

# An Invitation to a New Partnership

From the Organization of the Islamic Conference (OIC) to President Barack Obama



**Ekmeleddin Ihsanoglu**  
Secretary General of  
the Organization of the  
Islamic Conference.

**Dear  
President  
OBAMA,**

With great respect, the Organization of the Islamic Conference would like to congratulate you on behalf of the Muslim world on your groundbreaking election as President of the United States. The Muslim world has cheered your election and holds high hopes for your historic presidency. The eyes of the world now eagerly await your leadership and the fulfillment of your vision, promises, and pledges beyond America's shores.

The desire for peace is universal. Yet as the conflicts of the last decade have shown, the quest for peace is easily frustrated. We warmly welcome your expressed desire to give a major address in a Muslim nation soon after you assume the presidency and hope that it will mark the beginning of a more fruitful and better-informed dialogue between the West and the Muslim world. Above all, what is needed is the restoration of mutual confidence. Throughout the globe, Muslims hunger for a new era of peace, concordance, and tranquility. We firmly believe that America, with your guidance, can help foster that peace, though real peace can only be shared – never imposed. A nation can either be great or feared, but rarely both at the same time.

## Myths

Many myths about Islam, fostered by extremists in both the West and East, have proliferated in the last decade, and a new word – "Islamophobia" – has even entered the world's lexicon to describe anti-Muslim acts of prejudice and violence. Despite these pernicious myths, you will find that Islam is a religion of peace. Tolerance is its benchmark and borne of the very nature of Islam. Nor is Islam an exclusive religion. It is an integral part of the history of world religions. It continues and confirms the previous scriptures. Along with Christianity and Judaism, Islam emanates from the same part of the world, comes from the same God, and holds to the same Prophets, mainly Abraham. It has been tested over fourteen hundred years, and shown itself to be a religion of compassion, mercy, justice, and equality.

Extremists in any faith or tradition are rare, though they often command disproportionate attention. But the often overlooked truth is Islam is also the religion of moderation. It celebrates diversity and acknowledges and venerates a wide array of religions.

Islam, in fact, abhors extremism and fanaticism and calls for treading the path of the "middle way" in favor of tolerance and reconciliation. It exhorts Muslims to be morally responsive to the truth and to goodness, and to be alert to all that is false, evil or destructive.

The Organization of the Islamic Conference (OIC), which I have the honor to represent,

is not a religious organization. After the United Nations, it is the largest official, inter-governmental organization in the world. It is composed of 57 sovereign states, almost all of whom are secular. The population of these states collectively amounts to 1.5 billion – or one fourth of humanity.

Terrorism is a global phenomenon. It has no specific culture, race, or region. The root causes of terrorism are surely complicated but they include deprivation, poverty, despair and, most importantly, political injustice. Children do not emerge from the womb to announce they will become

new administration to foster constructive dialogue and facilitate solutions to the intractable predicaments plaguing the Muslim world and beyond.

In this regard, we are keen to build on the commendable initiative taken recently regarding the appointment of a U.S. Special Envoy to the OIC, and opening an office for him in the U.S. State Department. We are confident that this useful post will be endorsed and perhaps expanded under your leadership.

We also look forward to working with the new Secretary of State Ms. Hillary Rodham Clinton, who is no stranger to the Muslim world. In the coming months, we hope to build on the existing channel of communication between the United States and the OIC and open new ones.

Muslims today, around the world, believe that they have compelling strategic and moral reasons to cooperate and peacefully co-exist with the United States in particular, and with the West in general. Past episodes of short-lived misunderstandings should give way to a long future of peaceful cohabitation, making use of our shared civilizations and values to build a better future for all mankind. As you eloquently stated in your election-night acceptance speech in November, "our stories are singular but our destiny is shared."

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## Moderation and Modernization

One of the OIC's guiding principles is to practice "moderation and modernization." To cite one example, it was at our demand that the UN General Assembly organized a host of events and activities around the world to disseminate the idea of "Dialogue among civilizations" as an alternative to those who predict a coming "clash of civilizations."

We have been alarmed by this tendency to divide the world into rival civilizations – civilized and uncivilized, good and evil, friend and enemy. As a youth who spent part of his childhood abroad, you are well aware of the dangers of stereotyping. We believe you will have a unique opportunity to promote tolerance and nurture vibrant multi-cultural societies.

It is for these reasons that the OIC has been in the forefront of the Muslim battle against terrorism.

terrorists. They learn to be terrorists when injustice and tragedy are twinned with powerlessness. The decades-long suffering of the Palestinian people provides only the most recent and potent illustration of the link between oppression, injustice, and violence. The violence in the Mideast and the Palestinian people deserve an urgent and just remedy.

## Change and Partnership

The most powerful word in your election campaign was "change." Change must make the world a better place, correct wrongs and right the twisted. As an organization, we too have undergone substantial reform in charting an enlightened future for the Muslim world. As Secretary General of the Organization of the Islamic Conference, I wish to assure you that we will be at your side to see that justice prevails and that the forces which are out to undo peace are defeated. At the OIC we are firmly committed to cooperating with you and your

## from **Changing Course**

The Report of the Leadership Group on US-Muslim Engagement

In September 2008, after nearly two years of research and dialogue, a distinguished, bipartisan group of American leaders concerned by the rise in tension and violence between the U.S. and Muslim countries and communities, published its landmark report *Changing Course: A New Direction for U.S. Relations with the Muslim World*. The Leadership Group's mix of Muslim, Jewish, and Christian members included such luminaries as Madeleine Albright, the former Secretary of State, Richard Armitage, the former Deputy Assistant Secretary of State, Dennis Ross, former U.S. Special Middle East Envoy, congressman Vin Weber, pollster Daniel Yankelovich, and author Steven Covey. *Changing Course*, available at [www.usmuslimengagement.org](http://www.usmuslimengagement.org), provides a compelling roadmap for bolstering U.S. relations with the Muslim world and reducing tensions in the next decade.

From the summary: "This Report outlines a comprehensive strategy for the U.S. to enhance international security by improving relations with

key Muslim countries and communities. The strategy reflects the consensus of 34 American leaders, including 11 Muslim Americans, in the fields of foreign and defense policy, politics, business, religion, education, public opinion, psychology, philanthropy, and conflict resolution. "We come from different walks of life, faiths, political perspectives, and professional disciplines. Our shared goal is to develop and work to implement a wise, widely supportable strategy to make the U.S. and the world safer by responding to the primary causes of tension between the U.S. and Muslims around the world. We believe that a strategy that builds on shared and complementary interests with Muslims in many countries is feasible, desirable, and consistent with core American values.

The central message of our strategy is that the U.S. government business, faith, education, and media leaders must work with Muslim counterparts to build a coalition that will turn the tide against extremism. Our recommendations are directed primarily to U.S. leaders and institutions, but we can succeed only if counterparts in Muslim majority countries and communities also take responsibility for

addressing key challenges: reducing extremism, resolving political and sectarian conflicts, holding governments accountable, creating more vibrant economies, correcting misconceptions, and engaging in dialogue to build mutual respect and understanding.

## from **Islam and the West**

"I believe wholeheartedly that the links between these two worlds matter more today than ever before, because the degree of misunderstanding between the Islamic and Western worlds remains dangerously high, and because the need for the two to live and work together in our increasingly interdependent world has never been greater.

It is odd, in many ways, that misunderstandings between Islam and the West should persist. We share many key values in common: respect for knowledge, for justice, compassion towards the poor and underprivileged, the importance of family life, respect for parents.

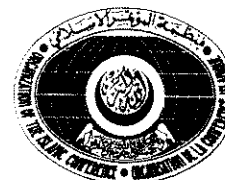
If there is much misunderstanding in the West about the nature of Islam, there is also much

ignorance about the debt our own culture and civilisation owe to the Islamic world.

We shall need to work harder to understand each other, to drain out any poison between us, and to lay the ghost of suspicion and fear."

– HRH The Prince of Wales

(speech at Oxford Centre for Islamic Studies)



## OIC at a glance...

Being the largest inter-governmental organization after the United Nations, the Organization of the Islamic Conference (OIC) is the collective and institutional voice of the Muslim world – over 1.5 billion people.

The OIC mission is grounded in ensuring the safeguarding and protection of the interests of the Muslim world in the spirit of promoting international peace and harmony, good governance, development and education, women's rights, and international goodwill. Its components include 21 bodies fostering its mission in the areas of higher education, banking, international commerce, public health, and science and technology.

The OIC welcomes your comments. Please address emails to [ishanti@oic-oci.org](mailto:ishanti@oic-oci.org).

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