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STATEMENT BY
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SECRETARY GENERAL OF THE
ORGANISATION OF THE ISLAMIC CONFERENCE,
AT THE
HIGH LEVEL SEGMENT OF THE
16TH SESSION OF THE HUMAN RIGHTS COUNCIL

GENEVA - TUESDAY, MARCH 01, 2011

**Mr. President,
Honorable Ministers and Head of the Delegations,
Madame High Commissioner,
Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen,**

I have the honor and pleasure to address this important High Level Segment of the Human Rights Council. Allow me, at the outset to join all those who took the floor before me to congratulate you Mr. President, on your election to preside over the deliberations of the 16th Session of the Human Rights Council. I am confident that this Session will bring about some conclusive decisions in the cause of Human Rights under your wise stewardship. My presence here today bears testimony to the increasing importance accorded by the OIC to the Human Rights issues in the wake of an ongoing reform and restructuring exercise. It is propelled by the vision of ‘moderation and modernization’, unanimously adopted at the Summit Level, in the Ten Year Programme of Action.

I take this opportunity to pay a special tribute to the High Commissioner Navi Pillay for her commitment and tireless efforts in the dispensation of the onerous responsibility of addressing all human rights situations around the world. I would also like to express my sincere appreciation for the progress made by the Human Rights Council over the last five years in fulfilling the mandate stipulated in the United Nations General Assembly Resolution 60/251. The Council deserves further appreciation for the recent success in the consensual outcome of the first review of its work and functioning. The Review mechanism is an important exercise in introspection. It also connotes an approach that must be extended to the other areas of the Human Rights system with a view to evolving the necessary tools to deal with the existing and emerging challenges. The mechanism of Universal Periodic Review (UPR) must be appreciated as an efficient tool to promote Human Rights values. I subscribe to the view that this Council's main role should be constructive and remedial, and not judgmental or selective.

Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen,

This Session of the Council is being held in the wake of important developments on the international scene including in some parts of the Muslim World. The OIC is following these developments with deep concern. They essentially reflect that the people in the countries concerned aspire to democracy, good governance and Human Rights. This must be respected. The leadership in these countries and the international community must deal with the situation with patience, wisdom, and a forward looking vision. Consensus and only consensus should form the basis of involvement and action by the international community represented by the international organizations like the UN and the OIC. A most important precedent was set by the Human Rights Council in this regard during the Special Session on Libya last week. This augurs well for an important principle that must be followed elsewhere in the multilateral discourse in dealing with the developments that continue to unfold. I would also lend my voice of support to the HRC's decision to urgently dispatch an independent

international commission to visit Libya to investigate into the allegations of human rights violations. The OIC stands ready to be a part of the commission. We also remain seized of the situation in Libya and dispatched two Coordination Missions to assess the humanitarian needs on ground at the border with Egypt and Tunisia. Allow me also to underline our principled position against any possible military intervention to the situation in Libya. To this end, all options should be utilized for the settlement of disputes through peaceful means and without resorting to use of force.

I would like to take this opportunity to reiterate that the aspiration of the Muslim world for good governance, the rule of law, the promotion of human rights, fighting corruption and the expansion of political participation and comprehensive development is recognized by the OIC Charter in its fundamental principles. The OIC Ten Year Program of Action also underlines the growing political and socio-economic challenges which could only be overcome through introducing and implementing reforms.

in different sectors. We are confident that OIC Member States would be able to rise up to these challenges towards accomplishing a prosperous and progressive future without external interference.

The manner in which the Council has been addressing evolving human rights situations, through convening Special Sessions, is a matter of satisfaction. It, however, needs to be complemented by effective strategy and efficient means to implement decisions of the special sessions in the interest of preserving the credibility and relevance of the Council.

In this regard, I would like to reiterate the urgent necessity for the Human Rights Council to effectively address the plight and permanent suffering of Palestinian people, under the continuous and deliberate aggression by Israeli military forces and a frequency of flagrant violations of their basic human rights. Many reports and testimonies from various United Nations independent mechanisms, including the Goldstone Report and the report of the Independent

International Fact Finding Mission on the incident of the humanitarian flotilla, have highlighted grave breaches of International Humanitarian and Human Rights law, which underpin contentions of war crimes and crimes against humanity by the occupying power. OIC had been instrumental in the establishment of these Missions and we call for full implementation of the reports thereof. Limiting access of Palestinians to their properties and holy sites particularly in Occupied East Jerusalem, the confiscation of lands and properties, the demolishing of houses and private properties, the construction and expansion of settlements, the continuous construction of the separation Wall, changing the demographic and geographic character of East Jerusalem, the restrictions on the freedom of movement of the Palestinian citizens of East Jerusalem, as well as the continuous digging and excavation works in and around Al-Aqsa mosque and its vicinity have all been highlighted that the situations in the occupied Palestinian territories is riddled with violation of the whole range of Human Rights.

OIC remains keen to encourage efforts for promoting and protecting human rights of the Kashmiri people. We believe pronouncements resumption of engagement between Pakistan and India is a positive development that must be continued and intensified with a view to resolving all outstanding issues. We are also following the humanitarian situation of Muslim minorities in non-OIC member states such as the Philippines, Thailand and Bulgaria in close and positive collaboration with the Governments of these countries.

Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen,

Islamophobia is a contemporary manifestation of racism and the phenomenon must be addressed in that context. It is matter of priority for the OIC that must not be treated as merely a numbers game. It indeed threatens the multi-cultural fabric of our societies. Most importantly, it poses a clear and present danger to international efforts geared towards peace stability and security, in both the regional as well as global context. Accordingly it needs to figure into

the strategic calculations of the international community in our bid to bequeath a peaceful abode for the future generations.

OIC has a principled position against defamation of any religion, dehumanization of the followers or denigration of symbols sacred to all religions. The developments including the ban of construction of minarets, the attempts towards burning of Quran and the use of Islamophobia as an instrument of electoral politics are ominous. There is an urgent need to initiate and sustain what I would like to term as 'preventive cultural diplomacy'. We need to move beyond event based calls for action to create spaces for structured engagement. The Human Rights framework provides with a concrete basis for this engagement. We believe that the workshops on incitement to hatred under the Durban mandate constitute an important avenue for a synthesis aimed at bridging the divergence of views. I reiterate my call, during the 15th Session of the Council, for establishing an Observatory at the Office of the High Commissioner to monitor acts of defamation of all religions

or incitement to hatred or violence on religious grounds as a first step towards concerted action at the international level. Let me also recall that I had outlined eight areas of action for consideration by states, at both the national and international level, with a view to dealing with defamation issue. I am pleased to note that the proposal has found some resonance.

The OIC has shown flexibility in negotiations with our partners over the past couple of years and we would now expect some reciprocity. The perception that supporting the resolution would throttle one's right to freedom expression is only a myth . Freedom of expression will always be upheld but it cannot be allowed to be a tool to use for inciting fear and hate.

I would like to take this opportunity to say that I felt encouraged by some positive and constructive proposals in finding a way forward on the text of the Resolution. If there is a genuine political will on the part of all to address the

issue of incitement of hatred against religions in earnest, I am confident that we can achieve a consensus.

Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen,

Let me conclude on a happy note. I am pleased to inform this Council that the OIC is on the verge of establishing an Independent Permanent Commission on Human Rights. The vision and the mandate for establishment of the Commission was provided by the leadership in the OIC Ten-Year Programme of Action adopted by the 3rd Extraordinary Islamic Summit held in Makkah Al-Mukarramah in 2005. This vision was accorded a statutory status in the new OIC Charter, unanimously approved and entered into force in March 2008. We have since been acting swiftly, through an open and credible process, in taking concrete steps toward establishing the Commission. The statute of the Commission is near finalization and likely to be entered into force following adoption by the forthcoming Session of the OIC Council of Foreign Ministers to be held in Astana in June this year. It needs to

be appreciated that what was envisaged to be achieved over a period of ten years, is on the verge of been accomplished in half the stipulated time period. This reflects the strong political will on the part of OIC Member States. I salute the commitment shown and action taken by the Member States in this important area. We can now afford to take a step further toward an upward revision, of the target we set in Makkah, over the later half of implementation of the Ten Year Programme. It is expected that this Commission of independent experts would constitute an important pillar of the ongoing process of reform at the OIC with a view to transforming the Organisation into a body that would effectively cope with the challenges faced by the Muslim world.

To end, allow to me express confidence, Mr. President, in your able stewardship of this 16th Session of the Council. An efficient disposal of the substantive agenda of this Session stands to gain from your wisdom and experience.

I thank you all.