



“Islamic Civil Society a Means of Attaining Unity, Justice and Equity”

— President Khatami

The President of the Islamic Republic of Iran and Chairman of the 8th Summit of the Organisation of Islamic Conference, Syed Mohammad Khatami, welcoming the heads of Islamic States, said :

“I take the opportunity to welcome you all who have come from every corner of the Islamic world, to your second home; the Islamic Republic of Iran to take part in the eighth Summit of the Organisation of the Islamic Conference.

I offer my gratitude and appreciation to my dear brother Ezuddin Iraqi, secretary general of the Organisation of the Islamic Conference, for his acumen and relentless endeavours; in directing the OIC towards achieving its objectives, and also for his valuable contribution in facilitating the successful holding of this summit.

I wonder whether to commence my words with a statement of the woes and misfortunes that are, or with the joys and delights that ought to be.

It is not a fact that a basic aim of the OIC is to find a common workable formula as a panacea for the outstanding unresolved issues in the Islamic world and to endeavour at attaining a status and position befitting Muslim states?

And to achieve these lofty ideals, passing through the prevailing circumstances, we should endeavour to find the remedy for the unaccomplished issues.

Definitely, no wrong can be cured unless the symptoms are, first precisely diagnosed. Only then, the best solution be prescribed through proper reflection and dispensation. And finally through strong resolve those ills could be cured.

Our predicament is that the Ummah, once the flag-bearer of knowledge, thought and civilisation, has, in the past few centuries, eclipsed into weakness, regressed into backwardness. And confronting the present predominant civilisation has, with painful passivity, failed to fully harvest the fruits of this civilisation. Our quiescence through centuries is the product of the decline of, once a brilliant civilisation which used to illuminate the destiny of human races and whose radiance of achievements and influences are yet praiseworthy and to which the modern civilisation is truly indebted.

Today, the replication of the old civilisation is neither possible for its time is long gone nor desirable, even if it were ever probable.

If we are to consider civilisation as the consequence of man's quest to comprehend existence, the world and himself, and the outcome of his efforts, then the unalterable element in man remains to be his 'search and need'.

However, the nature of his quest and need and their forms are tailored according to time and place.

Civilisation continues to survive as long as it meets the challenges of the magnitudes of ever-growing new questions and ever-changing man's needs, otherwise it is doomed to gradual decline. And since civilisation is the direct product of mankind, it also goes through such metamorphosis as birth, growth and decline.

The issues and needs of man of our time are in many aspects different from those of our predecessors. The reason why we have, in recent centuries, shown passiveness before the Western civilisation which, in fact, is the answer a Western man has found for his question, lies in the fact that we have, to multitudes of reasons, been deprived of quest and every nation devoid of quest lacks thought and such a nation is condemned to perpetual quiescence.

and complete surrender to others.

It would be worthy of observation that such passiveness, frailties and backwardness is not our preordained fate and that a people who have once created one of the most glorious civilisations in the history of mankind still possesses latent potentialities for creating a civilisation of pre-eminence provided, of course that they lend themselves to thinking and reflection and that such an ideal can not be realised unless:

1. People in contemplation revere to their historical self-realisation which is rooted in the eternal divine inspiration on the one hand, and enjoys an overflowing historical, cultural potentiality relating to the past, on the other hand.

2. People acquire a precise perception of the era they are in. In this context, it is imperative for us to note that between the Islamic civilisation or the civilisation of the Muslims and our present life stands the Western civilisation which has brought quite a number of achievements, though its detrimental influence too, has been enormous particularly for the non-western societies. Ours is the era of preponderance of the Western culture and civilisation. Therefore, comprehending the scope and magnitude of its influence is a must. However, in order to attain an effective and fruitful outlook, we need to penetrate deep down below the surface ignoring its superficialities to get to the root of the basis of its foundation, theoretical principles and its values. Our cognisance of the past is equally imperative without due retrogression to the past, and lingering in the past which is definitely a reactionary attitude. But when we are in search of identity and the refinements of our mental attitudes and as the norms of habituantes have been firmly set due to the elements of time and space, and our judicious critical outlook,

and because of present glory and dignity at times, we try to find a path for transcending beyond the present into future which is more magnificent than that of our past heritage.

Undoubtedly, we can succeed in treading this path when we try to derive constructive benefits from the achievements of Western civilisation in the area of science, technology and social norms to move forward into future, an inevitable means to a successful entry into the future.

It is the civil society which we desire to establish and perfect in our own nation and which we recommend other Islamic societies to follow suit. Definitely it is not the civil society from the perspective of the Greek philosophers and Roman political outlook as the result of its administrative experience. This civil society which began to take shape in the middle ages gradually found its place in our modern society after plodding through millenniums.

It should be noted that the two

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Painful and bitter pill to swallow, though, to see our Muslim countries being plagued with passivity and backwardness, nevertheless, we still have a ray of hope, a matter of rejoice that we as yet have the opportunity and capability transforming our destiny through our resoluteness, solidarity and awareness with the demonstration of our self-sacrifice and devotion.

If we are to glance at the twilight at the horizon, we can see that we are capable of moving the current generation and the posterior towards the new civilisation by forging solidarity and mutual understanding, standing side by side, supporting each other and fraternally hold our hands to aid each other. For the materialisation of such a goal, all of us must dedicate ourselves to the realisation of the Islamic civil society in our respective societies.

concepts of civil societies are not necessarily in conflict with each other in the area of its identity and consequences, although their nature and the quality may be different. It is due to this characteristic that we should not become oblivious of judiciously adopting some of the constructive aspects of the Western civil society.

We all know that Western civil society from both historical and theoretical point of view, originate from the Greek city-state and Roman political system."

In the other part of his speech the president maintained that "however, our civil society has its origin, historically and theoretically speaking, in Madinat-un Nabbi", adding that it should also be noted that the change of name from Yathreb to Madinat-un Nabbi is not a mere transformation of a name from one into another. The same phenomenon can be observed in the change of the

term "Ayyam-ul Jahiliyah" (days of ignorance) to "Ayyam-Ullah" (days of Allah). "Madinah" does not at all mean a town, a place or an area and neither does Ayyam-Ullah apply to the time factor."

Khatami pointed out that "consequently, the full comprehension of the culture and thought in addition to becoming cognisant of other nations' interests and liking, can attain peace and security," adding that "arriving at mutual understanding entails establishment of dialogue with all nations."

In another part of his speech, yet he stressed that "respect for human rights and the observance of its norms and criteria in this society is not based on the political expediency or merely due to creation of concord with other parties involved, further adding that "such an attitude is an outcome of our religious teachings and divine code."

Dwelling on the concept of a new civilisation he said that "the Islamic civil society which we aspire to establish is based on identity which can be enhanced and nurtured through ceaseless efforts of the intellectuals, scholars and thinkers."

The president added that "the Islamic Republic of Iran has embarked on, as its vital role in the making of a new civilisation as a minimum. Our active participation in the genesis of the new civilisation in the making, will eventually phase out the existing civilisation."

On building the new civilisation he maintained that "for the realisation of such a precious goal, is there a more reliable recourse than to the Holy Quran, the eternal heritage of the glorious prophet of Islam? Which divine scripture or message has emphasised, as much as Quran has. It's a wealth, a rationality, meditation, reflection, contemplation and deliberation on the existence and the

universe, beside providing innumerable lessons from the fateful life of the people and community of the distant past."

The president then stated that "Muslims everywhere in the world, including Muslim minorities in non-Muslim countries consider the Organisation of Islamic Conference as the backbone of their support and source of their security, psychologically speaking."

development saying, "Development constitutes another propitious basis for the preservation of security and stability and susceptibility of independence of the Islamic societies as well as for the honour and dignity of Muslim nations."

He added that "in our view, proper and preferred development is comprehensive, balanced and sustainable. In addition, it should ensure participation of all

"All of us should help the Organisation of the Islamic Conference so that it can strive, more assertively, forcefully and unequivocally, towards sincere and compassionate resolution of differences within the Islamic world."

Khatami addressed the 55-member countries of the OIC: "Generally, speaking, we should be alert to and vigilant of both visible and invisible sources of threat against our security."

The president then stressed, "In this regard, the Islamic Republic of Iran, while stressing co-operation among states in the Persian Gulf region for the preservation of the regional peace and stability, considers the establishment of regional security and co-operation with the participation of all the states in the Persian Gulf and the adoption of reliable measures that would bear fruit of lasting security in the region and towards the creation of a common defence of shared interests and concerns of all countries and nations."

President Khatami then touched on matters related to de-

velopment, groups and segments of the society, including women and youth, in the process of progress. In development defined as such, human being is the central factor, who should be accommodated with the blessing of material and spiritual blessings of life, which constitutes the very fundamental objectives of development."

The president pointed out that "in order to achieve such a development, we should, first and foremost define and devise the proper patterns of development compatible with the particularities of our respective societies and the Islamic world."

He added, "We should as well be cognisant that no country can successfully overcome all the hurdles of development on its own."

Khatami alerted the OIC to the

fact saying, "Further, it is imperative that the Islamic countries undertake a comprehensive, precise and scientific assessment in evaluation of their potentialities, capabilities and capacities, in help create - through utilisation of their respective comparative advantages - a web of interconnected chain of complementing developmental undertakings across the Islamic world."

President Khatami finally dwelled on the role of OIC saying that, "the Organisation of the Islamic Conference, as the only universal multi-lateral organisation in

supranational Islamic and human needs and aspirations."

He then added that "the Organisation of the Islamic Conference, with thirty years of experience, enjoys the requisite potential resources for more effective presence at the international level."

The president propounds that "hence, it is natural that we now take up the question of looking for new approaches and mechanism to strengthen its organisational structure as well as to make more efficient its decisions and ensure their implementation."

Khatami then deduced that



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the Islamic world, plays an important role in the accomplishment of the aforementioned and in general, the realisation of the overarching objectives of "participation, dialogue, security and development."

He elucidated his point on OIC saying, "In the light of the steadily growing role of religion in general, and Islam in particular, in recent decades in explaining and shaping human relationships, Muslims all over the world are well justified to look upon the Organisation of the Islamic Conference as a recourse to meet their

"under the current circumstances it is incumbent upon the Organisation of the Islamic Conference to assume a more active and innovative presence in international equations, particularly in the resolution of current conflicts among member states or the crises imposed on them from outside."

He then went on to say, "The organisation's initiative in defending the rights of the honourable people of Bosnia stands out as a good beginning for a serious change in the organisation's approach to international crises."

The president regarded that

"preservation and continuation of such a sensitivity and active support of the rights and interests of Muslim societies and Muslim communities and minorities in non-member countries, along with constructive engagement in finding a solution for such chronic cases as Cyprus and Kashmir, is imperative for the institutionalisation of a more prominent role of the organisation."

President Khatami then advised, "all of us should help the Organisation of the Islamic Conference so that it can strive, more assertively, forcefully and unequivocally, towards sincere and compassionate resolution of differences within the Islamic world. We should also support the organisation, financially as well as politically, in discharging its mandate."

He further stated, "simultaneously, more vigorous attention to the fundamental and pressing problems and issues of the Islamic world on the part of the organisation, along with enhancing the content of its decisions and further reinforcing of its plans and activities, will certainly make the organisation more energetic and dynamic."

President Khatami concluded, "And finally, in closing my statement, I would like to express my gratitude once again to our dear guests, and wish the best success for this December gathering, and greater achievements for the Organisation of the Islamic Conference," and ending with an optimistic tone on Muslims' reliance upon the only Creator Allah, the Omnipotent, said, "And the last words of ours is "praise be to Allah, the Cherisher and the Sustainer of the worlds."

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