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THE ISLAMABAD ELEVENTH SESSION  
of  
ISLAMIC FOREIGN MINISTERS' CONFERENCE  
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The International Foreign Ministers Conference (IFMC) is an executive body of the Organization of Islamic Conference (OIC) which during this very first decade of its existence has developed into a prestigious international organization; this is because of its unity of purpose, and the consistent position based on justice and tolerance which it has taken on international issues. The OIC represents over a billion of Muslims all over the globe and, as such, its role is likely to become more significant and important in containing aggression and promoting peace in the tension ridden world of today.

Seen as the deliberative and Policy Organization of Islamic Conference (OIC) and the political context in which IFMC met, its Islamabad session has been regarded, as pointed out by the Tunisian Foreign Minister, one of the most important in its history. The Eleventh Session of IFMC in Islamabad was indeed a historic event. Having taken place in Pakistan, it also added a new leaf to the history of Pakistan.

In Pakistan the Session has been viewed as a 'historic Conference' of 'historic significance' (*The Muslim*), and as a 'historic assembly' (*The Pakistan Times*). It is also to be conceded that this historic assembly took historic decisions. Apart from their importance to the parties concerned, these decisions can be characterised 'historic' from different angles:

- (a) They were taken by consensus, by complete agreement on the minimum essentials and by the broadest possible common agreement on the whole. The decisions underlined a common strategy to achieve common objectives.
- (b) They were realistic in the sense that under the circumstances such decisions were called for, and were most likely to be effective.



- (c) The decisions reflected self-confidence and collective will of the participants in the Conference.
- (d) The decisions were taken in a spirit of non-alignment and complete freedom, and were not influenced by any lurking fears, or pressures.
- (e) To solve the problems, political as well as economical and socio-cultural, the decisions retained initiative with the Conference.
- (f) Some important decisions were taken by reconciling the differing view-points; this demonstrated the spirit of solidarity and also inspired confidence in the competence of the IFMC to be able to take united decisions despite differing viewpoints and even divided loyalties in terms of political exigencies.

### A Timely Session

Historically speaking the Session was timely as it came when the non-aligned Muslim world was being squeezed hard, and the aggressive crisis, everywhere in Muslim world—in Palestine, in Iran, in Afghanistan and in some African sectors. Everywhere the Muslim minorities were held under duress, and except for the two sectors in the Far East and Africa, in all the other world sectors the refugees were the Muslims. Eversince the usurpation of Palestine, the word 'refugee' had become synonymous with 'Muslim refugee'. The Palestinians, the Afghans, the Somalians, and the Muslims in Chad, Uganda, Kampuchia, and Philippines had been driven out of their hearth and home by the unjust and intolerant forces leashed against them. Was it a mere coincidence, or by a plan and purpose, to tighten grip over a sizeable part of the non-aligned world which intervened geopolitically between the two super power blocs!

The holding of the Eleventh Session of the IFMC in time may not contain the forces of injustice and aggression automatically, or change the crisis ridden situation in the Muslim world drastically. But the voice against it has been raised *in time*, and *unanimously* and *forcefully*. The President of Pakistan raised some pertinent questions in his opening address: "Can this state of affairs be allowed to continue for an indefinite period? Will the children and the old and the helpless people continue to be rendered homeless? Is it not their indivisible right to live in their country with dignity and honour? And, is it not the duty of the international community at large to ensure that their right was restored to them?"

All these questions stood addressed to the international community



conscience, to the conscience of the whole humanity. The IFMC then raised a strong voice against injustice and aggression, and it was raised unanimously. This strongly protesting voice was accompanied by a programme of practical measures which was outlined in the various resolutions. It is the capacity of the IFMC to raise a powerful and timely voice against aggression that counts; and when it is accompanied by the Muslim states' collective will to steer an independent course of action, their voice howsoever feeble, carries weight.

Not only a timely voice was unanimously raised against aggression, but also action-oriented practical measures were adopted. The appointment of a three-member committee of the Conference (the Secretary General, Pakistan and Iran) was a determined step forward to explore the possibility of a viable solution of the Afghanistan issue. The Committee will have all the initiative and options at its disposal, including the steps to be taken to contact Kabul and Moscow to enable Afghanistan to retain its character of an independent and non-aligned Muslim state. To prevent Israel from usurping al-Quds (Jerusalem) by transferring its capital there, the Conference decided to take all the necessary measures including the summoning of the Security Council, a Special Session of the U. N. Assembly and, later on an extra-ordinary session of the IFMC if necessary. By these measures, the hitherto Arab pressure will be reinforced by the IFMC pressure, and the world opinion influenced by the more positive World of Islam opinion to dissuade Israel and its partisans from adopting aggressive and unjust measures against the people of Palestine.

To meet the challenge posed by the crucial problems which confronted the Muslim World and which were to be considered by the Conference, the President of Pakistan in his opening address set three directional goals for the *Ummah* in general and the IFMC in particular : (i) to consolidate Islamic unity and solidarity, (ii) to strengthen collective security, and (iii) to protect the common Islamic heritage and cultural identity. This observation had impact and would appear to have served as a guideline so that important decisions were taken in the Session towards promoting Islamic solidarity, security and cultural identity.

### Islamic Solidarity

Success of the Islamabad Session can be seen in the demonstration of Islamic solidarity. Some of the most crucial issues came under arguments but finally unanimous decisions were taken. Dr. M. al-Dawalabi, the Secretary General *Motamar al-Alam al-Islami* rightly observed that IFMC achieved useful results despite the exceptionally different situations



and challenges confronting it. It may be said that with the conclusion of the Eleventh Session the Islamic solidarity front stood further strengthened. Establishment of the Islamic Solidarity Fund to which generous donations were made to help the Muslim refugees in different sectors, is an important step in cementing the bonds of brotherhood transcending national frontiers.

Reconciliation of the varied and differing viewpoints was an important feature of this Conference which has shown the way to the strengthening of Islamic solidarity. This capability, if institutionalized and sustained, will go a long way to strengthen the organization in its competence to meet external aggression and also diffuse internal tensions within the Muslim states. The IFMC deliberations demonstrated that internal differences can be reduced and resolved in a spirit of tolerance, understanding, accommodation and reconciliation. It was the Conference ability to accommodate the differing and even conflicting viewpoints which resulted in the maximum possible agreement to put on record the memorable resolutions on Palestine, Afghanistan, and Iran.

### Collective Security

To promote security of the member states, the Conference adopted some realistic measures. Instead of envisaging any bilateral or collective defence pacts, decisions were taken towards strengthening the foundations for inter-Islamic co-operation and developing closer and better understanding by streamlining the role of the information media. There is a clear realization that it is only through mutual concern and goodwill that the collective will of the *Ummah* can be developed to ensure collective security. In the context of the present world situation, the IFMC made its stand clear on two important issues concerning security. It was recognized that aggression against any one member state was aggression against all the member states. The Conference also called upon the Muslim countries to beware of the dangers involved in allowing foreign military bases being established on their soil.

### Economic Co-operation

It was recognized that in order to build up a system of collective security, it was necessary first to attain economic self-sufficiency. The real strength of a modern State lies in its economic strength, and also political independence depends largely on economic independence. The Conference took note of the World Economic Order and the international economic policies and inter-relations which operated to the disadvantage



of the developing countries. Islamic States could proceed to achieve economic independence through a process of closer economic co-operation and inter-dependence among themselves and within the sphere of non-alignment. Between themselves they have all the resources (oil, agricultural, mineral and manpower) which could be conserved, developed and utilized to mutual advantage. Accordingly, decisions were taken to develop institutions of banking, trade and commerce within the Muslim countries, and promote co-operation in industry, commerce, communication, transport and tourism. The member states were called upon to ratify and sign the General Agreement for Economic, Technical and Trade Co-operation. Pakistan's proposal for a high-powered meeting for industrial co-operation was accepted. The report concerning technical co-operation, manpower, training and research was considered for further action in the areas of development. Food security and problems of the landlocked countries received special attention paving the way for a joint meeting and better understanding between the littoral and the landlocked states. The need for joint ventures in planning and developing, guarantees for inter-state investments, and promotion of inter-state trade was recognized. The organizations and institutions which have been established, or are proposed to be established will, in the long run, contribute to economic self-sufficiency and security of the 'member states'. Among such institutions are: International Association of Islamic Banks; Islamic Bank for Development; Islamic Chambers of Commerce, Industry and Commodity Exchange; Islamic Centre for Development of Trade; Islamic Centre for Technical and Vocational Training and Research; and Statistical, Economic and Social Research and Training Centre for Islamic Countries.

### Cultural Identity

A consciousness of cultural identity becomes the psychologically motivating force for a people to survive in times of crisis. The Islamic community must fortify its cultural identity in the face of crisis. The value system of Islam can become a living force in the life of the *Ummah* if it is reinforced through its educational, social and legal institutions, to pervade all walks of life and permeate all aspects of vocational, artistic and recreational activity. The qualitative creative behaviour distinctive of Islamic way of life has to be promoted through the process of education, social organizations and institutions, and through vocational and artistic traditions. Along with this essentially present-cum-future directed effort, the past cultural achievements of the Islamic Com-



munity are to be preserved and interpreted meaningfully. Under the spell of ignorance in some parts, under the stress of poverty in others, and under the compulsions of colonial domination elsewhere, the Islamic cultural heritage has suffered an irreparable loss. New specialized agencies are to be established, the existing institutions are to be revitalized and adequate funds are to be provided to ensure the safety of the Islamic heritage which is a landmark in the history of human achievements.

The deliberations of its Social and Cultural Committee and the recommendations made and accepted demonstrated a clear realization on the part of IFMC to fortify the *Ummah's* cultural identity and conserve and preserve the cultural heritage of Islam. Towards this end, important decisions were taken in the following areas. (a) *Educational*. Establishment of the Islamic Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization; the Islamic Foundation for Science and Technology; the World Centre for Islamic Education in Makkah Mukarramah; Islamic Universities in Uganda and Niger; Islamic Centre in Guinea Bissau; and Centres for Teaching Arabic in Pakistan and Sudan. (b) *Cultural*. Establishment of an International Commission for the Preservation of Islamic Heritage; Research Centre on Islamic History, Art and Culture in Istanbul; Islamic Centre in New York; Translation Institute in Sudan; the International Islamic Crescent Organization; arrangement for preservation of important Islamic cities, and monuments in Morocco, Tunisia and Mauritania; a common lunar calendar for the world of Islam as a whole; and of an Organization of the Inter-Islamic States Games and Sports Events. (c) *Legal*. Establishment of an International Law Commission to conduct research and make recommendations for application of the principles of *Sharia* to the existing institutions and new life situations. (d) *Islamic Social Justice*. Holding of a symposium on Islam and the new World Economic Order; Declaration of 1981 as the year of the Handicapped; and preparation of a document on Human Rights in Islam.

Thus, the Eleventh Session was a significant event in more than one respects. As a whole, it demonstrated a constructive and comprehensive approach at handling the problems of the World Islamic Community in general and of the Muslim States in particular. The approach was constructive in so far as forthright and firm yet realistic stand was taken on the most crucial political issues and it was comprehensive in the sense that not only the political issues came under discussion but a wider view was taken of the needs and problems of the World Islamic Community, and important policy decisions were taken towards economic, social, educational, scientific and cultural development in the Muslim countries. To



make OIC, the nerve centre for all activity more effective, attention was given to its organizational aspects so that OIC becomes institutionalized on sound lines to handle the problem of the World of Islam more effectively.

Pakistan had the honour to host the Conference and it goes into the credit of Pakistani hosts from all agencies and at all the levels, in setting the stage and providing a congenial environment for the successful progress of the Conference. In main the Foreign Ministry experts led by Mr. Agha Shahi demonstrated their expertise in helping to steer the Conference to a successful conclusion. As a result, tremendous amount of goodwill was generated for Pakistan which brought in a unique response from the discerning guests. They decided unanimously and with acclamation that President Zia-ul-Haq be requested to address the thirty-fifth session of the United Nations General Assembly next September on behalf of the entire Islamic World. It is a unique event in the history of Pakistan that its head of state has been singled out to represent the World Islamic Community at an important international forum such as the United Nations. It testifies as much to Pakistan's continuous, sincere and successful role in supporting the just struggle of the Muslim people for securing their political rights, as to its most cordial relations with the Muslim states at the present juncture of history.

In conclusion it may be stated that the image of the World of Islam Today can be seen in the concerns expressed and the decisions made in the Eleventh Session of the IFMC. Three features stand out clearly: (a) From Morocco to Indonesia, the modern Muslim states have begun to appreciate the compulsions of the present times, (b) they are beginning to draw closer together and to one another, and (c) they are inclined to strengthen and exercise their collective will to ensure their security and progress. Economic and cultural co-operation is seen as an important step towards promoting collective security.

The IFMC meetings have developed into a dependable forum for generating collective will on the part of the member states. The emergence of the collective will became obvious on more than one occasion during the Eleventh Session. The group solidarity indicated that the Muslim states were beginning to emerge as an independent bloc capable of taking its own decisions and charting a moderate yet independent course in the present day world affairs.

The challenge posed by the policies of the super powers was met realistically, and with courage and confidence.

All the members contributed to the success of the Session, though



some remained in the forefront while others played a significant role outside the regular sessions and helped to prepare the ground for agreed decisions. It may be observed that the African Muslim states played a moderating role which is likely to be of great value in the future work of the IFMC.

The most promising is the IFMC capacity for steering the Conference to successful conclusion, the capacity to accommodate and resolve differences, and the capacity to agree to disagree and yet arrive at common understandings for joint decisions.