OIC-IPHRC 12th SESSION
OUTCOME DOCUMENT OF THEMATIC DEBATE ON
'IMPORTANCE OF CULTURAL DIVERSITY IN THE PROMOTION
AND PROTECTION OF HUMAN RIGHTS'

Jeddah 23 November 2017: The OIC Independent Permanent Human Rights Commission (IPHRC) held a thematic debate on *'Importance of Cultural Diversity in the promotion and protection of human rights'* during its 12th Regular Session on 21 November 2017. IPHRC Chairperson Mr. Med S. K. Kaggwa and Amb. Samir Bakr, representing the OIC Secretary General inaugurated the debate, which was also attended by the Commission Members, OIC Members States and their National Human Rights Institutions, experts in the field of human rights and representatives of media.

Based on the comprehensive discussion, the Commission adopted the following:

Underscored that Islam accepted and promoted human diversity as 'Divine Order' within the concept of Unity in Diversity. It laid the foundation of a new culture steeped in the principles of equality among all human beings regardless of caste, color, creed or religious beliefs. Unlike, other civilizations in history, it did not look upon human cultures in terms of black and white nor divide human societies into spheres of absolute good and absolute evil. Its acceptance / respect for cultural pluralism is not based on any expediency or opportunism but it comes from its pristine universal teachings to all mankind.

Further underscored that Islam's success as a global religion/civilization is linked to its ability to adapt and embrace positive cultural traits of distinct peoples and diverse places. However, while fully respecting the beneficial values of other cultures, Islam sought to alter only those practices which prove to be detrimental for creation and sustainability of peaceful, progressive and welfare states and societies.

Highlighted the cultural zenith of medieval Muslim societies and their contributions in the field of scientific discovery, development of education and different cultures, which contributed to the steady journey of the world out from the Dark Ages into the era of Renaissance.

Guided by the 'Pact of Medinah', the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, UNESCO's *Universal Declaration on Cultural Diversity*, *Convention on the Protection and Promotion of the Diversity of Cultural Expressions* and ISESCO[1]'s *Islamic Declaration on Cultural Diversity* and *Cultural Strategy for the Islamic World,* which guaranteed the right of everyone to participate in the cultural life including the persons belonging to ethnic, religious or linguistic minorities the right to enjoy their own culture and to profess and practice their own religion.

Recalled the *Vienna Declaration and Program of Action* which, acknowledges the presence of cultural heterogeneity, the recognition of the significance of the national and regional particularities and acceptance of the right of everyone to have different cultural identities, while reaffirming the solemn commitment of all States to fulfill their obligations to promote universal respect for and observance and protection of all human rights and fundamental freedoms for all.

Further recalled the UNESCO Declaration on Cultural Diversity, which affirms that *"Culture takes diverse forms across time and space. This diversity is embodied in the uniqueness and plurality of the*

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[1] Islamic Educational Scientific and Cultural Organization

identities of the groups and societies making up humankind. As a source of exchange, innovation and creativity, cultural diversity is as necessary for humankind as biodiversity is for nature"[2]. Hence the full realization of human rights requires respect for and promotion of cultural diversity guaranteed by universally recognized human rights instruments.

Welcomed the adoption of Sustainable Development Goals 2030 and its recognition of respect for cultural diversity as an integral element for ensuring sustainable development of nations and cultures through promotion of a culture of peace and non-violence, tolerance, mutual respect, inter-cultural understanding and global citizenship and shared responsibility.

Further welcomed the holding of the 10th Islamic Conference of Cultural Ministers in Khartoum, Sudan organized by the Organization of Islamic Cooperation (OIC) and its specialized agency ISESCO to bench mark the progress made in achieving the goals of the Islamic Cultural Strategy and respond to the challenges of diversity in a coordinated manner through joint Islamic action.

Affirmed that cultural diversity, a defining characteristic of humanity, is reflected in the rich tapestry of cultures, traditions, philosophies and arts. Despite existence of cultural differences, the homogenizing effect of globalization has led to the emergence of common cultural and ethical values and behavioral patterns common to humanity, which has helped to bring people closer and eliminate harmful traditional practices. Hence, the respect for cultural diversity represents respect for the shared human principles that form the bedrock of the universality of human rights and fundamental freedoms proclaimed in the universally recognized human rights instruments.

Identified the global challenges emanating from diverse demographic and geopolitical realities among developing and developed world resulting into unequal economic and social exchanges, which have the potential to deepen the existing cultural differences between communities and generate conflicts.

Underscored the importance of leisure activities like sports or artistic expressions in the form of music, drawing, and similar performances to promote cross-cultural understanding through identification of similarities within and among cultural groups for creation of a pluralistic society;

Regretted that, lately, the signs of intolerance and failure to accept the diversity are ominous in the form of growing tide of xenophobia, hatred and discrimination based on one's race, religion, origin and ethnicity, which has resulted in blatant human rights violation of affected communities. Unfortunately, these acts of intolerance are not only prevalent in developing or societies facing conflicts but are equally affecting the developed world, where the politics of far-right is breeding the seeds of discord and promoting xenophobia on the pleas of cultural differences and demonizing of migrants, refugees and other minorities. Truly such a culture of hate and intolerance is not conducive for creation of peaceful societies and continues to constitute a threat to global peace and security.

Further regretted that in spite of the fact that Islamic values are fully compatible with the universally accepted norms of democracy, social justice and non-discrimination, Islamophobia and its articulation by the far-right groups is leading to hatred and discrimination against Muslims and creating a false sense of an impending clash between civilizations.

Denounced the misguided attempts of certain quarters to distort the institution of marriage and family

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[2] UNESCO Declaration on Cultural Diversity

by introducing slanted narratives of "sexual orientation" as part of human rights and LGBT relationship as an 'alternative form of family' in the garb of diversity. To this end, reiterated the fundamental role and contributions of the institutions of marriage and family, which have contributed in promoting ethical and spiritual values as well as strengthening the socio-economic progress in all societies.

Appreciated the timely initiatives of the OIC which include consensus adoption of the UN Human Rights Council Resolution 16/18 that conveys global resolve to combat all forms of discrimination, hatred and violence based on one's religion or belief to avoid clash among cultures. Also lauded the OIC's efforts to actively collaborate with the UN Alliance of Civilizations and UNESCO to bridge 'perception gaps' on issues of freedom of religion, freedom of opinion and expression as well as combating racism and racial discrimination and for protection of cultural heritage, access to quality education, information and communication and advancement of science and technology that serve to strengthen the implementation of universal human rights standards among all cultures and societies.

Emphasized that in order to promote a constructive understanding of cultural diversity, a threefold comprehensive strategy must include intellectual, political, and legal and human rights dimensions. On the intellectual front, cultural diversity should mean recognizing the value of pluralism and multiculturalism as a cornerstone of modern societies. On the political front, cultural diversity should be translated into policies of social inclusion of various cultural components of society and strengthening the socio-economic and cultural visibility of diverse communities. On the legal and human rights front, cultural diversity must be recognized through respect and protection of the right to differ as an indispensable component of universal human rights.

Emphasized further that IPHRC, as one of the principal organs of the OIC, has an important role in consolidating respect for Islamic culture and noble values and promoting inter-civilizational dialogue, consistent with the OIC Charter. In this regard, it urged the OIC institutions to take advantage of the human rights expertise of the Commission in pursuing the human rights based approaches towards implementation of the Islamic Cultural strategy.

Underscored that States have the sovereign right to adopt measures and policies to protect and promote the diversity of cultural expressions within their territory and to undertake appropriate measures in the best interests of their respective societies while ensuring non-discrimination and upholding the observance and protection of all human rights and fundamental freedoms for all segments of society.

Further underscored that while transformation of domestic laws and legal frameworks is an effective mean to embrace diversity, the role of traditional ethical and family values and particularly the role of women and civil society remains paramount in brining sustainable cultural integration among various groups.

Recognized the importance of information and communication technologies including the social media, which has broadened the scope of interactions for innovation and creativity and exchange of knowledge and ideas among the young minds to foster people to people development and cooperation with the potential to bring communities closer. To that end also emphasized the implementation of the recommendations made in the recently concluded IPHRC Seminar on Role of Media in combating hate speech, to create conducive environment for inter-civilizational dialogue and to demystify the notion of any clash of civilization or cultural relativism.

Highlighted that while utmost respect for diversity is emphasized, it must not become an excuse to perpetuate harmful cultural practices, which run against the fundamental/universal human rights. The respect for cultural diversity must not stop the societies to introspect and evolve. The process to alter these harmful practices must be carried out by proponents within the respective societies or communities through a process of an informed and open dialogue that is based on true understanding of the religious and cultural teachings and the obligations of universal human rights law.

Further highlighted that there is a need to understand that changing deep rooted cultural convictions of certain communities is a time-consuming process, which requires patience and understanding by all stakeholders. Although formal legislations in accordance with the international obligations of Member States prohibiting harmful practices may be the first step but a holistic approach especially through education and community participation are the preferred means to ensure viability and sustainability of the change process. Imposed solutions from outside are counterproductive and evoke resistance.

Underlined the need to develop a culture of peace through inter-civilizational dialogue to bridge ignorance and misunderstanding and allow each culture to learn and improve itself through positive, respectful, constructive and informed interactions. The promotion of intercultural/civilizational dialogue should focus on the three principal dimensions of culture; aesthetic, ethical, and spiritual components[3].

Highlighted the need to manage diversity at the political and constitutional level (which sets the foundation for the acceptance of diversity as a corner-stone of the national identity of the nation/ state); at the cultural and intellectual levels (which involves cultural mapping of various cultural components of the society, including cultural activities, cultural heritage, cultural practices, cultural products and artifacts to be included in the curricula to educate younger generations) and the educational and information levels (to be executed through media and technological applications);

Urged the international community to:

(a) follow up on the *Convention on the Protection and Promotion of the Diversity of Cultural Expressions* to deepen the international debate on cultural diversity, particularly in respect of its links with development and its impact on policymaking and implementation;
(b) encourage the production, safeguarding and dissemination of diversified contents in the media and global information networks to promote harmony between different cultural groups within and among nations and to embrace cultural diversity as a unifying force for creation of resilient societies;
(c) ensure respect for and protect traditional knowledge, in particular that of indigenous peoples and fostering synergies between modern science and local knowledge;
(d) encourage mobility of creators, artists, researchers, scientists and intellectuals and the development of international research programmes and partnerships, while striving to preserve and enhance the creative capacity of developing countries;

Urged the OIC Member States to:

(a) mainstream respect for cultural diversity in all relevant national legislations/ policies/national action plans in conformity with their international human rights obligations;

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[3] a) the aesthetic dimension is represented by the physical expressions in the form of buildings, folklore, food and dresses etc. and it is under this dimension of culture that intercultural dialogue is usually practiced and perceived; b) the ethical dimension of culture is about the values that define the humanity of each people, community or group, and it is the dimension that gives sense, substance, and strengthen to each culture. It is expressed through human relations and structures of society, and also through the aesthetic expressions and perceptions; c) the spiritual dimension is although intangible yet primary source of culture, which explains and gives meaning to life and all human expressions.

(b) develop appropriate regulatory frameworks designed to promote the principles enshrined in the *Cultural Strategy for the Islamic World* and other relevant universally recognized human rights instruments;

(c) incorporate the respect for cultural diversity as a tool and engine of sustainable development in relevant policies and programs;

(d) intensify international cooperation through cross cultural fertilization of knowledge and ideas and exchanges of best practices in regard to cultural pluralism;

(e) involve all sectors of civil society including religious leaders, minorities, ethnic groups and media in framing of public policies aimed at safeguarding and promoting cultural diversity and to that end facilitate the establishment of forums for dialogue among these groups;

(f) redesign national curricula to integrate human rights education into formal curriculum to create awareness about positive value of cultural diversity;

(g) remodel teachers' education/training as well as the curriculum with an aim to impart *'Global Citizenship Education'*[4] to younger generations to sensitize them about *"rights, responsibilities and duties that come with being a member of the global entity as a citizen of a particular nation or place"*[5];

(h) establish cultural institutions and facilities and ensure provision of requisite human and financial resources for cultural and institutional development.

Proposed establishing an independent Observatory within the ISESCO to:

(a) follow up implementation of the *Cultural strategy for the Islamic world* that can act as a catalyst to broaden cooperation between States and relevant non-governmental actors to implement targeted projects and programs;

(b) collect, compile and widely disseminate data and statistics on cultural diversity to help in the implementation of the Cultural Strategy;

(c) develop methodologies and tools for assessing and monitoring *respect for* cultural diversity *that are adaptable to national or local conditions by governments and public and private institutions;*

(d) help establish Member States national observatories to monitor policies and advise on appropriate measures for the promotion of cultural diversity as a mean to further the respect for and promotion and protection of human rights within their respective societies.

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4 GCD nurtures respect for all, building a sense of belonging to a common humanity and helps learners become responsible and active global citizens.
https://en.unesco.org/gced

5 https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Global_citizenship