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ENGLISH only

*In response to OIC Secretary General
H.E. Prof. Ekmeleddin Ihsanoglu*

Mr. Chairperson,

At the very outset I would like to express our gratitude to the Kazakh Chairmanship for organizing this event. It is an excellent occasion for us to exchange ideas and views on many vital issues of international relations with the Secretary General of an Organization which is playing ever growing role in maintaining peace and security.

We thank His Excellency for his speech, as always comprehensive, thought-provoking and frank. His Excellency's presence at today's PC coincides with the moment when the OSCE community has been actively engaged in the dialogue on the future of European security.

The OIC was one of the first international bodies that my country joined as a full-fledged member since restoration of our independence in 1991. The development of cooperation between Azerbaijan and the OIC is one of the priority directions in its foreign policy.

We appreciate the firm and principled position that the OIC has been consistently demonstrating with regard to the long lasting and the most serious conflict in the OSCE area, the Armenia-Azerbaijan conflict, which is fully based on the norms and principles of international law enshrined in the UN Charter, the relevant resolutions of UN Security Council and General Assembly. All these documents prove that the territorial integrity of Azerbaijan is the basis for the settlement of the conflict. We appreciate this firm position by OIC which is consistent with the spirit and letter of the article 8 of the OSCE Helsinki Final Act.

In recent years the relations between Azerbaijan and the OIC have entered a qualitatively new stage. The present –day cooperation includes the development of multifaceted tracks based on mutually beneficial interests.

Azerbaijan attaches great importance to the implementation of the OIC Ten-Year Programme of Action and contributes to this process through her consistent efforts.

The Azerbaijani chairmanship in the Ministerial Troika of the OIC in 2006-2007, as well as a growing number of prominent OIC events successfully held in Azerbaijan including the 33rd Council of Foreign Ministers and several sectorial Ministerial Conferences, our active participation in humanitarian assistance programs carried out through the OIC and UN frameworks prove the above-mentioned. As a next step Azerbaijan proposes hosting the 13th Session of the Islamic summit in 2014 in Baku.

Azerbaijan is a country with a diverse multinational population, representing many religious and cultural groups. Located at the crossroads of East and West, North and South, Azerbaijan has been actively promoting the idea of inter-religious and inter-cultural dialogue as the only way to mutual understanding and respect. In the last years Azerbaijan hosted a number of big international conferences in this field, which were organized jointly with the OIC, ISESCO, League of Arab States and the Council of Europe.

The announcement of Baku as the capital of Islamic civilization for 2009 was another recognition of Azerbaijan's role in cultural diplomacy that contributes to the consolidation of trust among different civilizations.

Excellency,

We commend your personal efforts in adopting two historic documents, known as the Ten-Year Programme of Action and the New OIC Charter. Taking this opportunity, I would like to inform that the President of Azerbaijan has recently signed the Decree on ratification of the Charter.

We share your view that among the gravest threats to stability and peace is the rise of hatred and intolerance. Negative phenomena we are witnessing currently can be efficiently tackled only through consolidated efforts, solid and sound programs and strategies, proper coordination and interaction among all relevant international actors. Azerbaijan believes that parallel membership and participation of fifteen states in both the OSCE and the OIC creates an additional asset and has a great potential for efficient cooperation in such areas as combating terrorism and extremism, promoting tolerance and non-discrimination, the role of education in fighting against all forms of intolerance, intercultural and inter-religious dialogue.

We do believe that the next Tajik and Kazakh OIC chairmanships will serve for further strengthening of interaction between these two organizations and wish all success to our friends and colleagues.

Initiation of high-level conference on tolerance and non-discrimination by the Kazakh Chairmanship to be held in Astana on June 29-30, 2010, indicates the significance of this topic for OSCE participating States. We are looking forward to this conference and its outcomes and express our confidence that high level representation of the OIC at this event might open a new page in the history of cooperation between two organizations.

Azerbaijan supports the idea to establish a permanent diplomatic presence of the OIC in Vienna at the level of liaison office or representation. We believe that it could positively contribute to a permanent and structured cooperation between OSCE and OIC.

In conclusion, I would like to wish the distinguished Secretary General of the Organization of the Islamic Conference His Excellency Professor Ekmeleddin Ihsanoglu every success in his professional activities.

Thank you, Mr. Chairperson.

