



**Statement by H.E. the Secretary General at the First IPHRC Session
(Jakarta - February 20, 2012)**

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

It is with an immense sense of satisfaction and pride that I welcome you all to this first formal Session of the OIC Independent Permanent Human Rights Commission – IPHRC.

This is a moment of profound historical significance. It must, accordingly, be approached with a sense of history. This Session being held in this vibrant capital city of the most populated Muslim country lends the perfect setting. I thank the Government and people of Indonesia for the generous offer to host this Session. I thank you all for gracious presence to mark this important occasion.

**Excellencies,
Ladies and Gentlemen,**

Establishment of the IPHRC is a singularly significant landmark in the four decade long history of OIC. The vision for establishment of the Commission was provided by the leadership in the OIC Ten-Year Programme of Action adopted by the 3rd Extraordinary Islamic Summit held in Makkah Al-Mukarramah in 2005. The next available Summit in Dakar accorded a statutory status to this Commission in the new OIC Charter. It was immediately extended a top priority status. The effort and positive energy put in this process by both the General Secretariat and Member States is commendable. It aptly reflects the ongoing process of ‘moderation and modernization’ at the Organization. It symbolizes resolute Joint Islamic Action that forms the defining characteristic of the new OIC. We took action in a swift and time-bound fashion and framework. I salute and congratulate the Member States on this accomplishment. The statute of the Commission entered into force following adoption by the 38th Session of Council of Foreign Ministers in Astana, in June last year. The presence of this highly qualified group of 18 experts in our midst is the result of elections conducted in Astana under, and immediately after the adoption of, the statute.

**Excellencies,
Ladies and Gentlemen,**

Having briefly traced the history, let me now put things in the current perspective. OIC being the second largest inter governmental Organization, establishment of this Commission is a major focus of international attention. It reflects the Member States' priority interest in and commitment to Human Rights. It has enhanced the visibility of OIC. Its true potential lies in making a sterling contribution to the credibility of OIC. There is a high degree of expectation. that this Commission of independent experts will introduce a paradigm shift. Its work must represent a confluence of universal rights and freedoms and Islamic values. It must catalyse coherent and strong intra OIC system aimed at facilitating the full enjoyment of all Human Rights in the Member States.

Distinguished Commissioners,

Let me take this opportunity to sensitize with regard to your historical role at the center of this pioneering act. I reiterate that the establishment of IPHRC - in less than the stipulated time - is significant in two ways. Not only the time but also the timing is of essence. For the first time in its history , OIC has created a permanent body of experts as one of its principal organs. The innovation lies in the views expressed on the basis of the members' personal capacity and not as government representatives. It provides with an enabling environment to submit truly independent expert opinion for consideration by Member States.

Deep seated misperceptions continue to stoke Islamophobia. It is a multi-dimensional phenomenon that continues to unfold as a contemporary manifestation of racism.It poses a potent threat to peaceful coexistence. Particularly so in a world faced with the menace of terrorism. Islam is being wrongly associated with human rights violations. There is a motivated campaign at portraying Islam as inherently incompatible with international human rights norms and standards. I am of a **firmly believe** that the case is exactly the opposite. Islam is not incompatible with human rights standards.It placed **Human Rights places a premium** on 'hukook ul ibad' or 'rights of the people" centuries before the Human Rights acquired currency in contemporary human existence. The concept of 'ijtihad' lends a dynamism that is unparalleled. Islam in fact has the normative potential to add to the modern values and standards and push for better implementation, both at the social and political levels. I have always believed that the world should judge Muslims by Islam and not Islam by Muslims. **The** OIC believes that the human rights framework forms the most plausible avenue of structured engagement. An engagement geared towards removing misperceptions and promoting interfaith harmony. An engagement that could underwrite global peace, security and stability. Assisting the Member **States** in this important area could form a primary focus of the **Commission's** work.

The IPHRC Statute has saddled **entrusted** the Commission with a multiplicity of mandates. The advisory capacity lends the Commission with the necessary space for positive interpretation of the mandates. Some work has already been done in the area of human rights. The advantage of your expertise is indeed vital and must not be squandard. It needs to be utilized to review and update OIC instruments, including the Cairo Declaration and the Covenant on the Rights of the Child in Islam. I am sure that the Member States would want to maximise the benefit and draw on the full potential of your expertise.

**Excellencies,
Ladies and Gentlemen,**

The statute provides with the necessary guidance on the nature and scope of IPHRC. The task may be summarized as removing the misperceptions regarding the interface between Islam and Human Rights. I have been sharing some thoughts and insight on guiding principles that could underpin the intellectual and methodological approach of the Commission. It is essentially based on my understanding of the statute as well as the perfect timing of the establishment of this Commission. I would re-emphasize the following **five points** that may be observed and accommodated in the work of this Commission:

First and foremost is **complementarity**. The OIC Commission must not be compared to any of the existing Human Rights mechanisms or duplicate their work. The value added for IPHRC lies in complementing or bridging the gaps for the benefit of the Member States.

The second point to be emphasized is **introspection** founded in a remedial and not a judgmental approach. The Commission must build capacities and provide solutions for the Member States in the area of Human Rights.

Thirdly, **prioritization** would be important. Based on the Commission's judgement dealing with issues in accordance with importance may be the right way forward.

Fourthly, I have been suggesting an **incremental and progressive approach** as being sustainable. The Commission must - over a period of time - go through the necessary evolution with a view to transforming itself into a relevant and effective body,.

Lastly, the importance of **credibility** cannot be overemphasized. The Commission must establish its credibility with both Member States and the international community. An early harvest of doables would be important to that end.

I hope the Commission will accord consideration to my suggestions.

**Distinguished Commissioners,
Excellencies,
Ladies and Gentlemen,**

Until today, the international human rights system was characterized by institutional frameworks operating at international or regional levels. The trans-regional nature of the OIC lends a unique character to IPHRC. It is indeed a pioneering act. Its importance cannot be overemphasized. It can neither be discounted. It would, however, be for the Commission to make itself count. This, in turn, would count significantly towards strengthening OIC's visibility and credibility as an international Organization. My brief interaction with the distinguished Commissioners - that form the pioneering team - is from where I draw reasons for optimism.

I thank you all.