SPEECH OF
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In the name of Allah the :Most Gracious the Most Merciful

I am pleased to address you today in response to the kind invitation of Dr. Hans Van Ginkel, Director of the United Nations University in Tokyo, at this conference which concludes the activities undertaken by the esteemed International University as a contribution to the year of by dialogue among civilizations. These activities culminated in the holding of this important conference in preparation for the submission of the report of the University to the next session of the UN General Assembly.

In fact, I have followed the subject under consideration closely both as part of my academic career and in my capacity as current Secretary General of the Organization of the Islamic Conference which launched the idea of dialogue among civilizations. The relevant initiative was made by the Iranian President, Mr. Muhammad Sayed Khatami as Chairman of the Eighth Islamic Summit Conference. He made a proposal to the 53rd Session of the UN General Assembly (1998) to declare the year 2001 as a year for dialogue among civilizations. The proposal was warmly welcomed by all states of the world. The General Assembly issued resolution No. 22/53 in which it declared the year 2001 as a year of dialogue among civilizations. The OIC initiative was based on the concept of the unity of the human origin as Allah, The Most Exalted says {... Who created you from a single person}. The Islamic concept stresses that the diversity represents not a reason for differences. Indeed, it paves the way for coming to know each other {...and made you unto nations and tribes, that ye may know each other}. Diversity of civilizations provides rich sources of knowledge. Constructive interaction between civilizations enabled humanity to achieve constructions on the face of earth throughout history. It also led to the realization of a human civilization that stands today as a common heritage for humanity. Hence, the importance of dialogue in orienting this diversity instead of kindling racist, chauvinistic or extremist nationalistic feuds which were behind all wars and atrocities committed throughout ages. Indeed, dialogue should be directed to encourage understanding among nations, promote tolerance among human beings, seek a common ground between different civilizations with the aim of enhancing common values, and exchange cultural enrichment while preserving cultural heritage and the peculiarities of each civilization.

In this context, I fully agree with the statement made by the UN Secretary General contained in his report to the General Assembly:

"Learning how to manage diversity has become a more compelling necessity ...It is the perception of diversity as a threat that is at the very origin of war. It is the perception of diversity as a threat that blinds so many who equate it with enmity. It is the perception of diversity as a threat that has made so many overlook the common humanity that unites us all."
Then the UN Secretary General raises the following questions:

- "Do we need an enemy?
- Can we aspire to a society in which leaders can lead without enemies?
- Can we all aim against the same enemy-intolerance?"

Therefore, the OIC has moved to say to the world: yes we are able to aspire to an international community without enemies and can all work against humanity's common enemy namely intolerance. We should accept diversity. We should not attempt to impose a namely culture on the world. We must also establish the common values of various cultures. In addition, we have to examine the changes introduced in them with a view to supporting two, types of values; those values that preserve the texture of the society such as attachment to family and communication among generations as well as moral integrity, dynamic values of the society such as the values of science, work and discipline and using the above in preparing a global value and moral system with the aim of fighting various types of evil and protecting and enriching human rights.

Ladies and Gentlemen:

Now, with your permission, I am going to elaborate on some of the terms contained in my statement such as "Islamic world" Islamic civilization" and "Arab civilization". The term "Islamic world" was used by the west to refer to countries of Muslims extending from the shores of Morocco on the Atlantic Ocean to the eastern boarders of Indonesia in the East and from Central Asia in the North to central Africa in the South. As pointed out by Dr. Jamal Hamdan, a scholar of geography, this term is neither commonly used in Geography as it contains disparities and dissimilarities, nor at the level of non-religious dimensions. Diversity in it represents the rule not the exception. However, this diversity is shaped in an Islamic framework that had produced a strong effect on the culture and civilization of Muslim nations. Thus, we find that the term "Islamic world" is relevant to another term in the cultural sphere namely the sphere of "Arab and Islamic civilization". The latter represents one of the cultural spheres effecting human civilization. It is described as Arab because it adopts the Arabic language as its vehicle of expression. It is also termed Islamic as it is based on the Islamic faith. Nevertheless, that does not make of it an exclusive civilization established on Muslim- to- Muslim basis only. Indeed, it is a civilization built with contributions from followers of other including Christians and Jews in the Middle East and other faiths and nations in Asia and Africa. In turn, the Islamic civilization contributed to the molding of the sentiments of the other minorities living in Islamic societies.

Dialogue has contributed, to a large extent, in shaping this civilization nurtured by the generous diversity of various civilizations and cultures whose sons themselves have, at a given time, embraced Islam. Islam is not concerned only with "communicating", it is also concerned with "addressing" and "listening". The entire humanity has reaped the fruits of such free exchange of views. Encounter between Islam and Greek philosophy represented one of the strong pillars of the contemporary civilization in the West. The standing reserved to Islamic thinkers by western thinkers was unparalleled. In this context, it would suffice us to point out the example of St. Tomas Aquinas who never referred to Ibn Seena (Avicenna) without using the title "the Master".

This openness, peaceful coexistence with other faiths and cultures, and spirit of dialogue, had positive implications on Islamic culture. In turn, the latter left the doors open for several human and cultural achievements that adopted
many elements from it. Islamic culture has shown a tremendous ability to accommodate several alien cultural elements and thus integrated them into its own structure without giving up its basic principles. However, situation has changed during the last centuries. Muslims have added nothing significant to the cultural heritage of their ancestors for several political and historical reasons that lasted until the concluding decades of the 20th century. However, the last decades have witnessed an Islamic resurgence termed by the known author Samuel Huntington as "Return to the indigenous". In this context the author says in one of his essays:

"The return to the indigenous is most marked in Muslim and Asian societies. The Islamic resurgence has manifested itself in every Muslim country; in almost all it has become a major social and, cultural and intellectual movement, and in most it has had a deep impact on politics. In the countries where Islamist political forces do not shape the government, they invariably dominate and often monopolize the opposition to the government throughout the Muslim world".

This resurgence is not directed against the western culture as advocated by Henitingpton. It is in deed a resurgence that addresses the dislocation of roots and the endeavours aimed at reinforcing them after a period during which a sense of laceration and uncertainty of cultural belonging prevailed.

Ladies and gentlemen,

It maybe useful to expound on some of the basic concepts relating to our symposium from an Islamic perspective such as the concepts of culture, civilization and heritage. Culture is either ascribed to a language like, the case of French or German cultures, a faith or specific ideology such as Marxism, a country or geographic region such Chinese, Pharaonic and Greek cultures. In fact, the Islamic culture constitutes a fabric made up of the both elements. It proceeds from the Islamic faith and uses Arabic language, the language of the Holy Qura'n. Civilization is the total asset realized by a nation or community in terms of advancement and progress. Therefore, culture represents a bridge for civilization.

Heritage is considered as the best expression of the cultural identity of a nation. It covers numerous cultural, artistic and intellectual shapes inherited from the far and near past. The Cultural Strategy for the Islamic World, adopted by the Sixth Islamic Summit Conference in 1991, rejected "the sanctifying of the Islamic heritage bearing in mind that it was the understanding of man to the Revelation and the interaction with the established norms of the universe, a product, however, that is neither part of the Revelation but that's human creativity related to Revelation. Therefore, ...a critical objective study of the heritage is of use {as} it forms part of the attention accorded to heritage. Culture that dares to undertake auto-criticism of its history and draws lessons form its heritage. could mould its future heritage with a creative spirit in order to keep pace with the changes without renouncing its originality. Those who discover their heritage , understand and criticize it, would be better equipped to maintain continuation through chances. We study and understand the past not
because of our love to seek to protect it because we want to restore it, but to utilize in the processes of changing the present."

On the other hand, there are basic characteristics and features peculiar to Islamic thinking. These include its comprehensive outlook to all elements of existence, its adoption of the Islamic perception of the nature of existence, the progress of the universe and life, the high status it gives to reason, knowledge and work, and its consideration of justice as the backbone of life with which civilizations are promoted and in the absence of which civilizations vanish. Knowledge represents its core and spirit. When knowledge is not available, the correct understanding of the basic two sources of Islamic thinking, namely the Qur'a'n and the Sunnah (Tradition of the Prophet {Peace and prayers be upon him, may not be possible to realize. Therefore, the peculiarities of Islamic culture find expression in universality, comprehensiveness, moderation, realism, tolerance, objectivity and unity in diversity.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

There is hardly an Islamic State that does not host non-Muslims. Furthermore, more than one third of Muslims worldwide live as minorities in non-Islamic States. Islam has respected other religions; 1400 years ago it established the freedom of belief, "No compulsion in religion", and the freedom of choice between belief and disbelief, "Let him who will, believe in it, and him who will, deny it". For the treatment of those who live in its community, Islam has established an equitable rule "They shall have what we have, and they are duty-bound as we are duty-bound." The Christian Arab constitutional jurisprudent Dr. Edmund Riyadh comments on this by saying that without exaggeration the idea that led to the adoption of this humanitarian (liberal) policy is indeed a genius innovation. It was the first time in history for a state, which is religious in principle and objective, to recognize the right of peoples under its power to preserve their belief, traditions and systems of life at a time when the rule had been to force the subjects to embrace the religions of their sovereigns. This rule ceased to exist in the West thanks to the French Revolution and the American Revolution in the second half of the 18th century.

The information and telecommunications revolution has led to an increase in the numbers of immigrants and to the aggravation of the entwined problems of migration. The mass migration of great numbers of people to other regions of the world led to increased intermingling of cultures, traditions and customs. Reference to this phenomenon was made by His Holiness Pope John Paul II on the 1st of January 2001. In a statement he delivered on the occasion of the Day of World Peace, the Pope said "There are some different results for such migration movements. Some civilizations grew and got enriched with the support of emigrants who managed to live through mutual respect, acceptance of different customs with a spirit of tolerance. On the other hand, new conditions emerged where, unfortunately, no solutions were found for the problem of convergence of different cultures and the ensuing tensions and disputes".

It is our view that the phenomenon of mass migration movements of people from the same cultural background may be invested. The new reality
could be used in establishing bridges of understanding and cultural communication if psychological and living stability could be provided by ensuring the preservation of their cultural identity and facilitating their integration in the societies in which they have settled without forcing them to be assimilated in the cultures of these societies.

If these rights and freedoms were considered in the past as part of the internal system and as internal affairs of concern to the state only, the evolution of human life and the succession of internal crises, in which the rights of individuals and communities were blatantly violated, transformed this problem from a mere internal affair to an international problem. This transformation materialized after it became evident to the world conscious that internal systems failed, on many occasions, to guarantee and ensure the minimum level required of such rights and freedoms. The issue of humanitarian intervention by the international community witnessed development leading to the promulgation of a real international humanitarian law. The latter is aimed at ensuring respect for freedoms and rights by defining objective commitments to be honoured by states in favour of the individuals and communities under their jurisdiction without distinction. In other words, it seeks to ensure national and international protection for these rights and freedoms. The Human Rights Commission defined this protection as "the protection of oppressed groups who, although wishing to be treated on equal footing with the majority, desire at the same time to receive special treatment in order to preserve their own characters which distinguish them from the majority". Realizing that, however, depends, to a large extent, on the degree of acceptance of the religious and cultural minorities and communities by the society of the majority in the state they live in. When not accepted by the majority, the existence of these minorities becomes endangered. The position of acceptance by the majority is crucial in providing the basic rights for these communities foremost of which the freedom of faith and the preservation of the cultural identity. Therefore, we are not here to enunciate these rights as they are not controversial. They are established in the texts and jurisprudence of the international law and the activities of international organizations. Ultimately, the question lies rather with the acceptance of these communities by the majorities among which they live. There is no better way than establishing dialogue among civilizations and cultures in an attempt to remove the reasons of non-acceptance of "the other" and the erroneous and stereo-typed concepts which have become deeply rooted in the hearts.

Ladies and gentlemen,

Looking at the most horrendous atrocities committed in Europe since the end of World War II, we will invariably see that they pertain to ethnic cleansing and all the other atrocities perpetrated against the Bosnian people between 1992-1995 for nothing but embracing a different faith. Unfortunately, the idea of finding an "enemy" is used as one of the political tools of the world today. Following the collapse of the Soviet Union, Mrs Margaret Thatcher wondered whether there was still justification for the continued existence of NATO. She answered her own question with a "loud and clear yes". She claimed that potential dangers which might threaten Europe in future, will stem from outside the European continent. She made a special reference to the Middle East region.
and the proliferation of advanced weapons therein while Europe will remain dependent on
the oil of the same region in the 21st century. Mr. Welly Class, NATO Secretary General,
was more explicit when he said "strict Islam represents a significant threat not less than the
Soviet danger in the era of Communism".

There is no doubt that such direction of thought will reopen an old sore which dates
back to about one thousand years when relations between the West and Muslims witnessed a
violent conflict that lasted for centuries starting from the crusades, passing by the downfall
of Andalus (Spain) and the modern European colonization of the Islamic and Arab world,
and lastly the implantation of the Israeli entity inside its territories. This situation left its
imprints on the psyche of both the West and Muslims. It fueled the sense of antagonism
between them. It also created a psychological barrier that should be removed rather than
kindled and boosted by advancing the contention of an inevitable or potential conflict. It is
unfortunate that western thinkers contributed to the creation of such a barrier. Most of their
studies on Islam have been dominated with bias and prejudice. They included drastic attacks
and judgments against Islam. Indeed, they contained unfounded information. Such assaults
against Islam and its civilization and the distortion of its image left far-reaching implications
that have been extended up to our present times. Relations between the West and the Islamic
civilization and nations are still tense, dubious, and cautious despite the progress achieved by
humanity at the level of concepts that are characterized, more than ever before, with the
spirit of tolerance among civilizations and rapprochement among nations. Islam remained an
exception. The negative view held about it did not change significantly compared with the
Middle Ages. As a matter of fact, one can state that the brutality of the assault against its
values and civilization increased in recent years in a horrifying manner. Sometimes they
reach obsessive proportions. Mass media in the West have launched campaigns in which
they accused Islam of being of violent nature. They considered its faith to be the major cause
for the manifestations of violence in some Islamic societies despite the fact that violence is
not confined to these societies. Some went even to the extent of claiming that the presence of
Muslim communities in European countries constitutes a menace to their security. Theories
advocating that the clash of civilizations has become inevitable, emerged. Such theories also
claim that Islam is more qualified to engage in a conflict with the Western civilization.

On the other hand, there are new painful incidents that are not confined only to the
Islamic world but extend also to cover the Third World as a whole. These are the incidents
that emerged as a result of the repeated practices of double standards in implementing the
principles with which the international community has become aquatinted in the area of
human rights and self determination. For instance, when the UN attempts to protect the
Palestinian people from the blatant human rights violations and the daily atrocities
perpetrated against them, it finds itself faced with the American veto whereas human rights
documents are used against Third World states for much less serious violations. This is
applicable to all other issues such as democracy, free trade, environment, prudent rule, the
right to self-determination, foreign occupation and selective economic measures and
sanctions against certain states.
Despite the efforts exerted with the aim of eliminating bigotry and racial discrimination, the latter are still practiced against certain factions or nations. From time to time, such attempts are backed and nurtured by attempts aimed at distorting the image of faith and believes and rejecting the culture of the other as well as exploiting the mass media to spread hatred. All these attempts should be dealt with in the framework of dialogue among civilizations as it represents the core of the problem... the problem stemming from the desire to impose a single civilization on the world namely that of the West with the pretext of modernization and progress on the basis of the astonishing success scored by the said civilization. In contrast, we have the example of Japan, which achieved the same success, not to say a greater one, but preserved its identity.

Those who want to make of Islam "an enemy that poses a threat not less dangerous than that of the Soviet", commit a grave mistake against the entire humanity. Islam is, and was, neither a theory triggered off by economic frustration or the result of the industrial revolution and its repercussions, nor a positive theory that came to collapse in seventy years ...Indeed Islam is a Revealed Faith that aims at achieving decent life for mankind in this earthly life and the Hereafter.

We thank Allah that the Third Millennium started under the slogan of dialogue and understanding following the end of the last century of the Second Millennium which witnessed the most horrendous and most sanguinary wars and the most sever in terms of human rights violations in the history of human beings ...Therefore, the beginning of the Third Millennium under the slogan of dialogue heralds a brighter future. Dialogue is a necessity for coexistence; and international cooperation for preventing hegemony, aggression, and evils and injustice of war from taking place . The future of humanity is closely linked to the belief in the values of liberty, justice, solidarity and virtue.

In order for this dialogue to be fruitful, participation therein should be of global scope. It should also be undertaken by representatives of all contemporary human civilizations and cultures. Furthermore, it should not be confined to states only. Instead, it should be enlarged to include representatives of civil societies' organs and intellectuals. It should also disassociate itself from all political and national considerations. In addition, it should be based on recognition of diversity and tolerance among human beings and the protection of human rights. A common ground among civilizations should be sought in order to face common challenges that threaten human values and achievements, promote mutual understanding and acquaint nations with each other through sound recognition of the varied aspects of cultures and civilizations. The objective behind realizing that is to promote human cultural achievements that represent a common human heritage that provides the main pillar for the progress and welfare of nations, and the promotion of peace and security, human development and cordial relations among nations:

1- A publication of the League of Islamic Culture and Relations in the Spanish capital :Madrid (December 1998).

2- The Cultural Strategy for the Islamic World.
3- Islam Today (a publication of ISESCO (the Islamic Scientific and Educational and Cultural Organization)

.1- Islam and the West, a publication of the Centre for Islamic History Art and Culture, Istanbul 1999.

5- Foreign Affairs magazine.

6- Documents of the Organization of the Islamic Conference.

7- Statement of the Pope John Paul II on the occasion of the Anniversary of the global peace day 1.1.2001.