
**Statement By H.E. Prof. Ekmeleddin Ihsanoglu
Secretary General of the Organization of Islamic
Conference at the Inauguration of the 1st
International Turkish-African Congress**

*Bismillahir Rahmanir Rahim
Your Excellency,
Excellencies,
Distinguished Guests,
Ladies and Gentlemen,
Assalamu Alaikum Wa Rahmatullahi Wa Barakatuh*

At the outset, I would like to thank to the Turkish Asian Center for Strategic Studies for organizing an international congress on such an important subject. It is a great privilege for me to be present at the inauguration of the 1st International Turkish – African Congress together with scholars, intellectuals and eminent persons from Turkey, various African countries, regional and international organizations.

I would like to avail of this opportunity to convey my deep sense of appreciation to the Government of the Republic of Turkey, in particular, His Excellency Recep Tayyip Erdogan, Prime Minister, and His Excellency Abdullah Gul, Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Foreign Affairs, for their keen interest in demonstrating solidarity with Africa, and developing and enhancing excellent relations between Turkey and African countries.

I would also like to seize this opportunity to express my profound gratitude to H.E Professor Alpha Omar Konare, President of the African Union Commission, for his gracious interest and unwavering support that he has shown to discuss the ways and means of broadening fruitful relations between Turkey and Africa.

Mr.President/Chairman, Ladies and Gentlement,

Although the OIC was initially established as a political forum, soon after its inception, it has aimed to develop solidarity and cooperation in economic, commercial, technological, social and cultural domains.

The Organization of Islamic Conference (OIC), reaching 57 today, out of which 27 are in Africa, constitute a substantial part of the group of developing countries. For this reason, the OIC supports all developing countries and demonstrates, in every occasion, solidarity with them.

The OIC Member States are dispersed over a large geographical region on four continents, extending from Albania (Europe) in the north to Mozambique (Africa) in the south and from Guyana (Latin America) in the west to Indonesia (Asia) in the east. The Member States in Africa represent almost half of the OIC countries. Unfortunately, most of the least developed countries (LDCs) are also from Africa. Out of 50 LDCs classified by the United Nations, 22 are members of the OIC.

All the member countries of the OIC share common problems and today, they are severely affected by the globalization process. Severe international competition caused marginalization of the economies of some member states, in particular, those in Africa.

The most recent publication of the United Nations' Department of Economic and Social Affairs (DESA) titled "The 2005 Report on the World Social Situation: the Inequality Predicament", launched on 25 August 2005, draws the attention to the widening income gap between the rich and the poor countries. Furthermore, the said report indicates that "Eighty per cent of the world's gross domestic product belongs to the 1 billion people living in the developed world; the remaining twenty per cent is shared by the 5 billion people living in developing countries"

Within such a global environment shaped by severe international competition, and considering that globalization and liberalization are facts of life, the developing countries, including the OIC Member States, should develop ways and means to survive and improve their conditions so as to derive benefits from this process. One major solution, in this regard, is to increase economic cooperation among themselves. In this respect, I am confident that this Conference will also propose pragmatic and implementable ways and means to enhance economic and commercial ties between Turkey and African countries.

Since I assumed office in January 2005, I have devoted great importance to socio-economic well-being of the OIC Member States, particularly in Africa. In this connection, in March this year, I undertook a tour to 6 Member States in Africa. I visited Burkina Faso, Chad, Gambia, Mali, Niger and Senegal to obtain first hand information on the prevailing socio-economic

conditions in the Sahel region. During this tour, I launched a programme aimed at strengthening sustainable development in Africa, including elements to develop food and cotton industries in West Africa through the promotion of joint ventures among the OIC Member States, strengthen the capabilities of the African Member States in combating poverty, eradicate polio, and develop a stronger partnership between businessmen and entrepreneurs of the OIC Member States. The Extraordinary Summit Conference scheduled to be held in Makkah Al Mukarramah in 7-8 December 2005, among others, will also examine measures to support African Development.

In line with the elements of that programme, we have organized, in cooperation with the Government of Burkina Faso, the Islamic Development Bank (IDB) and the Islamic Center for Development of Trade (ICDT), a Forum on “Energizing Trade and Investment in the Cotton Sector of OIC Member States” in Ouagadougou, Burkina Faso on 18-19 April 2005. The main objective was to discuss the ways and means of increasing the value-added in cotton sector in Africa and supporting the industrialization process of African Member States. On the sidelines of the Forum, the companies particularly from Morocco and Turkey negotiated agreements with their counterparts from Burkina Faso and Mali to Establish cotton factories in these countries.

I would like to inform the audience that Malaysia initiated the programme of “Capacity Building for Poverty Alleviation” focusing on action-oriented concrete projects to alleviate poverty in the Low-Income and the Least Developed OIC Member States. Under the first phase of this programme, three pilot projects were identified, two being in Africa, namely Mauritania and Sierra Leone. In a meeting, held on 8-9 October 2005 at the IDB Headquarters, Burkina Faso, Comoros, Guinea, Senegal and Somalia were, among others, included under the Second Phase of the said Programme. Malaysia in close cooperation with the Islamic Development Bank formulates the details of the Programme.

I am happy to learn that Turkey has also initiated a commendable programme, namely “Africa Development Strategy (ADS)”. This programme serves as a framework for the development of trade, investment and technical cooperation between Turkey and African countries. Thus, in this manner, the Programme aims at contributing to the development of Africa, improving living standards and reducing poverty of the African People. Within the framework of this programme, the Undersecretariat of the Prime Ministry of Foreign Trade has already initiated some important events in Africa, including trade exhibitions and reciprocal visits of Turkish and African Businessmen.

Furthermore, a Turkish Trade Exhibition is, now, being organized in Dakar, Senegal from 25-28 November 2005. I am confident that the Turkish Trade Exhibition in Dakar will create a suitable environment to ensure better cooperation between Turkey and African countries, and in particular, generate new business opportunities among the businessmen.

The objectives of this programme are in line with the main objectives of the OIC. For this reason, I have strongly supported this initiative. Furthermore, within the framework of concretizing Islamic solidarity, I will always encourage similar activities aimed at enhancing cooperation among the Member States, in particular, those between African members and the others. In this connection, I urge the OIC Member States to demonstrate greater solidarity with Africa.

I thank you and wish you great success.

Wassalamu Alaikum Wa Rahmatullahi Wa Barakatuh