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On the Occasion of:

Symposium on Islam
Islam : Fostering Peace and Dialogue in an Interdependent World
Tokyo, December 13, 2002

First of all, I would like to thank the Honorable Prime Minister of Malaysia H.E. Mr. Mahathir bin Mohamad for honoring us by his presence, and for accepting to give the Key Note Address on the occasion of this unprecedented event organized by Ambassadors of the member countries of the OIC, as well as for the strong support of the Parliamentary League of Ruling Parties for Islam, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan and the United Nations University in Tokyo.

I am convinced that the Prime Minister's Statement will be a great source of inspiration and orientation for our theme, which is:

Islam: Fostering Peace and Dialogue in an Interdependent World.

I would like to express our appreciation to H.E. Ambassador Moustapha Cisse of Senegal, whose efforts have contributed to the establishment of constructive debate between beliefs. It goes without saying that the presence of two Japanese eminent academicians Pr. Heita Kawakatsu and Pr. Akira Goto will give a great dimension to our dialogue for peace and mutual understanding that we hope to establish.

We have initiated this symposium with the Parliamentary League of Ruling Parties for Islam in order to temperate the pessimistic debate and create a new dynamic of dialogue; and from there to wider friendship and trust between people. The debate between religions is an important element to eliminate roots of conflict and build strong relations between people.

The theme of the debate has been widely discussed, and still remains a fearful topical question in a world where globalization has succeeded to remove the conventional boundaries of a bipolar world as was seen in the cold war era.

In this debate, we should avoid the trap of amalgam which would reduce the issue to a division between two civilizations, two cultures, and finally and simply the confrontation between the West and the Orient. This is the danger.

Retaining this approach could come to assimilate hundred millions of sincerely peace-loving men and women to a few fanatics and activists who have absolutely nothing in

common with them.

Retaining this approach means darkness to a religion, which has participated in enriching universal inheritances such as science, art, medicine and culture among others.

Retaining this approach would become a historical mistake through deepening the gap of misunderstanding and creating an education of distrusts and suspicion. It would ostracize the Muslim world that, following some statistics, will represent 65 % of humanity in less than 30 years.

I would like to underline that Western and Muslim civilizations have met several times in a constructive manner.

Muslim works from Spain and Sicily have created the western civilization.

This has been confirmed by Paul Balta in the news paper "le Monde" and I quote : "The Greek heritage had been transmitted to the West by Arab who had added their own contribution. And it was considerable. Without this contribution, the Renaissance couldn't happen." I would also like to quote Roger Garaudy "It is the Spain of Alphonse X and the Sicily of Frederic II, both fascinated by the Muslim culture, which gave birth to Western modernity. The Arab-Islamic civilization played a pivotal role, both as mid wife and fostering parent to this new era."

Terrorism has no religion; terrorism has no race. It is unfortunately in every corner of the world, however. We have the moral obligation to unite ourselves to combat terrorism and its deepest sources: poverty, injustice and exclusion.

The behavior of Muslim towards other religions is explicitly mentioned in the Holy Koran, our book of reference. It is revealed without ambiguity vis-à-vis the religion through the Koran. The Chapter of Spider states, I quote:

"And dispute ye not with the People of the Book, except with means better (than mere disputation), unless it be with those of them who inflict wrong (and injury); but say, 'We believe in the Revelation which has come down to us and in that which came down to you; our God and your God is One; and it is to Him we bow (in Islam)'."

It is a reality in the Koran that Judaism and Christianity have the same source as Islam, all adoring the same God: indeed, the Old Testament and the New Testament share lots with the Koran.

Concerning other major religions, it is clearly stated in the Holy Koran that we have to accept differences. "To you your religion and to me mine."

The missionary action of Buddha and all philosophers and social reformers of all time had been in reality a concerted movement and evolution toward the improvement of human condition and the acquisition of the benefits of a better education and a greater wisdom.

This is to say that, in Islam, the dialogue and coexistence between religions was established 13 centuries ago.

Ladies and Gentlemen, and Dear Friends,

Let's work together in solidarity and friendship so that hatred, suffering and war don't come to destroy our hopes and expectations in the future; so the new generation, our children will live in a peaceful and healthy world.

I am very pleased that, with the experts and individuals of various nationalities and horizons, this symposium will surely enlighten us on this actual question.

Once again, I would like to reiterate the appreciation of the Ambassadors of the member countries of the OIC to the Prime Minister of Malaysia, H.E. Mr. Mahathir bin Mohamad for his cooperation and for all his efforts to play a leading role in establishing dialogue and peace.

I would also like to thank the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan, as well as the Rector of the United Nations University H.E. Dr. Hans Van Ginkel for the efforts he has undertaken in the frame of the dialogue between civilizations and cultures.

Finally, I thank all of you for coming in great numbers and assisting this symposium aimed to create solidarity and understanding between people and nations around the world.