



**1st WISE PERSONS
BOARD
MEETING**

1 Mart March 2012 Baku-Azerbaijan

**THINK TANKS PLATFORM OF THE
ISLAMIC COUNTRIES
(ISTTP)**

ISTTP
THINK TANKS PLATFORM OF THE MEMBER COUNTRIES OF THE OIC
İKTİDAR ÜYELERİ DÜŞÜNCE KURULUŞLARI PLATFORMU
LA PLATE-FORME D'CENTRES DE STRATEGIE DES PAYS DE MEMBRE D'OIC
مُنِير مَوْسَسَات الفِكْرِيَّة بِالْبِلْدَانِ الْأَعْضَاءِ فِي مَنظَمَةِ الْمُؤْتَمَرِ الْإِسْلَامِيِّ

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THINK TANKS PLATFORM OF THE ISLAMIC COUNTRIES (ISTTP)

1 March 2012 Baku-Azerbaijan

DRAFT REPORT (SUMMARY)

Think Tanks Forum of the Member Countries of the OIC (ISTTP)

THE FIRST WISE PERSONS BOARD MEETING

(1st March 2012, Baku - Azerbaijan)

“Think Tanks Forum of the Member Countries of the OIC (ISTTP) Wise Persons Board Meeting”, which had been proposed in the First Think Tanks Forum of the OIC Countries and confirmed in the second Forum, was held on 1st March 2012, at the margins of the 3rd Think Tanks Forum of the OIC Countries that was held in Baku, Azerbaijan. The agenda of the meeting and the members of the Wise Persons Board are as follows:

A. ISTTP WISE PERSONS BOARD MEMBERS

1. Ambassador (R) **Ömür ORHUN**, Adviser to the OIC and to TASAM, Turkey
2. Prof. **Zaleha KAMARUDDIN**, Rector of the International Islamic University of Malaysia
3. Ambassador Dr. **Mostafa DOLATYAR**, IPIS, Iran
4. Senator **Müşahid Hussain SYED**, IPRI, Pakistan
5. Ambassador **Humayun KABIR**, BEI, Bangladesh
6. Dr. **Hatem EL KADI**, President of IDSC, Egypt
7. Prof. **Shamseldin Zeinal ABDIN**, ACDESS, Sudan
8. **Elnur ASLANOV**, Chief of the Political Analysis and Information Provision Department of Administration of the President of the Republic of Azerbaijan



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B. AGENDA OF THE ISTTP'S FIRST WISE PERSONS BOARD MEETING

1. Introduction
2. Tasks, functions and new members of the Wise Persons Board (Action Plan for the year 2012)
3. Discussion about institutionalization of the "Think Tanks Forum of the OIC Member Countries"
4. Information about the "Rules for Granting Consultative Status in the OIC to Non-Governmental Organizations/Think Tanks"
5. Suggestions about possible contributions of the Think Tanks in the process of change and transformation in the OIC member countries
6. Considerations on the interaction between the OIC Think Tanks and their counterparts in the West
7. The criteria to be a member of the "Think Tanks Forum of the OIC Member Countries" (qualifications, limitations, official affiliations, etc.)
8. Any other business

C. SUMMARY OF THE DELIBERATIONS OF THE MEETING

1. Considerations about Think Tanks in the OIC Countries

When establishment and institutionalization of think tanks in the OIC member countries and in Western countries are compared, it can be observed that there exists an important **institutional deficiency of think tanks in the OIC countries**. During the past 10-15 years, the establishing and developing think tanks in some OIC member countries has been on the rise, but not in a sufficient level.

Most of the think tanks in OIC member countries are affiliated with government agencies. The number of NGOs are also low. Although the current situation with regards to this issue is more promising, there are still many steps to be taken. **In that regard, developing NGO based think tanks should be a priority in the OIC member countries.**

Lack of qualified human resources is the most important deficiency of the OIC member countries in dealing with the recent developments in the region. Therefore, the OIC member countries should concentrate on sectoral studies. Indeed, among the 1770 think tanks in the USA, only about 100 make researches in the fields of foreign policy and geostrategy. **Others specialize on sectoral studies.**



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Therefore, education, for instance, should not be seen as a task assigned only to ministries of education and think tanks must step in at this point. Think tanks should not focus just on such issues as security and foreign policy. On the other hand, although “**innovation in public administration**” should be the most relevant subject, it is unfortunate that this is not taken seriously in most OIC member countries.

Establishing correct information channels and evaluation of information in a comprehensive manner is needed for a healthy interaction between OIC member countries. Think tanks should assume important duties in this matter. Therefore, think tanks should be enabled to employ highly qualified personnel. Unique networks within the OIC are needed in order to handle specific issues. These networks are important for the development of interaction between the public and the decision makers. Think tanks in OIC member countries should also generalize and simplify information about strategic interests of their countries for accessibility of young people.

It is evident that think tanks play a crucial role in Western countries. Think tanks in the West can make serious researches on many pertinent issues and develop more clear positions in view of occurring events. Therefore they are able to create a vision that can keep their countries' interests. If one of the major deficiencies of the OIC countries is lack of qualified and sufficient number of think tanks, another important deficiency is that information produced by think tanks are not properly evaluated by the decision makers. **For instance, some think tanks in the MENA countries foresaw the “Arab Spring” and submitted information months before to the relative governments, but this was ignored by the decision makers.** The image, mechanisms and status of think tanks in OIC member countries should therefore be developed and these think tanks should conduct qualified studies in the fields of economy, politics, education, etc.

Lack of sufficiency in numbers, human resources and image of think tanks are the main problems of all OIC member countries, but in some under developed OIC member countries, there is not even one think tank. Financial aid should be provided to these countries by such institutions as IDB in order to help them to establish think tanks. In such issues, ISTTP Wise Persons Board and other available institutions may take a leading role.

2. Institutional Framework of the Forum and of the ISTTP Wise Persons Board

The OIC Representative explained the recent “Rules for Granting Consultative Status in the OIC to Non-Governmental Organizations/Think Tanks” and stated that the Forum might also apply for consultative status in the OIC. He went on to underline that although the OIC supports the initiative of the Forum, his presence at this meeting would be on a personal basis.



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He also briefed the participants about OIC's achievements in the human rights domain, including the initiation of the Independent Permanent Human Rights Commission.

It was thus noted that institutions and commissions that are/will be created within the frame of the OIC Think Tanks Forum and ISTTP Wise Persons Council are/will not official parts of the OIC. **The Forum and related institutions and agencies will continue to act in a close dialogue with the OIC with a flexible style.** The current initiative that is being tried to be institutionalized has the quality of being a first in the OIC family. The initiative can give important messages to the world public opinion that its work and studies will not remain superficial.

ISTTP's Wise Persons Board is presently composed of eight personalities. Membership of the Board was devised taking into account geographical, strategic and demographic balances. **At this point, to appoint representatives from Indonesia, Gulf Countries, Central Asian Countries and Nigeria was proposed by some members.**

It was also noted that every country has its own dynamics. In this connection, it was stressed that territorial nationalist tendencies, like bringing the Turkish, Arab or Persian identities to the fore will diminish the credibility and efficiency of the Board. **However, conducting studies within the spirit of cooperation and complementarity will increase the efficiency of the work of the Board.**

Wise Persons Board is established in order to create proactive and solution facilitating ideas for problems of the OIC member countries. In that regard, the important problems are enumerated as **woman's rights, education, regional conflicts, protection of the environment**, etc. Some representatives suggested that Wise Persons Board needs to make **"research travels"**. Mere conducting negotiations will not be enough; operational studies are needed.

D. SUMMARY OF SUGGESTIONS

1. Qualifications and Priorities of ISTTP Wise Persons Board

- ISTTP Wise Persons Board is a consultative organ created within the body of Think Tanks Forum of the OIC member countries, consisting of various representatives of think tanks. **Wise Persons Board is a civil initiative and it should remain a civil initiative in the future.**

- The communication language should be **English** in the activities of ISTTP's Wise Persons Board. **Chatham House rules** should be applied in private meetings. Rules should be established on which representatives will conduct the meetings



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- ISTTP's Wise Persons Board should may consist of **12 or at the most 15 members**. In this regard; **it was suggested that representatives from Indonesia, Gulf Countries, Central Asian Countries and Nigeria** should be appointed as members.
- It is not necessary to focus only on seasonal (temporary) issues. ISTTP's Wise Persons Board could prepare reports on **woman's rights, education, conflict resolution, protection of the environment, etc. If necessary, the Board could make research travels and prepare reports to submit to the international institutions like the OIC**. Smaller committees acting under the Wise Persons Board can be established to work on sectoral issues. Solution oriented reports should be prepared.
- **Events that occur in an OIC member country and their effects on other OIC member countries should be discussed in detail.**
- Proposals should be prepared before the OIC Summits and Ministerial level meetings.
- **Present Office of the Secretariat General of the Forum and Wise Persons Board in Istanbul should be strengthened; its annual budget and the shareholders should be determined. ISTTP web portal, which was proposed by the former Forums and have already been established, must be activated.**
- **The most important part in studies of ISTTP's Wise Persons Board might be characterized as "manageability of the process"**. There are many institutions within the body of the OIC; however there are also some gaps in the management process. In this regard, **it is crucial to create, strengthen and protect manageable civil initiatives for the process.**
- It is important to implement the ideas put forth before the month of Ramadan. The next meeting of the Board may be scheduled in June 2012, two weeks prior to Ramadan in Malaysia, upon the invitation of the Malaysian representative.

2. OIC Think Tanks and the Forum

- **The Think Tanks Forum of the OIC member countries does not have a legal status. The Forum consists of various think tanks which have come together voluntarily.** There is not a signed document for this initiative. Wise Persons Board is the consultative body of the Forum.
- In the developed world there is a difference between what governments say and what non-governmental organizations say. The Forum and its related institutions will not commit to any official affiliation with any international agency or with any government, but it will be made sure that this Forum will proceed in consultation and discussion with the official ranks. **This initiative should be and should remain a civil initiative.**



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-Institutionalization of the Forum depends whether it is recognized somehow by the OIC. Suggestions related to this issue were as follows: **Forum can be given a status that provides intellectual contribution for the Secretariat General of the OIC.** Alternatively, member countries and the General Secretary of the OIC can define the Forum as a body that covers relevant issues. A small working group including 5-6 countries can be formed. The institutionalization process should be carried out delicately. "Rules for Granting Consultative Status in the OIC to Non-Governmental Organizations/Think Tanks" are critical in this regard.

- A decision should be made about which meeting will be performed by which actors in which conditions. It is difficult to determine the rules on defining membership in Think Tanks Forum of the OIC Countries. Regarding this issue, members of the Wise Persons Board could conduct studies. Two suggestions may be brought up with regards to membership to the Forum: 1) Membership should completely depend on voluntary participation, or; 2) Giving membership to the institutions that are suggested by the governments.

-Current central structure in Istanbul should be strengthened for the Think Tanks of OIC member countries.

-A moderator should be determined for the website that operates in the context of the Forum and the website should be active.

- **Establishing information channels and evaluation of information comprehensively is needed for a healthy interaction between OIC member countries.** Think Tanks are key in this regard. Therefore employment of highly qualified personnel are essential for think tanks. Unique networks for the OIC are needed to be established in order to handle specific issues. These networks are important to improve interaction between public and decision makers.

- **Access to the legitimate media institutions** which are reliable and which have a large audience **should be provided.** (Al Jazeera was mentioned as being a good example in this regard.)

-The promotion for the Forum can be carried out through such academic journals published by universities.

- **It should be taken into account that the Forum must include representatives from the Islamic Institutions operating in Western countries.** Studies should be conducted on common reference points between Western think tanks formed by Muslims. The Forum and its related organizations can contribute to the development of interaction between OIC member countries and Western countries. In this respect, it is necessary to contact not only with the institutions that have been established and is being operated by the Islamic organizations in the West; but also by the



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institutions and organizations that represent Western countries as a whole. Detailed and functional studies about Islamophobia, dialogue between civilizations, political problems, et cetera, must be conducted. The Forum should work **on the basis of internationally recognized reference points and orient its activities accordingly.**

-Studies should focus not only on general issues; narrow scoped activities should be conducted also. The basic principle should be immediate action to implement proposals. **The Forum should not turn into a cumbersome structure.** The ideas that are produced by the Forum should have practical application.

-Besides national think tanks; the **OIC countries should have combined/common think tanks. A network that covers all the OIC countries might be created.** Employment of personnel who want to work on the OIC level should be supported. Wise Persons Board should show directions in such activities.

-**Underdeveloped countries that do not have any think tank should be supported regarding the issue of establishment of think tanks. Financial support should be provided by such organisations as Islamic Development Bank (IDP).** In all these areas, Wise Persons Board can take the lead.

3. Pro-Active Suggestions

-Declarations that possess stereotyped information should not be published. Instructions should be functional. Previous studies should not be repeated.

- Public diplomacy activities and the activities of the NGO's have intensified in the last decade and the share of the governments and international organizations in the international field have to some extent declined. However, governmental activities continues to hold the largest share. OIC member countries should exploit public diplomacy activities at the maximum level.

- OIC member countries should focus on sectoral activities. For instance, education should not be seen as a task restricted to the ministries of education. Think tanks should be involved with such endeavours.

-Young generations should be prevented from falling into despair. Young people should be prepared against the challenges of the new world order.

- For the OIC member countries in order to be more effective in the international arena, the OIC itself should be more effective in all its formal and informal activities.

(NB: It should be noted that all these suggestions and proposals could not be examined in detail due to lack to time, and all proposals were not endorsed by all representatives.)