC instruments as well as international covenants to come up with recommendations to fill up any gaps or strengthen existing standards.

The Statute provides with the necessary guidance on the nature and scope of IPHRC. I would, however, summarize the task of the Commissioners to removing the misperceptions regarding the interface between Islam and Human Rights. At the same time, while the Statute of IPHRC entrusts you with specific mandates, your advisory capacity lends you the necessary space for positive interpretation of the mandates.

I am pleased to note that the five key elements of *complementarity, introspection, prioritization, incremental approach* and *credibility*, which I submitted for consideration at the first IPHRC session in Jakarta, were endorsed by the Commission as the guiding principles for its work. If pursued diligently, these principles would serve to enhance confidence in Commission's work both within and outside the OIC, hence improving its credibility and effectiveness.

I am also pleased that the Commissioners succeeded in evolving a priority list of thematic issues such as *Women, Children, Right to development* and *Education* etc. Other equally important areas that have been considered by the Commissioners are the question of Palestine, Islamophobia, incitement to discrimination and hatred on the basis of race and religion and the human rights of Muslim minorities and communities in the non Member States. These are all important and crucial areas that need to be addressed by the Commission. I had also submitted some thoughts on some of these priority areas, which I am sure would be given due consideration by the Commission Members.

In order to ensure Commission's efficacy, you must come up with concrete suggestions / best practices on priority areas, which could be presented to CFM for consideration and possible follow up by Member States.

In terms of *methods of work*, I would like to submit that the Commissioners may like to work in small *Working Groups* on each priority area or subject of their specific interest. These working groups would also

help consolidate contacts with relevant international human rights bodies on specific subjects and be able to pursue these matters vigorously at different forums. In this manner, concerted efforts could be made to prepare comprehensive research/studies on each subject during the inter-sessional period including through the use of distant communication. These studies should be shared with all Commission Members for views and approval during formal sessions, before onward submission as IPHRC recommendations to the Member States.

I would also suggest that *formal sessions* should be dedicated to working on substantive issues and organizational / administrative aspects of IPHRC work could be addressed during the *inter-sessional meetings*. Establishment of the Bureau in this Session would help facilitate these organizational aspects.

**Excellencies,
Ladies and Gentlemen,**

The establishment of the Commission has been widely acknowledged as a positive step particularly in the human rights circles. It certainly has enhanced the visibility of the OIC but its true potential lies in enhancing the credibility of the OIC. At the same time, being the first cross regional human rights mechanism of its kind on the international scene, it is also under the close scrutiny of international community. There are already groups and websites closely monitoring its activities. Both the Member States and the Commissioners would have to build on this positive momentum to effectively portray the OIC vision of *“moderation and modernization”*.

At our end, despite the meager human and financial resources, the Interim Secretariat within the General Secretariat has spared no effort towards facilitating the work and activities of the Commissioners. As per the Statute requirement, I have appointed the new Executive Director of the IPHRC. Pending a decision on the Headquarters, I have also appointed some colleagues from the General Secretariat to assist the Executive Director. This small team has been working vigorously to assist IPHRC and I am confident that they would ensure the conduct of yet another successful session. They have also prepared and shared a draft Budget, which hopefully will meet the financial needs of IPHRC’s planned activities in 2014.

Regrettably, the IPHRC could not hold its 3rd Regular Session earlier but am happy to note that there were a range of productive activities in which Commissioners actively participated and presented the IPHRC views. I am confident that from 2014 onwards there will be two regular sessions of IPHRC and steady progress in other mandated activities such as inter-sessional working group meetings and interaction with regional and international human rights mechanisms.

In order to have a better understanding of the global discourse on human rights as well as to assist the OIC Groups on Human Rights in Geneva and New York, it is crucial that Commission Members must attend the Human Rights Council Sessions in Geneva and Third Committee deliberations in New York. Similarly, the Commission must establish strong working relationships with regional human rights mechanisms from Europe, Africa, Asia and Latin America. I strongly encourage the Commission to undertake the planned visit to EU and if possible attend the ongoing session of the Third Committee in New York, this year. It would help developing better understanding of the political side of human rights as well as establish regular communication channels with important UN mechanisms and agencies.

Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen,

The road ahead is long and the challenges numerous. However, the establishment of and support to this Commission are testament of OIC Member States' continued commitment to prioritize human rights on its agenda. I am confident that through their unswerving commitment and cooperative work Commission Members will soon be able to realize the true potential of this independent advisory mechanism to the OIC.

I am proud of being the part of this overall effort that led to the creation of this unique and pioneering body of independent experts at the OIC. Their independence is of paramount importance and must be safeguarded. Their expertise should be utilized to better understand the cross cutting nature of human rights related aspects on the whole range of issues on the OIC agenda. Their role must be strengthened as the collective human rights conscience of OIC. I have no doubts in my mind that if utilized effectively, this organ would serve to enhance the visibility and credibility of OIC in the international arena.

IPHRC should also make use of its potentials in the most organized and professional manner. The Commission must organize itself to function in a coherent and credible advisory body that can perform its mandated tasks to the best interest of Muslim Ummah. As I stated earlier, the need to develop a *strategy for an early harvest* constitutes an imperative. The Commission must not waste time in addressing substantive issues in a prioritized fashion to realize this potential. I would reiterate my suggestion of a *remedial rather than a judgmental approach* as a solution provider for the benefit of Member States.

Let me conclude by expressing my best wishes to the Commission Members for a very productive and successful Session. I shall always be looking forward to hearing good and positive news about this unique mechanism and would be happy to contribute to its success in whatever way I could.

I thank you all.