



PROCEEDINGS
Seminar
on

Upcoming 45th Session of the Council of Foreign Ministers of OIC, Dhaka: Revisiting A Shared Journey

Carnival Hall
Bangabandhu International Conference Center (BICC), Dhaka
Thursday, 29 March 2018

Organised by



Bangladesh Institute of International and Strategic Studies (BISS)

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Published by

Bangladesh Institute of International and Strategic Studies (BISS)
1/46, Old Elephant Road (West of Ramna Police Station),
Dhaka-1000, Bangladesh.

Phone: (+88) (02) 9353808, 9336287, 8315808

Fax: 88-02-48312625

E-mail: info@biiss.org

Website: www.biiss.org

Printed by

GraphNet Limited

95 Naya Paltan, Khan Tower

1st Floor, Dhaka-1000

Phone: 9354142, 9354133, 01715011303

E-mail: graphnet@gmail.com

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FOREIGN MINISTER
Government of the People's
Republic of Bangladesh

Message

I am happy to learn that Bangladesh Institute of International and Strategic Studies (BISS) is bringing out a publication on the seminar they arranged on 29 March 2018 keeping in view the 45th Session of the Council of Foreign Ministers (CFM) of OIC in Dhaka.

It is indeed an honour that Bangladesh is hosting the 45th Session of the CFM scheduled to be held on 05-06 May 2018 in Dhaka. This is the first time that such an OIC conference is being held in Bangladesh under a democratic Government. The timing of the Dhaka CFM can never be more appropriate as Hon'ble Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina, daughter of the Father of the Nation Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, under whose leadership Bangladesh joined the OIC during its 2nd Summit in Lahore in 1974, is steering the country towards development and progress. Lately, the country met all criteria for graduation into a developing country out of the LDC status.

Since its joining, Bangladesh has been playing an active role in the Organisation and contributing to the goals and objectives of OIC. It is working in various important OIC Committees and Ministerial Contact Groups including the Al Quds Committee. OIC is the flagship organisation of the Muslim world, the second largest inter-governmental organisation after the UN, comprising 57 member states with a population of 1.3 billion. OIC is acting as the voice of the Muslim Ummah and its work encompasses almost all areas of life – political, social, economic, cultural, scientific, technological, and developmental.

A glimpse of the contents and the speakers' list assures me of the quality of the publication. I commend BISS for an excellent job done. I deeply appreciate the speakers of the Seminar and those who made probing questions for their valuable thoughts and recommendations. I am confident, suggestions and ideas coming out of the Seminar would prove useful during Bangladesh's Chairmanship of the 45th Session of the CFM. I applaud BISS for organising the Seminar in collaboration with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MoFA) which provides a platform for debate and deliberation among policy makers, academia, experts, media, representatives of various international and national organisations and youth leaders. I am confident, the outcome of the Seminar would provide the OIC member states with constructive views and insights to move forward with a strengthened OIC towards solidarity, peace and prosperity for the *Ummah*.

I hope the readership would find the publication both informative and enlightening. I wish it a success.

(Abul Hassan Mahmood Ali, M.P.)

Introduction

Bangladesh is going to host the 45th Session of the Council of Foreign Ministers of OIC in Dhaka, scheduled to be held on 05-06 May, 2018. Keeping this meeting in view and to deliberate on various aspects of OIC and its role as well as creating awareness, Bangladesh Institute of International and Strategic Studies (BISS) in collaboration with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Government of Bangladesh, organised a seminar on “Upcoming 45th Session of the Council of Foreign Ministers of OIC, Dhaka: Revisiting A Shared Journey” on Thursday, 29 March 2018 at Carnival Hall, Bangabandhu International Conference Center (BICC), Agargaon, Dhaka.



The Seminar was divided into two sessions- Inaugural Session and Working Session. Major General A K M Abdur Rahman, ndc, psc, Director General, BISS commenced the inaugural session with welcome address. H.E. Mr Md Shahrir Alam, MP, Honourable State Minister for Foreign Affairs, Government of the People's Republic of Bangladesh graced the Seminar as the Chief Guest. Professor Dr Syed Anwar Husain, Bangabandhu Chair Professor, Bangladesh University of Professionals, made a presentation on “History of the OIC: Genesis and the Journey” during the inaugural session. Ambassador Munshi Faiz Ahmad, Chairman, Board of Governors, BISS, chaired the session.

In the Working Session, four presentations were made. Professor Dr Akmal Hussain, Former Professor, Department of International Relations, University of Dhaka made a presentation on “OIC and the Ummah: Promoting Development, Peace and Stability”. Ambassador Md Touhid Hossain, Former Foreign

Secretary of Bangladesh deliberated on “Bangladesh and OIC”. Ambassador Muhammad Zamir, Former Chief Information Commissioner of Bangladesh and Currently, Member of OIC Independent Permanent Human Rights Commission, made his presentation on “Human Rights and OIC”. Presentation on “Emerging Challenges and Way Forward for an Effective OIC” was made by Ambassador Mohammad Mohsin, Former Foreign Secretary of Bangladesh and Former Assistant Secretary General of OIC.

Mr A F M Gausal Azam Sarker, Director General, International Organisations (IO), Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MoFA) briefed the audience about MoFA's preparation for the upcoming 45th Session of the Council of Foreign Ministers in Dhaka. At the end, Mr Md Shahidul Haque, Foreign Secretary, Government of the People's Republic of Bangladesh summed up the discussions of the Seminar. Ambassador Munshi Faiz Ahmad, Chairman, Board of Governors, BISS, concluded the seminar with vote of thanks. Representatives of the Head of Foreign Missions in Dhaka of different OIC countries, senior officials of Bangladesh Government, representatives from different international organizations, former ambassadors, media, academia, researchers and students from various universities participated in the open discussion session and expressed their valuable opinions and observations.



Inaugural Session



Welcome Address

Major General A K M Abdur Rahman, ndc, psc
Director General, BISS

At the outset, **Major General A K M Abdur Rahman, ndc, psc**, Director General, BISS, mentioned that the seminar was taking place in the month of March, which is the month of independence of Bangladesh. He offered his deepest respect to the Father of the Nation, Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman and registered his heartiest respect to all the martyrs of the liberation war, who sacrificed their lives for the betterment of the country.

He stated that it is a matter of great honour and prestige for Bangladesh that it is going to host the 45th Session of the Council of Foreign Ministers (CFM) of the Organization of Islamic Cooperation (OIC) in Dhaka on 05-06 May 2018. He informed that Bangladesh will assume Chairmanship of the CFM for a period of one year through hosting the event. Thus, this is a great opportunity for Bangladesh to play a crucial role in the OIC framework and make the organisation an effective platform to unite and consolidate the Muslim World, which is currently afflicted with a multitude of challenges.

He noted that OIC is the second largest inter-governmental organisation after the United Nations (UN) and the largest inter-governmental Islamic organisation with a membership of 57 states spread over four continents. OIC member states represent 22 per cent of the world population, 70 per cent of the world's energy resources and 40 per cent of available raw material. The Organisation is claimed to be the collective voice of the Muslim world. It endeavours to safeguard and protect the interests of the Muslims in the spirit of promoting international peace and harmony.

Major General Rahman said that the Father of the Nation Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman led Bangladesh to join OIC at its Second Summit at Lahore, Pakistan in 1974, which was marked as a turning point for the country to get integrated with the Muslim *Ummah*. Since joining OIC, Bangladesh has been actively participating in its summits and conferences and multifarious activities. Bangladesh has also played vital role in OIC's standing committees, as well as various affiliated, specialised and subsidiary institutions and organs.

On the note of critical analysis, he said that in spite of being the largest inter-governmental organisation of the Muslim community, OIC is yet to prove its effectiveness in the current milieu and to emerge as the collective voice of the Muslim world. The organisation has been heavily undermined due to its lack of success to tackle myriad of challenges faced by the Muslims around the globe. The persecution of Rohingya Muslims in Myanmar, dire situation in Palestine, conflicts in Syria, Libya, Iraq, Somalia, Afghanistan *etc.*, are the manifestations of its ineffectiveness which raises serious question about the role of OIC. Despite having the mandate to “safeguard and protect the interests of the Muslim world in the spirit of promoting mutual interest, peace and harmony”, the OIC could not succeed to respond substantially to many of the crises or demonstrate unity of thought and action.

He emphasised that OIC should play an active role to confront the challenges faced by the Muslim world *i.e.*, terrorism, extremism, growing Islamophobia, violation of the rights of Muslim communities around the globe, deteriorated humanitarian situation in parts of OIC Member States, youth radicalisation *etc.* It is very important to strengthen intra-OIC cooperation and undertake Joint Islamic Action to unite the Muslim *Ummah* for addressing the challenges. OIC needs to intensify its consultations, revisit its political, diplomatic and strategic considerations, and intensify its efforts to make it an effective organisation to establish peace in the world and elevate the standard of living of Muslim community around the globe.

General Rahman inferred that it is still not too late to make OIC a dynamic and effective platform for cooperation and Bangladesh needs to play a key role in this regard. He concluded with the expectation that under Bangladesh’s Chairmanship of CFM, OIC will transform into a proactive and vibrant organisation which will safeguard the dignity, independence and rights of the Muslim World.



Presentation on "History of the OIC: Genesis and the Journey"



Dr Syed Anwar Husain

*Bangabandhu Chair Professor, Bangladesh University of Professionals (BUP)
and Former Professor, Department of History, University of Dhaka*

Professor Dr Syed Anwar Husain, at the beginning, quoted the eminent English historian Arnold J Toynbee who developed the 'Challenge and Response Thesis' that "responses to challenges, natural and circumstantial, make things or great things happen as the world progresses in time". He related the statement with the Muslim *Ummah* and said that the *Ummah* faced an unprecedented challenge and responded to the challenge by creating the first Muslim regional institution. Considering the intra and inter-Muslim states' disquieting scenario, Professor Husain stated that the institution is perhaps the best thing that has happened to the Muslim *Ummah*. Moreover, the institutional resilience, as demonstrated in the fact of its being in existence so far since its inception in unusual circumstances, is a testimony to the commonality of benign will on the part of the member states, which is undoubtedly, the factor for its continuance. Nevertheless, the journey so far undertaken by this institution has been quite chequered.

Professor Husain then explored the genesis of OIC and the major challenges that the organisation has faced over the years. The urge for creating an institution for the Muslim community emerged in response to the incident of arson at Al-Aqsa Mosque in Jerusalem which was torched reportedly by a mentally unbalanced Australian Christian fanatic Denis Michael Rohan on 21 August 1969. The old wooden roof and an 800 year old pulpit were partly destroyed by the fire. Amin al-Husseini, the former *Mufti* of Jerusalem, called this arson a "Jewish crime" and made an emotive call for all Muslim states to convene a summit. On 25 August 1969, the foreign ministers of 14 Islamic countries met in an emergency meeting in Cairo, Egypt. The meeting witnessed an eloquent speech of the Foreign Minister of Saudi Arabia wherein he made a cogent argument that the challenges emanating from the Al-Aqsa burning was a concern for the entire Muslim *Ummah*. For properly addressing the concern, the Saudi Foreign Minister proposed an immediate convening of a Summit of Islamic countries. To act upon this proposal, a preparatory committee was formed consisting

of representatives from Saudi Arabia, Morocco, Iran, Pakistan, Somalia, Niger and Malaysia. On 8th and 9th September 1969, the preparatory committee finalised a date for summit in Rabat, Morocco.

Between 22nd and 25th September 1969, the First Islamic Summit was held in Morocco. The 24 heads of the Muslim majority countries joined together in that Summit. A well-meaning and forward-looking resolution was crafted which stated, among other things, that, "Muslim governments would consult with a view to promoting close cooperation among themselves and mutual assistance in the economic, scientific, cultural and spiritual fields, inspired by the immortal teachings of Islam".

Six months later, between 22nd and 26th March 1970, the First Islamic Conference of Foreign Ministers (ICFM) was held in Jeddah, Saudi Arabia. Representatives from 22 Muslim states participated in the Conference, in order to establish a permanent secretariat. The secretariat was to function in Jeddah until the liberation of Jerusalem. Tunku Abdul Rahman, the Father of the Nation and the first Prime Minister of Malaysia was appointed as the first Secretary General of OIC. It was further resolved that the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO) be supported morally, politically and economically and that its offices be opened in different capitals of the Muslim world.

The Second ICFM was held from 25 to 29 December 1970, in Karachi hosted by Pakistan. One significant resolution of the conference was the creation of a fund for the Islamic Secretariat. Along with confirming Tunku Abdul Rahman's appointment, this conference also resulted in the establishment of the Islamic Bank and Islamic News Agency.

Jeddah, Saudi Arabia was chosen for the Third ICFM which took place from 29 February - 04 March, 1971. Delegates from 30 Muslim countries were present in that conference. The conference approved the first charter from where the Organisation of Islamic Conference (OIC) has started its journey. The preface of the Charter states the common belief of the Muslims that would work as the foundation of integrity and unity among Muslim peoples. The Charter contains fourteen chapters or articles, five codes of conduct for the member states and seven objectives of the organisation.

As of now, OIC consists of 57 member states who work as "the collective voice of the Muslim world," with the aim to "safeguard and protect the interest of the Muslims in the spirit of promoting international peace and harmony." He added that the OIC conducted a formal revision of the Charter in 2008. The revised Charter set out to promote human rights, fundamental freedoms and good governance in all member states. In this revised Charter, the OIC decided to support the UN universal declaration of human rights and international law.

Professor Husain noted that on 20 June 2011, in the 38th Council of Foreign Ministers meeting in Astana, Kazakhstan, the organisation changed its name from the Organisation of Islamic Conference to Organisation of Islamic Cooperation along with its logo. The Charter states that the OIC aims to preserve Islamic values, to jointly work in economic, cultural, scientific and political areas, to promote solidarity amongst the member states and to establish international peace and security. Professor Husain opined that the torching of the *Al-Aqsa* mosque might have acted in adjudicating the formation of OIC, but historically, in the wake of the ending of the Ottoman Caliphate in 1924, Muslims had aspired to a Pan-Islamic institution that would serve the common political, economic and social interest of the *Ummah*.

Reflecting on OIC as a regional and peace contributing institution, Professor Husain mentioned about Professor Joseph S Nye's paradigm of peace-in-parts wherein the regional bodies such as the OIC may contribute to international peace-building through keeping regional harmony and peace. Such a postulation

has relevance to all regional organisations including the EU, OAS, OAU, SAARC, ASEAN, BIMSTEC, BBIN *etc.* Such regional institutions do not conflict with UN peace-making endeavours rather they are believed to be working in tandem with the world body.

Regarding the journey of OIC, Dr Husain pointed out some key issues. He noted that the OIC supports two-states solution to the Palestinian crisis; the organisation condemns the recognition of Jerusalem as the capital of Israel and the moving of embassies to *Al Quds*. In December 2017, an extraordinary meeting responded to Donald Trump's decision on recognising Jerusalem by denying the Istanbul Declaration of Freedom for *Al Quds*. Cartoons of the Prophet published in a Danish newspaper in September 2005, were found offensive to the Muslim world and severely been condemned in the Third Extraordinary Session of the Islamic Summit Conference.



Professor Husain later pointed out some of the initiatives led by the OIC. He said that the OIC established the Independent Permanent Human Rights Commission (IPHRC) in 2008, comprising 18 members from various educational and professional backgrounds. The IPHRC is an independent body to monitor human rights situation. In September 2017, all member states of this body strongly condemned the human rights violations against the Rohingya Muslims in Myanmar. To facilitate arbitration in conflicts, a mediation committee was formed on 21 November 2017. In the first meeting of this committee in Istanbul, Professor Husain represented Bangladesh. The 12th Islamic Summit held in Cairo in 2013 mandated the OIC Secretariat and the Standing Committee for scientific and technological cooperation to organise an Islamic summit on science and technology. The first summit of science and technology was held in Astana, Kazakhstan on 10th and 11th September 2017. The member states supported that the Muslims lack in knowledge contribution due to their stereotypical lifestyle. The Astana Declaration of the OIC called for increasing investment in science and technology, education, eradication of extreme poverty and implementing sustainable development goals (SDGs).

He opined that the emergence of terrorist activities is seriously deteriorating the image of Islam. He further said that the OIC's position on defining terrorism proved to be problematic. In 1999, OIC co-opted the convention of combating international terrorism. During a meeting in Malaysia in April 2007, the issue of

terrorism was discussed but no consensus definition evolved. The meeting, however, rejected the illustration of Palestinian struggle as terrorism. In fact, at the outset of the meeting, the OIC prepared a statement praising the Palestinians and their Intifada. At the 34th Islamic Conference of Foreign Ministers in May 2007, the Islamophobia was termed as the worst form of terrorism.

In his conclusion, Dr Husain noted that there are challenges that are remaining unsolved despite having a series of resolutions and declarations. OIC is the largest multilateral institution for the Muslim *Ummah* but OIC alone is not capable of resolving the crises existing in today's dynamic world. He suggested that OIC should extend its capacity to work with the international players to pursue the welfare of the Muslim *Ummah*. He said that symbol and reality may not always work, but the retention of the symbol and sustaining its underlying spirit may impact positively on reality.



Address by the Chief Guest



H.E. Mr Md Shahriar Alam, MP

*Honourable State Minister for Foreign Affairs,
Government of the People's Republic of Bangladesh*

H.E. Mr Md Shahriar Alam, MP, Honourable State Minister for Foreign Affairs, Government of Bangladesh, said that the Seminar holds particular importance for the people of Bangladesh. As through the rich discussions of the Seminar, the audience will come to know that Bangladesh has given utmost importance to OIC in hosting the 45th Session of the CFM in Dhaka in May 2018. The seminar is also useful in reflecting on what the people of Bangladesh would like OIC to be and to do in these trying times when the Muslim world is faced with so many challenges coming both from within and beyond. He added that this distinct honour came in recognition of Bangladesh's active and constructive role and growing importance at the OIC. Unanimous endorsement in favour of Bangladesh is also a mark of the confidence reposed in the Government of Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina.

He then explained why OIC is important for Bangladesh and why Bangladesh is hosting the conference. He said that by giving top priority to Bangladesh's association with the Muslim *Ummah*, Bangladesh joined OIC under the leadership of the Father of the Nation Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman through his historic participation in the second OIC Summit held in Lahore in 1974. Father of the Nation gave high priority to Bangladesh's closer relations with the Muslim world and stressed on Islamic solidarity.

Honourable State Minister went on saying that with OIC membership Bangladesh's shared journey with the *Ummah* started. He observed that the organisation has evolved from being a forum focusing on merely political issues into a much wider platform for cooperation in diversified fields of social, economic, environmental as well as developmental nature. Bangladesh has since been actively engaged in OIC in keeping the purposes of the organisation relevant to the times and needs of the *Ummah*. He added that the importance and value that Bangladesh attaches to OIC in fact, comes from its unique position. It is the sole

political organisation of the Muslim world with representation of 57 independent States, the right international body for voicing for the *Ummah* and serving their just causes, working for realisation of their aspirations and promoting their interests through joint Islamic action. It is the second largest global organisation after the UN with enormous prospects as the Muslim world possesses one third of world's strategic resources and one fourth of global population including the highest ratio of youth population to make the best use of the



resources. OIC offers the unique opportunity of association and cooperation of the *Ummah*, a wider faith based socio-cultural identity with a given precondition for solidarity and unity.

Honourable State Minister emphasised that Bangladesh with its 90 per cent Muslim population, the third largest among member states, and having preponderant Islamic ethos and values, finds its natural place in the fold of OIC. He remarked that Bangladesh also needed Islamic solidarity to reinforce its independence and sovereignty. At the initial stage, the OIC membership helped Bangladesh in securing recognition and establishing bilateral relations with the Arab world which subsequently provided the country with the first external labour market and a new source of foreign assistance. Oil rich Middle East still remains the largest source of foreign remittance representing around 70 per cent of global remittance inflow for Bangladesh. Socio-cultural interaction with the Muslim world also helps Bangladeshi people strengthen and flourish their Islamic values and bondages. OIC's institution like Islamic Development Bank (IDB) is an important source of development credit for Bangladesh under the assistance of which more than a dozen development projects are running and several billion dollars of credit facility came to meet Bangladesh's petroleum need. Bangladesh's Islamic universities and institutions also benefited from the Islamic Solidarity Fund.

Honourable State Minister also described why Bangladesh is hosting the 45th CFM. He stated that under the leadership of Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina and in pursuit of her Government's Vision 2021 of a digital middle income Bangladesh, the current Government has been most successful in attaining the MDGs, with steady economic growth of well above 6 per cent for a decade, and Bangladesh has recently come out of the LDC brackets. Bangladesh is progressing confidently in all indices of development with a number of success stories such as – being a model UN country, an inclusive society of interfaith harmony,

having high rate of poverty eradication and a range of social safety nets, women's empowerment and gender equality, peacekeeping in the world, largely containing terrorism, enhancing climate resilience, advancing in the fields of health, education, information and communications technology (ICT) and science, technology and innovation (STI). He expressed that time has therefore, come that Bangladesh shares these success stories and its best practices with its brotherly countries of OIC and contribute in a shared journey in quest of peace and development with rights and dignity. He further stressed that a new emerging Bangladesh needs to be known.

He informed that with the decision of hosting the CFM, Bangladesh has already become part of the OIC CFM Troika and an influential member of the important eight member OIC Executive Committee for three years. He added that Bangladesh's leadership role in OIC is going to enhance its good image and strengthen its diplomatic position in safeguarding and promoting its interests not only in the OIC framework but also at global stage with beneficial impacts both at home and abroad.

Honourable State Minister then narrated the issues Bangladesh is focusing in the Dhaka CFM. In this regard, he mentioned that the challenges facing the *Ummah* such as the conflicts, division, tension, and instability of the Muslim world are getting everyone's focus in the Dhaka CFM along with the problems of terrorism and violent extremism, sectarian tendencies, hatred, prejudice and Islamophobia, massive humanitarian crises with forced displacements- seriously affecting rights and dignity of the Muslim minorities like the Rakhine Muslims of Myanmar, persistent poverty and socio-economic backwardness of Muslim societies are OIC priorities. Protection of their rights and fundamental freedoms therefore, will remain a major preoccupation of the upcoming CFM. The way the CFM is addressing these issues are through resolutions and proposals regarding political, economic, social, cultural, and family affairs issues that are now under finalisation. The meetings of the Permanent Finance Committee, Economic, Social, Cultural and Family Affairs



Commission (ICECS), and the Senior Officials in Jeddah this month have largely discussed these resolutions seeking to find solutions and approaches to the ongoing problems of the *Ummah*. These issues are being approached under four broad ranges of draft resolutions: (a) those relating to peace, conflict resolution,

mediation and security; (b) those relating to OIC economic and development agenda; (c) those relating to minorities and humanitarian questions; and (d) those relating to OIC reforms. It is obvious that some differences in approach, emphasis, target of action, mechanisms and ways exist among OIC member states in dealing with these agenda. But consensus, he emphasised, is the general principle that is being sought.

He then informed the audience that a number of initiatives are in the offing and specific resolutions for conflict resolution and strengthening mediation capacity are being considered. Efforts are being undertaken



to operationalise OIC preferential trade arrangement called TPS-OIC to substantially enhance intra-OIC trade. New stage of programmes and project initiatives under OIC's second ten-year development plan called "OIC: 2025 Programme of Action" (adopted at the 13th Islamic Summit in Istanbul, Turkey, in 2016) is also coming with Dhaka CFM. At this stage, member states will be invited to come up with their programme and project initiatives. He highlighted that Bangladesh made substantive contribution in developing this document with inclusion of new targets in several new areas including STI, blue economy, sustainable agriculture with new ideas of lease farming, and regional economic integration through multi-modal connectivity. Bangladesh has brought a new resolution on multi-sectoral connectivity. He mentioned that Bangladesh is taking the lead in forming a private sector and track 1.5 based economic cooperation initiative called South East Asian Cooperation (SEACO) with regional economic cooperation and integration in mind involving three South East Asian member states. Ultimate objective is to have a regional Free Trade Area (FTA) and thereby, encourage OIC FTA with this building block basis example.

Honourable State Minister said that the Rohingya problem, in its humanitarian and human rights aspects is going to get prominence. In fact, there will be a separate side-line session on the humanitarian challenges of the Muslim world with special focus on the Rohingyas on 06 May 2018 and prior to that a visit to the Rohingya makeshift camps in Cox's Bazar will take place on 04 May.

He stressed that the comprehensive reform of OIC and its system is a crying need of the day both for greater efficiency, dynamism and clout of the organisation. He added that Bangladesh along with some

other brotherly countries are working hard with new thoughts and proposals for OIC reforms in a number of areas: rules and procedures, organisational and Secretarial issues, their roles and mechanisms, recruitment rules, transparency initiatives, efficiency enhancement, observership and operationalisation of a number of new statutes, bodies and institutes *etc.* Discussions on these are going to take place in Dhaka.

He hoped that Bangladesh will be making its utmost efforts in taking up OIC agenda forward in the *Ummah's* interest during its one-year chairmanship. Bangladesh has chosen a theme for the Dhaka CFM- "Islamic values for sustainable peace, solidarity and development." This is for the purpose of sending a particular message that through the pursuit and practice of internal values of Islam such as tolerance, peace, equality, fraternity, justice and compassion [on some of which some other civilisations rose in history], the *Ummah* could remain firm in their right track, surmount multifarious challenges and reach the goals of sustainable peace, solidarity and development in a shared journey. This is in line with the vision of Honourable Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina of seeing OIC standing firm on its principles and values and the Muslim world becoming master of its own, capable of solving its own problems within itself.

In conclusion, he underlined that the thoughts and recommendations coming out of enlightened discussions of the Seminar would be of much value to all in the collective efforts of OIC and inspire Bangladesh in playing its role as Chair of the 45th CFM session. He also took the opportunity to request for active participation of the member states and guests in the Dhaka CFM to make it a successful one.



Remarks by the Chair



Ambassador Munshi Faiz Ahmad
Chairman, Board of Governors, BISS

Ambassador Munshi Faiz Ahmad, Chairman, Board of Governors, BISS informed the audience that the Organization of Islamic Cooperation (OIC's) Council of Foreign Ministers (CFM) meeting is held every year to make recommendations regarding policies and programmes to the summit as well as to examine progress in implementation of decisions taken by the previous summit. The 44th Session of the CFM was held in Abidjan, Ivory Coast, from 10-11 July 2017. The next, *i.e.*, the 45th Session of the CFM will be held in Dhaka, Bangladesh from 05-06 May 2018. The Bangladesh government has drawn up a detailed and extensive preparatory and awareness building programme of activities in the run-up to the Session. The present seminar titled "Upcoming 45th Session of the Council of Foreign Ministers of OIC, Dhaka: Revisiting a Shared Journey", is one of the major events in that programme and seeks to raise awareness about the OIC and its activities in promoting shared development, peace and stability, among OIC countries in particular, and the world at large in general.

He added that the OIC is composed of four operative organs: a) The Islamic Summit: composed of heads of state and government of member states; b) Council of Foreign Ministers; c) Executive Committee: holds decision-making powers between the ministerial meetings; and d) General Secretariat: the executive organ of the OIC and implements the decisions of the two political decision-making bodies. The OIC also has a parliamentary wing called Parliamentary Union of the OIC Member States (PUIC), based in Tehran.

Ambassador Ahmad highlighted that the OIC was founded basically with two aims: 1) Liberating the *Al-Aqsa* Mosque; and 2) Restoring the Palestinians' rights including their right to have the sovereign and independent Palestinian state with Jerusalem as its capital and the right of the displaced Palestinians to return to their homes. He regretted that the OIC could not succeed in achieving many of these goals, due to disunity and lack of commitment among leading Muslim nations. In spite of the drawbacks, he pointed out that the OIC has piloted quite a few resolutions in support of these rights which have either been passed by the UN General Assembly or the UN Security Council, creating strong international legality in support of these causes. Besides, the OIC has established various institutions to promote cooperation. Some important ones

are: Islamic University of Technology, Bangladesh; International Islamic University, Malaysia; Islamic University, Niger; Islamic University of Uganda and the Islamic Development Bank (IDB). The IDB is a multilateral development and financing institution based in Jeddah, Saudi Arabia which funds projects in both public and private sectors, provides technical assistance for capacity building and resource mobilization *etc.* The OIC 2025 Programme of Action has been developed on the basis of the vision and principles as enshrined in the Charter of the Organization. This document marks the second phase of the OIC Ten Year Programme of Action (TYPOA) that was initiated in 2005.

He mentioned that contrary to popular perceptions, OIC has worked substantially in support of human rights including rights of children and women. A good example is the OIC's commendable role in creating pressure in support of the Rohingyas. It has also played important role in conflict resolution initiatives, notably in Bosnia-Herzegovina, Philippines *etc.* At the end, he noted that the OIC must endeavour to fulfil its Charter obligations that aims to preserve Islamic social and economic values, promote solidarity amongst member states, increase cooperation in social, economic, cultural, scientific, and political areas, uphold international peace and security, and advance education, particularly in the fields of science and technology.



Working Session

Presentation I: OIC and the Ummah: Promoting Development, Peace and Stability



Dr Akmal Hussain

*Former Professor, Department of International Relations,
University of Dhaka*

Dr Akmal Hussain at the outset, noted about Robert A Mortimer's writing from *The Third World Coalition in International Politics* that "Weak states never have had much say in world politics. Accordingly, the developing states of Asia, Africa, and South America have been mere objects than subjects in international system. Until quite recently, to speak of the Third World in international politics was to identify an arena of great-power competition, not an actor. Only in the 1970s, has a new collective actor begun to give an active role to the Third World in international affairs." He said that Mortimer, in the book, analysed the emergence and the role of the Third World coalition that began to exercise power at the sixth special session of the UN General Assembly in April-May 1974.

Dr Hussain opined that conflict and peace are the two common words in history. In the evolution of human society, with the rise of propertied class, the powerful has conquered and dominated the weaker class. Imperialistic expansion by the European powers had colonised people in different parts of the globe. But the desire for international cooperation to maintain international peace on a global scale has in the course of history been conceived when major conflicts were being fought. The League of Nations was the first experiment in this regard. However, the failure of the League paved the way for the foundation of the United Nations. Until now, the UN is the international organisation that aims to maintain peace and security in spite some of its grand failure in preventing major military invasions and regional conflicts. Besides the UN, the

world has witnessed the rise of scores of regional organisations in different corners of the globe with different agenda. Many Third World countries are active members in many of these regional organisations. In contrast to these organisations, the OIC is remarkably different in its orientation and spirit.

Dr Hussain noted that OIC is the second largest international organisation in terms of its membership next to the UN. It has now 57 members and spread over four continents: Asia, Africa, Europe and South America with a combined population of 1.6 billion as of 2008. In spite of having divergent history, culture, political and economic development, its members were inspired by a common vision reflected in the OIC Charter as: “to be guided by noble Islamic values of unity and fraternity, and affirming the essentiality of promoting and consolidating the unity and solidarity among the member states in securing their common interests at the international arena.”



In his discussion, Dr Hussain has examined two interrelated questions- firstly, how far the spirit of *Ummah* has been developed and secondly, what are the constraints and challenges the OIC members are facing to achieve their goals.

In elaborating his discussion, Dr Hussain noted that the concept of the Muslim *Ummah* is as old as the religion of Islam itself. It connotes the community of Muslims and is different from the term Nation. The nation is a political concept- a community of people possessing a given territory with separate language, culture and sometimes a government. To the Muslim way of thinking, the *Ummah* that counts is the *Ummah Islamiyyah*- an entity that theoretically comprises all Muslims throughout the world whatever is their national origin. In Islamic thought, *Ummah* represents a universal world order, ruled by an Islamic government. It was historically formed in response to the divine revelation granted to the Prophet of Islam. He, however, raised a question in defining the monolithic character of the Muslim populations all over the world. He said that given the heterogeneous nature of this population one might question its universality. Though, all the 57 member countries have majority Muslim population divided into different sects, their political history varies- the Arab states have been through different historical experiences and their evolution has followed a different path from

that of the non-Arab Muslim states. He expressed that at the early stage of Islam the religion was propagated among the Arabs- the sense of belonging to one indivisible community was logically strong. But in later stage Islam was spread among diverse people of the globe. Moreover, the member states are at various stages of material development; this disparity casts negative influence on their bonding as equal partners. The inter-state conflicts among some members pose a challenge to conceptualising the *Ummah* as well.

Dr Hussain remarked that as a parallel to the OIC, there is no other international organisation which was founded on religious values. The Charter of the organisation in its preamble underscores its goal as, "to work for revitalising Islam's pioneering role in the world while ensuring sustainable development, progress and prosperity for the peoples of the member states." Its founding fathers were inspired by a unique religious ethos which was derived from the concept of *Ummah*. It was stated that the organisation is the collective voice of the Muslim world and works to safeguard and protect the interests of the Muslims in the spirit of promoting international peace and harmony among the various people of the world. The establishment and subsequent development of the organisation is considered as the representation of concrete manifestation of the concept of 'Islamic solidarity' in contemporary world. The change in its title in 2011 to Organisation of Islamic Cooperation exemplifies the desire of its members to work more closely giving prominence to commonality of interests.

Professor Hussain extended his description on the nature and scope of the organisation by saying that the founding fathers were also aware of the complexities of contemporary international politics and knew how the Muslim majority countries were affected by that situation. OIC is not any religious body contrary to misperception of many, especially in the Western countries. He opined that religion is the guiding force but it was not an organisation to promote Islamic religion only. For it, Islam was a tool to aggregate their strength in this complex world. When in 1969, 24 states assembled in Rabat to discuss the Al-Aqsa issue, they wanted to demonstrate the collective image of the Muslim world to face that situation. The world had witnessed a Pan-Islamic movement in the mid-nineteenth century advocating the unity of Muslims under one Islamic state. Advocates of Pan-Islamism were religious zealots. Compared to them, the founders of OIC were pragmatist in outlook. Being aware of sovereign power of each member they could not think to create a single entity when there is so much diversity among them.

He expressed that although at the moment of its inception in 1969, the driving force was religious sentiment but over the time the organisation has changed immensely in its structural formation and scope of activities. It began as a small body with modest brief to ensure arrangement for holding the conferences. However, since the third summit in 1981, the organisation grew substantially establishing three standing committees and several subsidiary organs and specialised and affiliated institutions. According to Ekmeleddin Ihsanoglu, the former Secretary General of OIC, "The leaders of the member states had the far-sight to envision the challenges that came along with advent of the present century. Their vision encompasses all aspects and issues, and they decided to work out a road map that would empower the Muslims to forge ahead along the rest of the world."

Professor Hussain underscored that in five decades of existence, the OIC has emerged not only as a diplomatic forum to articulate common Muslim concerns but has become a forum for meaningful socio-economic and cultural exchanges in the Muslim world. Both activities are described as 'joint action' which aims to establish cooperation, if not common action, on priorities identified by the Member states. The areas of its activities included political, economic, trade, culture and heritage, research in science and technology, human rights and rights of women and terrorism. However, the organisation has sometimes been

blamed for its lack of success to convey a clear institutional image or assert authority in international affairs. Dissatisfaction has been aired by the public opinion of the member states, and sometimes by members themselves. Like any other inter-governmental organisation, the OIC has also been handicapped due to conflicting national interests coupled with differences in political and ideological orientations.

He noted that there was turn in the history of the organisation when a ten-year programme of action was adopted from the third extraordinary summit meeting in Mecca in December 2005. It was preceded by meeting of a group of scholars and intellectuals examining the challenges facing the members in intellectual, cultural, political, economic and development fields. These scholars formulated some concrete programme of actions. The programme included political actions like establishing values of moderation and tolerance, combating extremism, violence and terrorism, countering 'Islamophobia', the question of Palestine, the rights of Muslim minorities and communities *etc.* In the economic and scientific fields, recommendations were made to achieve higher levels of development and prosperity, priority in enhancing economic cooperation among the members, intra-OIC trade, issues related to globalisation, liberalisation, environment, science and technology *etc.* In the field of education, social and cultural, recommendations were made to tackle illiteracy and low standard of education, redress ideological deviation and to focus on the rights of women, children and family.

Dr Hussain stated that the issue of Palestine captured OIC's attention since its beginning. The desecration of the holy mosque of *Al-Aqsa* acted as push factor for the organisation's beginning. Its charter stipulates that it should support the Palestinian people to exercise their right of self-determination and establish



their sovereign state with Jerusalem/*Al-Quds Al-Sharif* as its capital and to safeguard its historic and Islamic character. OIC's position on this issue has been that East Jerusalem should be the capital of independent Palestinian state and the seat of the OIC itself. An extraordinary summit conference of OIC was convened on 13 December 2017 to review the developments that resulted from the decision of the US President Donald Trump regarding US's recognition of East Jerusalem as the capital of Israel. In the Communiqué of the conference, the members "hold the US administration fully liable for all the consequences of not retracting

from this illegal decision; and regard it as an announcement of the US administration's withdrawal from its role as sponsor of peace... Call on the Security Council to assume its responsibilities immediately and reaffirm the legal status of the City of *Al-Quds Ash-Sharif*."

Professor Hussain noted that the OIC has expanded its agenda in various directions. By its decisions to work in political, economic, scientific, education and cultural agenda, it gives the look of a thriving organisation. The spirit emanating from being *Ummah* should be taken as pulling the members together. However, the diversity which is in-built in the Muslim societies should be remembered in judging its role as a united entity. He said that the concept of *Ummah* stands more as vision but not reality. He quoted from the welcome address of Mahathir Mohamad, the former Prime Minister of Malaysia, of OIC Summit held in 2003 that "not only our governments divided, the Muslim *Ummah* is also divided again and again. Over the last 1400 years, the interpreters of Islam, the learned ones, the *Ulamas* have interpreted and reinterpreted Islamic religion brought by Prophet Muhammad (*SAW*), so differently that now we have a thousand religions which are often at odds with one another that we fight and kill each other. From being a single *Ummah*, we have allowed ourselves to be divided into numerous sects, *mazhabs* and *tarikats*, each more concerned with claiming to be true Islam than our oneness as the Islamic *Ummah*." Dr Hussain observed that unfortunately, the OIC is unable to intervene in the war and conflicts that are fought among the OIC members. The Article 27 of its charter regarding peaceful settlement of disputes becomes questionable when there is an armed conflict between two or more members.

He concluded by saying that the condemnation and adoption of scores of resolutions about Palestine issue have failed to change the Israel and US attitudes due to lack of any leverage of the OIC members in this regard. Same argument may be given for Rohingya problem. To him, how far present Saudi-US bilateral relations can influence US attitudes to Jerusalem issue is a matter to ponder. He expressed that the national interest of any individual member of OIC may take precedence over OIC decisions.

Presentation II: Human Rights and OIC



Ambassador Muhammad Zamir

*Former Chief Information Commissioner of Bangladesh and
Current Member of OIC Independent Permanent Human Rights
Commission (IPHRC)*

Ambassador Muhammad Zamir, Former Chief Information Commissioner of Bangladesh and Current Member of OIC Independent Permanent Human Rights Commission started his presentation by sharing his first experience of working with OIC. He stated that his first interaction with OIC started from 1970 when he was a government official of Pakistan's Foreign Office. He attended the Islamic Conference held in Lahore in 1974. He said that Malaysia's Prime Minister Tunku Abdul Rahman took the responsibility to unite the Muslim countries as the first Secretary General of the OIC. Since then the OIC has come a long way.

Ambassador Zamir stated that one of the major achievements of the OIC in recent years is the establishment of the OIC Independent Permanent Human Rights Commission (IPHRC). The main objectives of IPHRC are: advising OIC's policy and decision making bodies on all matters in the realm of human rights; advancing human rights and fundamental freedoms in Member States; promoting and strengthening human rights in Member States by providing technical cooperation and assistance in the field of human rights and awareness raising; pursuing free and intercultural dialogue to promote peace and harmony among the Member States to promote the true image of Islam; promoting cooperative working relations with relevant bodies of UN as well as relevant regional human rights mechanism; and promoting and supporting the role of Member States' accredited civil society organisations.

Describing the composition of IPHRC, Ambassador Zamir informed that the OIC IPHRC is comprised of 18 members (*i.e.*, six from Asia, six from Arab world and six from Africa). Members of the Commission are nominated by respective governments and are elected by the Council of Foreign Ministers (CFM) for a three-year period. There was an election last year where he was elected as a Commissioner of this region. The Commission has representatives from Uganda, Turkey, Burkina Faso, Uzbekistan, Nigeria, Oman and Saudi Arabia. He informed that there will be a meeting with all of them in Jeddah within two weeks.

Regarding the objectivity and independence of IPHRC, he stated that IPHRC follows the internationally recognised norms, standards and procedures for ensuring objectivity, independence and professionalism in the performance of its mandated tasks. Each elected Commissioner is required to make a solemn declaration, before assuming responsibilities, for faithfully discharging her/his responsibilities with professionalism, truthfulness, independence, impartiality and integrity. In exercising their functions, the Commissioners are bound to uphold utmost professionalism, truthfulness, independence, impartiality and integrity whilst enhancing their moral authority and credibility, free from any kind of extraneous influence. The Commissioners are barred from receiving instructions from any State, including their own, or any third party.

The IPHRC will address the following issues in next three years: the rights of women and children, the right to development and combating Islamophobia, extremism and intolerance as well as human rights violation in different countries. In this context, there was a meeting in the beginning of January of OIC IPHRC in Dhaka. The IPHRC visited different camps and talked to the Rohingya people who entered into Bangladesh. They had a detailed discussion with United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) and International Organization for Migration (IOM). The IPHRC is preparing a report on the situation which will be presented in the next meeting.

Ambassador Zamir also noted that the IPHRC is determined to play its role to promote human rights with Islam's spirit of justice and equality. In this context, he quoted an *Ayah* of *Sura Yasin* - "they are looking for me, blessings will come from the tree". He explained the meaning which is: 'the Creator is watching what we are doing'. He further informed that he had met the National Security Adviser of Myanmar and described the Rohingya refugee situation and conveyed OIC's request to allow OIC team to visit the troubled area of Rakhaine state to understand what is actually happening. He hoped that the Embassy of Myanmar in Bangladesh will be helpful to send a representative to the refugee camps of Bangladesh. He mentioned that these issues were discussed in the meetings of UNHCR and IOM.

In conclusion, Ambassador Zamir focused on the vision of OIC and stated that the OIC stands for equality. He recalled a proverb in this regard that "water cannot be divided, if we try with our finger then the finger will be drenched but water will come together". Similarly, he continues, within OIC, there might be different opinions, there might be clashes and conflicts of interest and expectation, but the Member States need to work together. He concluded by emphasising that the Rohingya issue needs to be solved urgently.



Presentation III: Bangladesh and OIC



Ambassador Md Touhid Hossain,
Former Foreign Secretary of Bangladesh

Ambassador Md. Touhid Hossain, Former Foreign Secretary of Bangladesh, at the outset noted that the participation of the Bangladeshi Prime Minister at the Lahore Summit in 1974, was a bold and determined step, given the prevailing circumstances. He said that OIC member states had mostly been downright hostile to Bangladesh's war of liberation. For many of them it was a breaking up of the largest Muslim state that would further weaken the already beleaguered Muslim world. Some OIC members, including the pivotal Saudi Arabia, were yet to recognise the State of Bangladesh. He added that the visit was made possible by behind the scene maneuver of some OIC members. As a requirement for Bangladesh to participate in the summit, Pakistan recognised Bangladesh a day ahead of the event.

He noted that India, which offered vital support to Bangladesh's War of Liberation and was at that time also the most important ally to Bangladesh was not well disposed towards this decision. India itself had tried unsuccessfully to enter the OIC at its inception. According to him, participation of Bangladesh at the OIC summit was a masterstroke that opened its way to be involved with the still somewhat hostile Muslim world.

He observed that opening up with the Muslim world was crucial for Bangladesh on a number of counts. With the third largest Muslim population in the world, Bangladesh has traditional, social and religious bonds with the Muslim world, and her joining the OIC institutionalised that bond. There were also some domestic, political, economic and socio-cultural imperatives. He added that since joining the OIC, Bangladesh has remained a committed and active member of the organisation. The country participated in all the summits and CFMs; and has been actively involved in all the important issues confronting the Muslim world. It hosted the 14th ICFM in Dhaka in 1983 and is going to host the 45th CFM this year.

Ambassador Hossain said that the late 70s and 80s of the last century was a period of most intensive involvement of Bangladesh in the OIC's activities in the arena of political and conflict resolution, albeit

with little tangible results. He examined Bangladesh's role in the Palestine committee (*Al-Quds* Committee), the Iraq-Iran war, the Mindanao insurgency and the war in Bosnia. He continued that a prime concern for the OIC from its very inception was the fair and durable peace in Palestine. The concern of the OIC member countries over the Palestine issue and continued occupation of Jerusalem led to the creation of the Permanent Committee on Jerusalem, known as the *Al Quds* Committee during 6th ICFM in Jeddah in 1975. In the 9th ICFM in Dakar during 24-28 April 1978, Bangladesh was elected a member of the Committee. First two sessions of the Foreign Ministers' level committee were held in Fez and Marrakech in 1979 and 1980 respectively in which the Foreign Minister of Bangladesh participated. Bangladesh's proposal for an overall action programme emphasising a common Islamic position on the *Al Quds* and the Palestine issue was approved by the committee. Bangladesh has maintained its abiding support on the Palestine issue and consistently taken active role in all subsequent meetings of the *Al Quds* Committee. He, however, observed that, the committee proceedings did not achieve anything concrete in terms of ending the plight of the Palestinians or the rigours of Israeli occupation.

While discussing the political issue, Ambassador Hossain narrated about OIC's involvement in the Iraq-Iran war in the 1980s. He said that the OIC Summit of 1981 formed a committee comprising the Presidents of Guinea, Bangladesh, Pakistan, the PLO Chairman, the Prime Minister of Turkey and the Foreign Minister of Senegal, to help end the war. He noted that the efforts did not succeed in its mission primarily because of the bias against Iran on part of important members of the organisation, apart from the western support for Iraq which was clearly the aggressor. The war ended in 1988, when the Iraqi forces were



physically driven out of Iran, after both countries have suffered unprecedented losses both in terms of material resources and human lives.

He mentioned that a success story of the OIC in the conflict resolution was the peace accord in the Mindanao conflict, in the Philippines over the period from 1969 to 1996. The Final Agreement was signed in 1996 between the Philippines Government and the Moro National Liberation Front (MNLF). Bangladesh remained actively engaged in bringing the parties together. Particularly Ambassador Mohammad

Mohsin, Assistant Secretary General of the OIC and former Foreign Secretary of Bangladesh was the chief negotiator from the OIC and played a pivotal role in bringing about the agreement. Bangladesh is a member of the OIC Ministerial Committee of the Eight that monitors the implementation of the agreement. The Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF), however, has continued its armed resistance, reaffirming their commitment to establishing a self-determining *Bangsamoro* territory.

He added that during the 1992-95 Bosnian War, OIC as a group took initiatives to support the Bosnians who were facing annihilation at the hands of the Serbs. The UN placed an arms embargo on all sides which put the Bosnians in dire straits as the Serbs already possessed a formidable arsenal. In 1993, the OIC summit in Karachi agreed on Bosnia's need for weapons to defend themselves from the Serbs. However, the case of the Bosnian Muslims was somehow salvaged by the intervention of the West, particularly the US, who came with active support of the Bosnians compelling the Serbs to accept a deal that led to the Dayton agreement. Bangladesh remained engaged with the OIC's efforts in Bosnia and participated in the peacekeeping both during and after the war under UN auspices.

In the economic area, Ambassador Hossain touched upon the activities of the Islamic Development Bank (IDB) and the issue of trade promotion among the member countries. He mentioned that the IDB was established on 07 December 1973, by seven member countries of the OIC with the aim of fostering economic development and social progress of the member states and Muslim communities. It started functioning in 1975 and Bangladesh has been a member of the Bank since its beginning. Its headquarters is in Jeddah.



It gives financial assistance to member states for their economic and social development and aims to foster trade among member countries.

Ambassador Hossain told that the OIC's 10-Year Programme of Action of 2005 ended in 2015. The 2016-2025 Programme of Action has been initiated and projects formulated by countries will be supported by the IDB. Bangladesh has taken an active interest in the programme and seeks help for multimodal connectivity to boost trade. He mentioned that the IDB is a major development partner of Bangladesh. The

country receives both loans and grants from the IDB, mostly in agriculture, power, rural development and education sectors. He continued that over the decades, a big help for Bangladesh from IDB has been short-term credit for purchase of oil. Since becoming a member, Bangladesh received such credits to the tune of



about US\$ 17 billion from IDB, at some point the credit amount reaching close to one billion US dollar. He regretted that the IDB was supposed to work as a supportive organisation of the OIC, but in reality, it works independently, often in defiance of the OIC's political decisions.

Reflecting on trade promotion, Ambassador Hossain said that an Islamic Common Market was proposed by Bangladesh in the early 1980s but that has not been materialised. He mentioned that most recently a preferential trading arrangement has been agreed and the member countries are to give a list of items to be traded and the concessions offered. However, nothing concrete has happened in that respect yet.

He also mentioned that the 24th ICFM in Qatar in 2000 called on member states 'to reinforce sub-regional and regional markets and relaunch the existing economic integration projects among themselves'. Following this, a private sector initiative in Bangladesh called SEACO Foundation has taken an initiative to establish South East Asian Cooperation (SEACO) involving five OIC members of South and South East Asia, namely Bangladesh, Brunei, Indonesia, Malaysia and Maldives. SEACO proposes to promote cooperation in trade and investment, as well as in economic and development areas involving private sector, civil society and through public private partnership (PPP).

He then focused on other areas of Bangladesh-OIC cooperation. He mentioned that Bangladesh is the host of Islamic University of Technology (IUT) which is a subsidiary organ of the OIC. Beginning in 1981 as the Islamic Centre for Technical and Vocational Training and Research (ICTVTR), it is now a highly rated institution in the field of applied science and engineering. He claimed that the vision for converting the vast population of Muslim world into a quality human resource was pioneered by Bangladesh. Students from around 20 OIC member countries are now pursuing their higher studies at this institution. He added

that Bangladesh has also received tangible benefits from the Islamic Scientific, Educational and Cultural Organisation (ISESCO) in the form of scholarships, training *etc.*, and in organising seminars, workshops and conferences in the relevant field.

Ambassador Hossain also deliberated on the Rohingya crisis. He labelled it as the biggest crisis that Muslim community is facing outside of Palestine. He mentioned that the Myanmar regime, spearheaded by the all powerful military and the militant Buddhist clergy, has penetrated near complete ethnic cleansing of the Rohingya Muslim community of Arakan, accompanied by mass murder, rape and arson. He said that the whole thing happened in front of the global community. He then mentioned that the OIC has established a contact group on the issue and in a highly attended meeting of the Group in New York in September 2017, Sheikh Hasina, Prime Minister of Bangladesh, urged upon the OIC to take steps to put pressure on Myanmar to take back the 800,000 or so Rohingyas who have taken shelter in Bangladesh, in full dignity, rights and security. Her speech has made an impact on the international audience. Bangladesh has signed an agreement with Myanmar for return of the Rohingyas, although, there has been limited progress in this respect in the last six months. He urged upon the Government of Bangladesh to come out of the illusion of bilateralism and engage the OIC and the larger international community in resolving the issue. He also urged the OIC member states to be more generous and come forward with adequate resources to provide sustenance to the Rohingyas.

He also assessed the effectiveness of Bangladesh's involvement with the OIC. He said that the effectiveness of a member state in an organisation is equal to the effectiveness of the organisation itself. The OIC started itself with a political agenda, *e.g.*, the unity of the Muslim *Ummah*, and resolving the Palestine-Jerusalem issue. On both counts, the organisation has barely anything to show for success. He observed that even though the OIC is the second largest inter-governmental organisation, it is perhaps the most fractured one. On the one hand, there is the Iran-Arab conflict, on the other hand is the Shia-Sunni divide. Long drawn conflict between Saudi Arabia and Yemen, civil wars in Syria and Libya, intra Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) conflict of interest-all have further queered the pitch for the OIC. The *Al-Quds* Committee has been meeting for more than last four decades with no sight of solution. The pivotal countries of the OIC have not been able to put any more pressure on the international system that could lead to a resolution of the Palestine and *Al Quds* issue. He observed that, the pursuit of narrow self-interest by the member states has only strengthen the hands of their adversary.

He concluded by saying that Bangladesh has given its full support to the OIC on the organisation's political agenda. Bangladesh's entry into the organisation has opened up the avenues for the country to play an active role in the international milieu. It has also created wider opportunities for economic and other interactions with the members of the organisation. The IDB funded projects, the Islamic University of Technology, presence of a large expatriate workers' community in the Gulf countries are cases in point. He registered his high expectation that Bangladesh will continue to remain an active member of the OIC and a partner of its successes and failures in the days ahead.

Presentation IV: Emerging Challenges and Way Forward for an Effective OIC



Ambassador Mohammad Mohsin
*Former Foreign Secretary of Bangladesh and
Former Assistant Secretary General of OIC*

Ambassador Mohammad Mohsin, Former Foreign Secretary of Bangladesh and Former Assistant Secretary General of OIC, congratulated the Foreign Ministry for taking a timely initiative for holding the 45th Session of the Council of Foreign Ministers (CFM) of the OIC in Dhaka during the month of May 2018. He wished that the session would be successful and fruitful one. He also added that Dhaka had the honour of successfully hosting another CFM in the mid-1980s, when he had the honour of serving in Jeddah and was representing Bangladesh.

He continued to his story of OIC and said the organisation was set up back in 1969, following the burning of the holy mosque of *Al-Aqsa* in Jerusalem, primarily for providing a platform for the Muslim *Ummah*. Immediate priority was to support “the struggle of the Palestinian people and to establish their sovereign State with *Al-Quds Al-Sharif* as its capital.” He added that sadly, this goal had not been achieved till today, rather had become more complicated due to growing disunity and prevailing tension among the Arab members of the organisation. Not only that, the recent expectation for heralding an ‘Arab spring’ to bring democracy and justice has turned into an Arab disaster. He continued that the sad state of affairs prevailing today in the West Asia, especially among the member states of the Arab League and including the GCC and Maghreb Union *etc.*, are matters of concern to all in the OIC.

He said that the OIC is the second largest grouping of nations today, after the United Nations. The OIC represents more than two-thirds of the 1.8 billion Muslim people around the world, and 57 States as its members; while the rest nearly one-third of the *Ummah* live in non-member States. He said that there are lot of anomalies in the OIC. There is a country of OIC which without being a Muslim majority (like Uganda) is a member of OIC. And there are countries having majority Muslims (like Tanzania) who are not OIC members. He added that, as those countries are extended family of the *Ummah*, OIC looks at all of them. He called upon the OIC community to assume a greater responsibility with regard to the Muslim communities living in non-member states.

In this connection, he mentioned that India has the second largest Muslim community in the world but is not a member of the OIC. He then discussed about the Indian interest in the OIC. He mentioned about



former Vice President of India Ambassador Hamid Ansari's observation in an article published in the Indian Daily, "The Hindu" in 2006 where he said, "Neither an Ostrich-like of ignoring the OIC nor an avid embrace would serve India's purpose. Incremental interaction, and a quite insistence on the restoration of the original membership would be a better alternative." Ambassador Mohsin also mentioned that the Islamic Development Bank (IDB) which is an organ of the OIC has been operating a giant programme for some years. Now that extends assistance for the promotion of education to the Muslim students and Islamic institutions in India. Similarly, other interactions are also taking place within cultural affiliates and institutions of the OIC.

He then mentioned that since the setting up of the World Islamic Economic Forum (WIEF), consisting of public and private partnership, representatives from a large number of Non-member countries including India have been attending the annual WIEF gathering, held in different cities. He said that this practice is comparable to the gathering of the World Economic Forum in Davos. In Bangladesh, he said that there are also a group of friends both from the private sector and the public sector who have been trying to set up a sub-regional body-comprising of two OIC members states, from south Asia and three-member states from South East Asia, the group has been called SEACO. He added that he was glad to hear that the State Minister for Foreign Affairs of Bangladesh has also approved this approach.

He then continued, since the beginning of the millennium, Muslims of the world are passing through a period of anguish and restlessness of their soul. He mentioned that some would argue that this is a sign of the change of an era or turning of a new page. But here in South Asia, he added, countries seem to slide into deeper mess, unable to contribute anything substantial in the advancement of civilisation. To his mind, seeking approbation of the outsiders and being willing pawns in their hands, are hardly credible.

He mentioned that his colleague Ambassador Muhammad Zamir mentioned details of the OIC member states as they have been actively and constructively involved at different levels in promoting Universal Human Rights/Values for all without discrimination. In line with his colleague's comments, he added that the OIC has established its own Human Rights Commission (IPHRC) that operates in an independent and transparent manner so as to advise the member states on all human rights issues.

Ambassador Mohsin also recalled that back in the mid-1990s, on request of the UNICEF, the OIC has had the honour of being sponsors of the relevant UN charter for the rights of children and women. Out of the four or five sponsors, he proudly added that two of them had female Heads of Government. But he also mentioned that when the charters were adopted, the OIC countries had to have many reservations for them.



He regretted that the world is becoming more dangerous and chaotic day by day. Mounting deprivation, horror and misery are spreading across the continents as well as millions of innocent lives. While the traditional challenges remain, there are new manifestations of discrimination and violations that are playing into the hands of the extremists and terrorists. What indeed gives him more pain is to see that most of these miseries are faced by Muslim populated countries and communities.

He added that in recent years, there have been surge in violent extremist activities in the Middle East, Asia and Europe and they have one common element in them, *i.e.*, members of Muslim community are both the perpetrators and victims of these murderous process. He also added that a new stereotype has in the process emerged to brand Muslims as terrorists.

Ambassador Mohsin recalled the recent deadly terrorist attack at Gulshan in Dhaka and killings of about 22 or more people, most of whom were foreign nationals. He said that this attack had awakened Bangladesh to a new reality of extremist violence. In addition to demonstrating the unprecedented level of brutality, this attack and other follow up extremist violent activities in different other places, have also shown an ominous ideological connection of perpetrators to that of the ISIS and other global terrorist networks. He added that the OIC has an obligation in this regard, which stems from multiple factors.

He said that the CFM in Dhaka may consider advising the Secretary General of the OIC to explore the possibility for setting up a mechanism for conflict management, by an institute or forum, in line with the Europe based organisation like Organization for the Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE).

He then drew attention to one of the worst forms of Islamophobia the world has witnessed, that is the treatment of the Rohingya Muslims by the authorities in Myanmar. He suggested that the forthcoming CFM might consider setting up of a High Level Ministerial Committee consisting of six members (two from each group of Arab, Asian and African membership), to oversee and promote steps for solutions. He recalled that similar steps were taken by the OIC for undertaking dialogue with the Philippines and the Moro National Liberal Front (MNLF). Even, keeping in view the gravity of the situation, he said that if the CFM feels appropriate, it may also recommend setting up the aforementioned committee at the Heads of Government



level. He recalled that similar committees were set up in the early 1980s by the OIC for defusing the rising tensions that were created between Iraq and Iran, following the first Gulf War. He said that, he personally feels that Bangladesh will not be able to handle this situation alone and needs OIC to help them. He also suggested that the OIC needs to make a forum for the youth.



Mr A F M Gousal Azam Sarker

*Director General, International Organisations, Ministry of Foreign Affairs
Government of the People's Republic of Bangladesh*

Mr A F M Gousal Azam Sarker, Director General, International Organisations, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Government of the People's Republic of Bangladesh, briefed the audience about the preparation of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in organising the upcoming 45th Session of the Council of Foreign Ministers (CFM) in Dhaka. He said that the decision was unanimously endorsed in favour of Dhaka in Abidjan last year during the last session of the CFM. Since then the ministry has been at work for the preparation of organising the event. He deliberated on two areas of preparation: substantive area and logistics and organisation. For the substantive part, the preparation is almost done, he said. Recently, three meetings have taken place in the OIC Headquarters: the Permanent Finance Committee meeting, the meeting on economic, social, cultural and family affairs and issues, and the meeting on political, security and reform issues. During the meetings, a number of resolutions were discussed and finalised for the adoption in Dhaka CFM.

He informed that the Permanent Finance Committee finalised several resolutions regarding OIC's financial situation, budget, and some organisational issues relating to finance. On economic, social and cultural affairs, a number of resolutions were also finalised mostly, in the areas of economic, trade and investment initiatives, and also on a range of issues regarding family and cultural affairs, as well as on communication and media. In the economic area, Bangladesh has proposed a resolution on multi-sectoral connectivity and economic integration. He said that this was a contribution from Bangladesh and has been accepted during the meetings by other member states. He also informed the audience that there were some innovative proposals from Bangladesh in the area of investment, like utilisation of Islamic Solidarity Fund for Development (ISFD), a window of IDB (Islamic Development Bank), under a new and innovative kind of investment. This proposal has also been accepted and there will be a mechanism developed and the modalities finalised as well.

He also mentioned that a general assembly, which made an assessment of the activities and approved OIC's activities for the next one year, was held. These activities will be organised by the subsidiary organs of the OIC. One of them is the Islamic University of Technology in Gazipur. That is an important connection of Bangladesh with OIC, he noted. And through this, the country is contributing to the human resources development of the Muslim *Ummah*.

He further informed that there were discussions regarding political, conflict, security and organisational and reform issues, as well as on dialogue of civilisation and interfaith dialogue. He said that the Foreign Secretary of Bangladesh chaired the session and most of the resolutions have been finalised for adoption in the Dhaka CFM. However, a few resolutions will require additional consideration and will be discussed in Dhaka by the Special Committee. Bangladesh has also been contributing substantively in the reform proposals and in supporting new initiatives with the backing from some other brotherly countries.

On the organisational part, he said that the preparation is being done for logistics and other arrangements. The CFM will be organised at the Bangabandhu International Conference Center (BICC) in Dhaka. And for that, accommodation, transport and other preparatory works are going on in full swing. He assured the audience that the ministry is hoping to finish all those preparations within next few weeks. The Foreign Secretary of Bangladesh is leading the organising committee. Finally, he noted that Bangladesh is very actively involved in different committees of OIC and particularly taking lead in the Rohingya issue. Bangladesh is focusing largely on this issue and there will be a sideline event during the CFM in Dhaka to give the Rohingya issue a prominent focus.



Open Discussion



Mr Abul Hasan Chowdhury, Former State Minister for Foreign Affairs touched upon the South East Asian Cooperation (SEACO) and informed that in 2000, Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina in her first visit to Malaysia proposed setting up of SEACO which was enthusiastically embraced by the Prime Minister of Malaysia, Mahathir Mohamad. He suggested that this could be a reference point while discussing SEACO during the 45th Session of the CFM of OIC, Dhaka. He also deliberated on the Rohingya issue. He opined that there are possibilities of biased statements in these sorts of meetings, seminars and summits. He further suggested that a Special Committee can be

formed with the Prime Minister of Bangladesh, as she has taken a very humane and proactive approach. She has visited different capitals in the world and requested for a special session in the United Nations General Assembly (UNGA). Bangladesh is burdened with this crisis and it has done far better than most countries under the circumstances of humanitarian crisis. It is not a sole problem of Bangladesh rather it is a regional and global problem. He commented that the world has to wake up and go beyond making speeches.

Mr Mohammad Fazlul Haque, Vice Chairman, Asian Youth Council emphasised on the role of youth in shaping the future of OIC. He remarked that policy makers should utilise the potential of vast youth generation for a better future.

Ambassador Shamsheer M. Chowdhury, BB raised a question regarding the measures IPHRC can take in OIC Member States. He was also interested to know about the reaction of the National Security Advisor of Myanmar



on the Rohingya issue. He requested to the panel that the 45th Session of the CFM of OIC should solely focus on the Rohingya issue so that Myanmar could understand its grave importance.



Lt Gen (Retd.) A T Muhammad Zahirul Alam, rcds, psc, Former Commander, National Defense College stated that at political-strategic level OIC is simply divided into three different panels which are led by Saudi Arabia, Turkey and Iran. This division is coming in the way of making OIC an effective organisation. He suggested that the South Asian and South East Asian countries, who generally are not involved with these three

camps should take an initiative to reconcile the differences and to make OIC an effective organisation. He also pointed out that Turkey, Iran, Iraq and Armenia have kept the functioning of OIC unstable. He thinks that for some unknown reasons OIC remains shy away from the humanitarian crisis, like the Kashmir or the Rohingya crisis. OIC could play the facilitation role in resolving these issues. He then asked why OIC does not have a peacekeeping role despite being the second largest multilateral organisation. Mentioning that European Union, NATO and even African Union have critical role in peacekeeping, he asked why OIC does not have an active role when it comes to Muslim to Muslim conflict or Muslim versus other conflicts.

Mr Saleh Ahmed Tita, Columnist and Freelance Journalist pointed out that the differences between the Islamic countries are the root causes of the problem. There are so many organisations (*e.g.*, Islamic Development Authority, OPEC, Arab League, *etc.*) but none of them are able to solve the problems of the Islamic world. He stated that the Islamic countries believe in Quran and if all are based on the Quran, then why there is presence of different *Mazhabs* and other discriminatory measures. He suggested that, there should be a special body to solve these *Mazhab*-related divisions.

Abdullah Muhammad Rafi, Student, University of Dhaka raised a question on solving the problem of Palestine. He stated that the crisis is going on for a long period of time. So, he wondered why the problem has not been solved yet.



Mr Md Moazzem Hossain, Joint Secretary, BKMEA asked about the trade potentials of Bangladesh with OIC Member States. He said that Bangladesh has fulfilled the conditions to be graduated from LDC to developing country. Therefore, he was interested to know about the specific opportunity for Bangladesh regarding trade with OIC Member States.

Mr Humayun Kabir Bhuiyan, Special Correspondent, The Daily Independent commented that there are lot of discussions going on about OIC, its role, and effectiveness. Since, the organization is criticised by many for lack of success, he asked whether the OIC has any success story.





Major General (Retd.) A M S A Amin mentioned that a number of OIC Member States have recognised Israel and wanted to know whether there is any OIC policy regarding the recognition of Israel. Furthermore, he asked what should be the position of Bangladesh in this regard. Are we following an emotional approach or do we need to focus on pragmatism in this regard?

Major General (Retd.) Muhammad Abdul Matin, ndu, psc, former Director General of BISS said that the government has planned to host the 45th Session of the CFM in Dhaka which has a plan for next 5 years. He asked what are the agendas of Bangladesh that will be presented in the upcoming meeting of OIC?



Ambassador Mahmuda Haque Chowdhury asked whether OIC should keep its membership open to Muslim majority countries or only the countries named as Muslim country. She opined that the countries that are not Member States but have Muslim population, often very large, can be given observer status.

On the issue of recognising Israel, Ambassador Munshi Faiz Ahmad informed that OIC does not have any specific rules on its charter. However, Bangladesh's position in Israel is clear. It will not recognise Israel until the Palestinians get their rights. If recognising Israel can resolve the issue then Bangladesh will do so. Recognition of Jerusalem as the capital of Israel by the US has been a very concerning issue for OIC and it has specific position regarding that.



Responses by the Speakers



Ambassador Muhammad Zamir

*Former Chief Information Commissioner of Bangladesh and
Current Member of OIC Independent Permanent Human Rights
Commission (IPHRC)*

In response to the questions and comments, **Ambassador Muhammad Zamir** said that to come to a solution of existing areas of crisis in the Islamic world, all should identify the least common denominators. 'There should not be polarisation' – this motto is pursued by the OIC and IPHRC. They are emphasising three important areas. First, creating a common platform for gender empowerment. Second, improving the prospects of children's health and education and giving them safety and security. And third, elimination of racial discrimination not only in the country of origin, but also in the context of *Mazhabs*. He noted that the rights of children have been the principal area of focus and it will be the focal point of the draft paper of the 45th CFM. There have been changes due to the movements of the World International Network (WIN) of UNESCO.

Regarding his meeting with Myanmar's National Security Advisor, Ambassador Zamir said that he was informed that the new security adviser previously served as Myanmar's ambassador to the Philippines, Belgium, the Netherlands and the EU as well as Director General for political affairs within the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in the early 2000s. So, he is a skilled diplomat. Myanmar has to be explained by all concerns that this is a grave situation and he mentioned this to Aung San Suu Kyi when he was in China last year. He emphasised that while implementing One Belt One Road initiative, China must understand that it cannot have connectivity if vulnerability exists in the region. He informed the audience that on his meeting with Xi Jinping, the President agreed with this remark.

Responding to the question of Md. Moazzem Hossain, he opined that Bangladesh should discuss with other Member States about Free Trade Agreement (FTA). If the Member States agrees on an FTA, it will bring positive outcomes. He added that the countries that are interested but are not Members should also be included in the OIC FTA.

Regarding Bangladesh's recognition of Israel, Ambassador Muhammad Zamir informed that in October 1971, Mir Mohammed Rezaul Karim was in Bangladesh mission in London; Israeli ambassador met him at that time and proposed to recognise Bangladesh. Even at that time Bangladesh refused the proposal.



Ambassador Mohammad Mohsin
*Former Foreign Secretary of Bangladesh and
Former Assistant Secretary General of OIC*

Ambassador Mohsin said that he personally feels that Dhaka meeting of the Foreign Ministers should emphasise on the diversification. The fifty years of existence or the golden jubilee of the OIC will be very soon. He had served in the West Arab states *e.g.*, Oman, Jordan, Bahrain for a considerable portion of his life. Expressing his disappointment over the existing divisions among the Member States, he opined that it will not be solved in a short span of time. South and South East Asian states can take some constructive steps and can bring the *Ummah* closer to each other for a better understanding. In South Asia, there is less chaos on sectarianism, but the scenario is opposite in the West Asia. The relations between Iran and some of the Arab countries are such that they are even prepared to bring people from outside to fight their proxy wars. He stressed that Dhaka meeting has a special role to play in this regard.

Regarding the success story of OIC, he referred to the example of the Philippines. The OIC's special envoy and the OIC Committee of Six have dealt with the problem of Philippines. The OIC played a vital role in the peace negotiations between the Government of the Philippines and the Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF) "to solve the *Bangsamoro* problem" in the Muslim Mindanao region of the Southern Philippines. He suggested that this approach could be followed by Bangladesh to deal with Myanmar at state level.

Summing Up



Mr Md Shahidul Haque

Foreign Secretary, Government of the People's Republic of Bangladesh

At the outset, **Mr Md Shahidul Haque**, Foreign Secretary, Government of the People's Republic of Bangladesh, praised all the presenter for making high quality presentations in the Seminar. He said that the presentations covered all aspects of the relationships in the OIC, specially the human rights issue which is rather a new area where OIC has ventured in and, it is progressing very well. He recalled listening to the Executive Director of the Independent Permanent Human Rights Commission of the OIC during the senior officials meeting in Jeddah and underscored the progress that has been made in that area, in particular with regards to women and children.

He noted that like any other organisation, OIC is not perfect. He said that the OIC has its own dynamics; there are groups and sub groups, currents and cross-currents which he considered to be very normal and healthy. That is why, he added, the senior officials meeting in Jeddah was challenging. The meeting had lengthy discussion, he informed, some of which will be continued in Dhaka CFM as well.

Talking about the challenges that Bangladesh is facing in hosting the CFM as the current chair, he said that when Bangladesh decided to host the CFM, the situation in world politics seemed to be not so difficult. It was thought to be pretty easy for Bangladesh to host the event. But during the Chairmanship, the foreign office found that the things were not as easy as expected. Within *Ummah* there are difficult issues, in addition to the traditional difficulties that the *Ummah* has been dealing with for quite some time. That has made Bangladesh little alert and active.

Before going to share how Bangladesh is looking at the CFM as the chair, he reminded the audience that it is a very critical and difficult time not only for the global geopolitics but also for the Muslim *Ummah* geopolitics and that has to some extent steered, if not shaken, the OIC. He hoped that between 5th and 6th May, things will not go further difficult for Bangladesh to host the CFM. He then touched upon both the programme and the content part of the upcoming CFM. He said that a large number of foreign ministers will come and they will be the main delegates of the event. With respect to content, he said that some of the questions and comments raised in this seminar were actually raised in that meeting as well.



Sharing his observations from the senior officials meeting in Jeddah, he said that he, who started his career in the foreign office by covering the OIC, was very surprised seeing that delegates were saying very openly about difficult issues in the meeting. He informed that at the end of a long debate, it was decided that a proposal from the senior officials meeting would be brought to the CFM in Dhaka regarding the review of the OIC. The proposal envisaged that time has come to look at what the OIC has done so far, what needs to be done and where are the gaps. The proposal on the table is basically for a study to do a reform of the OIC. In the past, there was a lot of hesitation among the member countries. But this time, all agreed that time has come to revisit the journey of the OIC and see what needs to be done. He hoped that this proposal will be adopted during the Dhaka CFM and if adopted, people will see a real review of the OIC and hopefully some of the things that are being discussed in this seminar will be included in that review. He particularly highlighted the Turkish proposal to set up a NATO-like defence entity within the OIC. The proposal has been debated quite well in Abidjan and postponed, and again will be debated in Dhaka. Finally, member states have decided to do a review of the OIC within which they can also look at this Turkish proposal.

In terms of conflict resolution, he said that there were several proposals as well. It was realised that there are a number of ongoing conflicts and flashpoints that involve the *Ummah*, both within and outside. There was a proposal that the OIC should have its own conflict resolution body or mechanism. To that end, Turkey proposed for a mediation centre. After a long and very difficult debate which was postponed a number of times, the member states decided that they will bring forward a resolution accepting the Turkish proposal to set up a mediation capacity building centre in Turkey. This has not been finalised yet but there has been a good progress in this regard. Member states are eagerly waiting to see how this turns into a reality during the upcoming Dhaka CFM. If the proposal finally works out, then the OIC will have, for the first time, its own permanent conflict resolution mechanism and a centre. He further mentioned that there are a number of proposals in the offing and to nurture them and steer them through will not be very easy for Bangladesh.

Foreign Secretary Mr. Haque mentioned about the special committee in the CFM. If some issues cannot be resolved, member states put them in the special committee, he highlighted. It is the responsibility

of the committee to have necessary consultations and steer it through. Bangladesh will within its capacity try to do that. He was sanguine that there is quite a bit of goodwill in the *Ummah* and Bangladesh will utilise that to steer the deliberations and the outcomes that everyone thinks would be good for the OIC. He said that these two proposals - the reform proposal and the proposal for the mediation capacity building centre, are very critical for the OIC.

He further mentioned that there are a number of other new initiatives on the floor, including Bangladesh's proposal on connectivity. Bangladesh would like to see the OIC taking initiatives to connect South Asia with West Asia, and through that the Central Asia and the rest. This proposal has been accepted without much discussion and will bring a new dimension to the OIC's activities.

In terms of programme, he informed the audience that this time Bangladesh decided to invite foreign ministers of two more countries. Canadian Foreign Minister has accepted the invitation to be present as a special guest in the opening session. So, for the first time a non-OIC member country's foreign minister will come and speak on whatever issues he chooses to speak, but hopefully on the theme of the upcoming CFM - "Islamic values for sustainable peace, solidarity and development". The Foreign Secretary noted that the values that unite all the Muslims are extremely important and can also be transposed to the global values. The Ministry is waiting for the confirmation from another foreign minister. In addition to that, some of the points



that are being discussed in this seminar are already in the resolution and will be debated in the CFM. There are about ten issues that would possibly be dealt within the context of the special committee, he informed. According to him, this shows that member states are taking interests this time.

He observed that the resolution on Rohingya issue which would be adopted this time is a very bold and strong statement. The Foreign Secretary expressed that he was very happy after the adoption of the draft resolution which will be placed before the foreign ministers. This is because, during the last three CFMs, he faced a great difficulty in pushing up one paragraph on Rohingya issue in the report. He also faced difficulty in using the word Rohingya. There were strong oppositions from some member countries against the use of

the word Rohingya. This time, there is a three-page strong resolution bringing in all aspects of the problem and there was a consensus among the member states. He believed that finally, the member states have realised that something has fundamentally gone wrong with the Rohingya Muslims. Not a single member state raised opposition to the resolution. Bangladesh has been able to take the issue to the expected level. The country has been able to do it in writing and will see how it can push the resolution forward in the CFM in Dhaka. In addition, there are requests from a number of delegates that they would like to visit the Rohingya camps in Cox's Bazar. That is why the ministry has decided to keep 4th May open for the interested delegates to visit Cox's Bazar. The ministry will do necessary arrangement for these visits. He hoped that a number of delegates from different regions will go to Cox's Bazar and see for themselves what has been done to the Rohingya Muslims.

At the end, recalling his statement in the senior officials meeting, the Foreign Secretary urged the OIC members to act upon and materialise what they say and commit. This would help people understand what to expect from the OIC. He said that the Secretariat of the OIC has also realised that time has come to deliver on promises and if they fail to do so the OIC will remain insignificant in global politics.

Vote of Thanks



Ambassador Munshi Faiz Ahmad
Chairman, Board of Governors, BISS

Ambassador Munshi Faiz Ahmad, Chairman, Board of Governors, BISS extended his deepest gratitude and sincere thanks to H.E. **Mr Md Shahriar Alam**, MP, Hon'ble State Minister for Foreign Affairs, Government of Bangladesh, for joining the seminar as the Chief Guest. He also extended sincere thanks and gratitude to **Mr Md Shahidul Haque**, Foreign Secretary, Government of Bangladesh, for being present throughout the seminar and summing up the proceedings. He also conveyed sincere thanks to the distinguished designated speakers. He also thanked everyone else including Excellencies, Ambassadors/High Commissioners and other members of the diplomatic corps, civil-military officials, including former officials, members of academia, businessmen, representatives of think-tanks and the media attending the seminar. He also delivered a note of thanks to the colleagues from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Bangladesh and the officers and staff of BISS, who worked hard to organise the seminar and made it a success.

Summary of Suggestions & Recommendations

Many suggestions and recommendations have been put forward during the presentations and discussion session of the Seminar. Some of the suggestions are as follows:

Extending and Strengthening OIC's Role

- It was suggested that the Muslim states should increase investment in the fields of science and education. They should also invest for eradication of extreme poverty and implementation of UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).
- A suggestion has been made to revitalise the spirit of *Ummah* which will help to alleviate the differences among the member states, thereby, pull the member states together.
- OIC must act when a crisis is faced by the *Ummah*. The organisation may consider working with the international power-players to resolve the crisis.
- For a better understanding among the member states and smooth functioning of the organisation, the OIC should take into account the diversity in the Muslim societies while discussing its role as a united entity.
- The member states must adhere to the Charter of the OIC and need to build a common consensus when the disputes emerge.
- It has been suggested that, clear institutional image and authority in the international affairs must be conveyed by the OIC to pursue the interest of the Muslim states.
- OIC needs to work together with spiritual unity despite the differences in opinion, conflicts of interests and differences in expectations.
- The OIC has to improve the unity among its members because pursuit of narrow self-interest by the member states strengthens the hands of their opponents.
- OIC community should assume a greater responsibility in promoting the wellbeing of the Muslim communities living in non-member states.

The Palestine Crisis

- The long-standing Palestine crisis must be resolved by the Muslim world. There should be a consensus among the member states on this issue and effective resolutions should be passed for settling the conflict immediately.

Terrorism and Violent Extremism

- OIC should focus more on issues like terrorism, extremism, growing Islamophobia, violation of the rights of Muslim communities around the globe, deteriorated humanitarian situation in parts of OIC Member States, youth radicalisation *etc.*
- In the context that non-state terrorism has become a major challenge for the Muslim world, OIC needs to articulate a definition of non-state terrorism. The organisation should also clearly state its position against non-state terrorism.

Resolving the Rohingya Crisis

- OIC should take steps to put pressure on Myanmar to take back the 800,000 Rohingyas who have taken shelter in Bangladesh, in full dignity, rights and security.
- Government of Bangladesh should engage the OIC and the larger international community in resolving the Rohingya issue.
- The OIC member states need to be more generous and come forward with adequate resources to provide sustenance to the Rohingya refugees.
- CFM may consider setting up a High Level Ministerial Committee consisting of six members (two from each group of Arab, Asian and African Membership) to oversee and promote steps to solve the Rohingya issue. Even, keeping in view the gravity of the situation, CFM may also recommend setting up the aforementioned committee at the level of the Heads of Government.
- The 45th CFM of OIC should solely focus on the Rohingya issue so that Myanmar could understand its grave importance.

Others

- CFM in Dhaka may consider advising the Secretary General of the OIC to explore the possibility for setting up a mechanism for conflict management, by an institute or forum, in line with the Europe based organisation like Organization for the Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE).
- OIC needs to set up a forum for the youths, so that the youths are not influenced by elements such as violent extremism.
- It was observed that the OIC is divided into three different groups which are led by Saudi Arabia, Turkey and Iran and this division is coming in the way of making OIC an effective organisation. It was suggested that the South Asian and Southeast Asian countries, who generally are not involved with these groupings, should take initiatives to reconcile the differences between the groups to make OIC an effective organisation.
- OIC should also play role in humanitarian crisis faced by the Muslims in non-member states. More specifically, the organisation should play the key facilitation role in resolving humanitarian issues in Myanmar and Kashmir.
- With a view to alleviate the differences among the member states of OIC, it was suggested that a special body might be formed to solve the *Mazhab*-related divisions within OIC.

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