



**INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE ON THE QUESTION OF
JERUSALEM**

PLENARY III:

International and Regional Support for East Jerusalem

Speech

by

H.E. Amb. Musa Kulaklıkaya

Director General, SESRIC

21 July 2017

Hilton Hotel, Baku

Distinguished members of the protocol, ladies and gentlemen,

It is an absolute pleasure for me to address the representatives of various governments, private sector organizations, civil society and academia in Baku today. It is one the needs of the hour to address the issue of Jerusalem and Palestine in general.

The situation of the Palestinian people of Al-Quds Al-Sharif City, who dominantly live in 19 neighborhoods of the Eastern part of Jerusalem, significantly differs in many ways from the situation of the Palestinians in West Bank and Gaza Strip. East Jerusalem was occupied, annexed and controlled by Israel in 1967. Since then Israel has made the Palestinian residents in East Jerusalem “permanent residents”, but not “permanent citizens” (“blue card holders”). With this status, the Palestinian people of Al-Quds, who live inside what Israel unilaterally and illegally declared the municipality of Jerusalem, can routinely work and travel in Israel. They are assumed to receive the same national health care, retirement, unemployment and disability benefits received by Israeli citizens, but in practice many of them are not enjoying these benefits. They also have the right to vote in Jerusalem municipal elections (although in practice few of them do so) but not in national elections. In contrast, the Palestinian people in West Bank and Gaza do not have such a status. However, being residents but not citizens of Israel, the Palestinian people living in Jerusalem do not have equal rights with the Israeli citizens and are prevented by Israel from the Palestinian Authority’s services.

There are various political, economic and social problems, obstacles and challenges facing the Palestinian people living in Al-Quds. The political challenges are reflected in two main issues: (1) The illegal Israeli Settlements; and (2) The Israeli Strategy of Judaization of the City. The continuously expanding illegal Israeli settlements in Jerusalem and other parts of West bank is a part of a long standing Israeli policy of encircling the old city of Al-Quds and other parts of the area so as to have full authority on Jerusalem, including the Eastern part where the Palestinian people are residing. Judaization of Palestinian land is particularly evident in Al-Quds and has been accelerated in recent years through home eviction, home demolition, and residency revocation.

As for economic challenges, Israel has isolated Al-Quds from its natural integration with the Palestinian economy in West Bank and Gaza and other neighbouring Arab countries while ensuring that it does not develop into the same levels as of the Israeli side. In so doing, Israel has been working continuously to make the living conditions of the Palestinian people in East Jerusalem tougher and tougher while cutting their economic linkages with the Palestinian economy. In addition to the political and economic challenges, there are also many social problems facing the Palestinian people in Al-Quds. The Israeli legal, political and economic measures against the Palestinian people there lead to social problems and family related issues particularly for Palestinian youth who cannot envision a bright future and sometimes forced to leave the city.

In fact, Israel aims mainly to undermine the viability and resistance of Al-Quds city by forcing the Palestinian population to migrate out of the city and replacing them with Israeli settlers. Meanwhile, Israel continues its attempts to change the civilizational and religious image of the city threatening, first and foremost, the Islamic sanctities in Al-Quds Al-Sharif. In particular, it has been observed, during the last few years, that Israeli threats to the Blessed Mosque of Al-Aqsa, the first qibla and third holy mosque in Islam, have been extremely increased. This urges the need for the Muslims to defend the Blessed Mosque of Al-Aqsa, its first qibla, and all other Islamic sanctities in Al-Quds Al-Sharif city through empowering the Palestinian people and institutions of the city of Al-Quds and supporting their steadfastness against the brutal Israeli policies and plans.

It should be mentioned that despite all the pertinent UN resolutions on the Palestinian-Israeli conflict and all the peace efforts that have been so far undertaken at both the regional and international levels, Israel continues its occupational measures against the Palestinian People. In particular, the continuous expansion and growth of illegal Israeli settlements in the West Bank and East Jerusalem and the construction of the separation barrier are leading to a creeping annexation that prevents the establishment of a viable Palestinian State and undermines the right of the Palestinian people to self-determination. Considering the lack of strong political pressure by the international community on this issue, there is a need for OIC Member Countries to formulate and

adopt a common stance regarding Palestine and Al-Quds issues, particularly in the UN affairs.

In addition to the political will support, legal counselling is highly crucial. In this respect, Al-Quds Committee can play an active role in raising awareness and funds for technical assistance in legal areas. Capacity building programmes and training workshops can be organized for the Palestinian Lawyers in Al-Quds with the aim of enhancing their knowledge, experience and capacities of understanding the international laws as well as the Israeli legal system in issues related to human rights and other challenges of the Palestinian people in Jerusalem, particularly their struggle against the Israeli policies of Judaization of the city such as home eviction, home demolition and residency revocation.

The Palestinian civil society has been active in supporting the Palestinian people under the Israeli occupation in various political and socio-economic fields, including human rights and refugees, economic and trade, agriculture, tourism, education, health, women affairs, etc. Due to the Israeli political and legal restrictions and the isolation of Jerusalem from the Palestinian Authority administration, the role of the civil society in the city over the years became more and more important, particularly for supporting the people directly through certain programmes and activities in various political and socio-economic issues.

Distinguished Participants, Ladies and Gentlemen,

I would like to take this opportunity to inform your august audience about some of the selected activities of our Centre in and for the benefit of Jerusalem and its people. As you may already know, the Statistical, Economic and Social Research and Training Centre for Islamic Countries (SESRIC) is a subsidiary organ of the Organisation of Islamic Cooperation (OIC); operating in Ankara since 1978 as the main economic research arm, statistics centre and training organ of the OIC.

Considering the fact that Al Quds Al Sherif City is one of the oldest cities in the world blessed with rich historical, cultural and religious heritage, this City has high but untapped potential for the development of sustainable tourism. Undoubtedly, by having a comprehensive tourism development program Al Quds Al Sherif City and its inhabitants can benefit from many positive economic, social, cultural and

environmental impacts such as foreign exchange earnings, generation of employment, stimulation of infrastructure investment, preservation and restoration of cultural heritage, cultivation of cultural pride and sense of identity, and enhancement of the local environment.

The above mentioned fact was not absent from the mind of OIC leader when it adopted the “Strategic Plan for the Development of the City of Al-Quds” in the 12th Session of the Islamic Conference Summit held in Cairo in February 2013. This Plan gives special importance to the tourism sector in the Al Quds Al Sherif City by devoting 22% of the total projects fund to tourism. Also, the same fact was in mind when Al Quds Al Sherif City was selected as the OIC City of Tourism 2015 by the Coordination Committee on the Implementation of the “Framework for Development and Cooperation in the Domain of Tourism among OIC Member States” according to the Resolution of the 8th Session of the Conference of Ministers of Tourism (ICTM) held in December 2013 in Banjul, Gambia.

To counter Israeli strategy of Judization of the Al Quds Al Sherif City, there is a vital need to revive and support the preservation of Islamic heritage and economic development of the City. However, due to constraints and obstacles imposed by the occupying Israeli authorities, the Islamic heritage is highly in danger and economic situation remained very fragile. In fact, there is very little room for the other sectors like manufacturing and agriculture to contribute to the economic development of the City. It is for this reason that tourism stands out as one of the main sectors to shoulder the mission of economic development of Al Quds Al Sherif City.

In line with the “Strategic Plan for the Development of the City of Al-Quds” and the selection of the Al Quds Al Sherif City as the OIC City of Tourism 2015, SESRIC organised an international workshop on “Exploring Tourism Potential of Al-Quds Al-Sherif City” jointly by the Ministry of Tourism and Antiquities of State of Palestine in Istanbul, Turkey in November 2015.

The objective of the workshop was to provide the participants an opportunity to deliberate and to exchange views, knowledge and expertise with a view to determining ways and modalities for tapping into the tourism potential in Al-Quds Al-Sherif City and formulating concrete recommendations for action at the OIC level to

be presented to the 9th Session of the Islamic Conference of Tourism Ministers (ICTM) in Niger in 2015.

Delegations related to Al Quds Al Sherif affairs, Religion and Awqaf, Heritage and Tourism in Ministerial level from Palestine, Jordan, Malaysia and Turkey were the participants along with international academicians and experts, representatives from Organization of Islamic Cooperation (OIC) and Relevant Centers, Tourism Private Sector and NGOs, and a number of recommendation has been adopted at the end of the Workshop.

Palestine is rich – in potential mineral wealth, youthful population and biodiversity. Its people should thrive, its economies prosper. Yet many people living in Palestine remain trapped in poverty and endure hardship as a result of decades of occupation. Many of the youths of Palestine remain unemployed. According to 2016 Palestinian Central Bureau of Statistics (PCBS), in the 1st quarter of 2016 youth unemployment rate reached 39%. The highest unemployment rate was among youth aged (20-24) years reaching 43%. When we check the informal employment in the formal sector, PCBS states that rate about 57.4% among of all young workers in Palestine in 2015.

These numbers are showing us that the interventions to youth unemployment should be result-oriented such as skills training should be more demand-driven. This could only be achieved through engagement of all sectors, government, civil and private. With the help of companies, chambers, and business associations, we can address skills mismatches and gender disparity in skills development. The engagement of private sector actors can enhance the integration of labor market signals to the training cycle and ensure that students and trainees, especially the disadvantaged groups acquire the market-relevant employability and entrepreneurship skills.

Entrepreneurship is the one of the key dimension that can help unlock an unprecedented growth and development. There are also some examples for the innovation and entrepreneurship such as Gaza Startup Weekend, which began in 2011 and it is important because it gathers designers, developers, entrepreneurs and experts from all domains. Gaza Sky Geeks is a technology-based startup supported by Mercy Corps through a grant from Google. It is the leading co-working space, startup accelerator and technology education hub in Gaza. Thus, they bring together online

freelancers, outsourcers and startup founders. Beside, Sadara Venture is one of the only venture capital funds for Palestinian business and currently provides financing to entrepreneurs focusing on startup companies in the internet, mobile and software sectors.

Palestinian youths seeking professional positions to use their expertise and experience to ensure their further developing skills that meet market's demands are exponentially growing. In that case, I would like to give you some areas that could give growth and job creation to invest for the Palestinian youth; agriculture, IT and digital entrepreneurship, tourism, construction, and energy.

I would like to take this opportunity to inform this august audience about one of our latest initiatives that four leading organizations in development have pledged to jointly tackle the challenge of unemployment. The Islamic Development Bank (IsDB), SESRIC, TIKA, and UNDP Istanbul Center for Private Sector in Development (IICPSD), agreed to form a skills, employment and entrepreneurship development initiative, as “the SEED for Inclusive Growth”, to address the unemployment of youth, women and other disadvantaged groups in the Organization of Islamic Cooperation (OIC) member countries.

Our pilot project, SEED-Palestine, is under the joint initiative, and aims to empower Palestinian youth through skilling for employment, increasing job opportunities for the marginalized youth, and generating business development for existing and new enterprises that drive sustainable growth. Our pilot will be executed by the UNDP/PAPP as a project under the Economic Empowerment Programme for the Palestinian People (DEEP) in order to benefit from the existing infrastructure and resources.

In our first pilot we focus on Palestine due to complex situation of the issue of youth unemployment in Palestine, as the contemporary economic and political environment is constricted by several major obstacles. On the other hand, Palestine has a rapidly growing youth population who needs the right education and for a successful transition to employment through a holistic approach. For such reasons Palestine is chosen as a pilot country.

This timely initiative will help combine the expertise, know-how, networks and resources of the collaborating organizations and the UNDP Programme of Assistance to the Palestinian People (PAPP), to address the key socioeconomic challenges in Palestine.

In addition, the project will ensure that trainees gain the necessary employability skills and life skills to career advancement opportunities, particularly for individuals from disadvantaged backgrounds. A special focus will be given to promote collective and individual entrepreneurship opportunities and offer design and engineering services, mentorship, business development services as well as linkages with market and financing opportunities.

I hope that today's discussion will strengthen our common pursuit and give birth to new and fresh ideas on how to resolve the issue of Jerusalem. New modalities and innovations could contribute to the productivity and competitiveness and the salvation of Palestine. Only then we could become the role models in the international arena for inclusive growth.

I would like to express our gratitude to the United Nations Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People for their longstanding partnership in support of the Palestinian people and for specifically providing this invaluable opportunity to share our aims and goals for empowering the Palestinian youth.

I wish all of you a stimulating panel.

Thank you.