

On behalf of IPHRC, and on my own behalf, it is a great honor for me to welcome you all to Commission's 9th Session.

Before coming to the theme of today's event, allow me to update you about the Commission's work.

Around four weeks ago, this Commission has turned four years old. Within this short span of time, this nascent Commission, has been able to make commendable progress in pursuit of its multi-dimensional mandate. I will not go into details in the interest of time – and also because we have kept you informed on regular basis.

Last year, the 42nd CFM mandated the Commission to review the Cairo Declaration on Human Rights in Islam. We immediately constituted a Committee that met here in February and formulated preliminary suggestions. An initial report would be submitted to the next CFM.

A month ago, our representatives paid a visit to Palestine to see the state of human rights violations by the occupying power and to show solidarity with our Palestinian brothers and sisters.

The Commission was represented in the 13th Islamic Summit held in Istanbul last month. We are also thankful to President Erdogan of Turkey for announcing voluntary contribution for the Commission's work.

Excellency; the Commission is highly appreciative of the strong support that you and the General Secretariat have been extending to all aspects of its work. We are also highly appreciative of the excellent manner in which our small-sized but highly efficient Secretariat has been assisting us.

Our thanks also go to the Member States for their interest in our work.

We would like to assure the Member States that the Commission is fully cognizant of its important responsibilities. Each and every Commissioner is undertaking all possible efforts to contribute to Commission's progress. Some of our colleagues would be leaving us before the next Session; their excellent work will always be remembered. We also congratulate our colleagues who have been re-elected.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Coming to today's thematic debate, let me point out that IPHRC accords due priority to matters relating to women – their human rights and their empowerment. Right from the beginning of its work, the Commission established a Working Group dealing with this subject.

These are issues of great importance for the OIC as well. In this context, we commend His Excellency Secretary-General Mr. Iyad Madani, for his far-reaching efforts in promoting the cause of women empowerment, enabling them to participate in decision making mechanisms at all levels and playing an effective and comprehensive role in sustainable development.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

In today's world, gender equality and women empowerment in all fields of social and economic life are gaining increasing importance from the perspectives of both policy development and human rights.

A gender sensitive approach to sustainable development takes into account women's needs, concerns, knowledge and skills, which in turn enables policy makers to develop appropriate policy responses and actions to ensure more equitable distribution of resources that in turn leads to promotion of just and inclusive societies.

Women are usually their families' nutritional gatekeepers, saving stimulators and wellbeing moderators. Their knowledge, enterprise and collective social action have a huge potential to improve resource productivity and conserve social and biological ecology.

Women empowerment and sustainable development are mutually reinforcing. Rise in female education levels lead to fall in infant mortality rates. Reliable research studies show that gender sensitive development strategies register stronger economic growth than gender-neutral strategies.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Islam has accorded both spiritual and temporal equality for men and women. Islam elevated the status of women to own and inherit property, take part in economic activities, choose life partner and seek and transmit knowledge.

OIC Member States recognize women's vital role and importance of full participation in all areas of sustainable development. Accordingly, they continue to collaborate with regional and international partners to fulfil their respective international commitments provided in the relevant international human rights instruments as well as UN pronouncements on developments goals including Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action and recently adopted Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). Besides, international instruments, initiatives and mechanisms, the OIC's revised Charter, its Ten Year Program of Action (TYPOA) also address the importance of role of women in development. OIC has drafted OIC Plan of Action for the Advancement of Women (OPAAW) and its comprehensive implementation mechanism.

Since adoption of OPAAW, and holding of five ministerial conferences on women the progress on implementation has been rather slow. Therefore, there is a need to benchmark the progress on (i) revision of OPAAW to make it more representative and action oriented by involving civil society and media (ii) creation of synergies between respective national plans and strategies of the Members States and 2nd TYPOA (iii) signing and ratification of treaties and agreements by member states to ensure gender equality and strengthen family well-being.

It is hoped that the ‘6th Session of the Ministerial Conference on Women’s Role in the Development of the OIC Member States’, scheduled to be held in Istanbul in 2016, shall deliberate on the subject in detail.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

IPHRC Statute encourages the Member States to nominate women to the membership of the Commission. In the past, this Commission was led by two very able Women Chairpersons whose contribution is highly appreciated.

I am pleased to inform that during the 9th Session, the Commission has adopted studies on (i) “*Women and Men’s inheritance in Islamic Sharia*” and (ii) *Human Trafficking in OIC Member States with focus on Women and children*. Also, it discussed ways and means to assess, review and revise the OPAAW for its better implementation, with the purpose to enhance women’s role in the development of the OIC member States.

The Commission is willing to work with the OIC General Secretariat, Islamic Fiqh Academy and other specialized institutions to assist Member States to adopt legal measures and policies to increase the participation of women in all sectors of society. Such measures include positive discrimination, quotas, capacity building programs, higher education and other incentives to speed women's representation in all government institutions, economic enterprises and social organizations.

The Commission is ready to offer its expertise to the Member States in capacity building and training of policy makers for formulation of gender sensitive policies, programs and instruments ensuring access and opportunities for greater roles in fields of political, social, economic and cultural development.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

In order to turn the cliché of 'women empowerment' into reality it is imperative to garner political commitment at the highest leadership level to the cause of women advancement.

I am hopeful that today's debate will be another right step in the long journey to achieve meaningful and comprehensive integration of women in the development of just and inclusive societies.