

Original: Turkish

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FOR THE 33<sup>RD</sup> SESSION OF THE COMCEC  
(İstanbul, 22 November 2017)**

BİSMİLLAHİRRAHMANİRRAHİM.

Distinguished Ministers,

Distinguished Secretary-General,

Esteemed Delegates,

My Dear Brothers and Sisters,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

ASSALAMU ALAIKUM WARAHMATULLAHI WABARAKATUHU.

MAY THE PEACE, MERCY AND BLESSINGS OF ALLAH BE UPON YOU.

I would like to respectfully greet all of you with the most heartfelt feelings, affection and respect as we open the 33<sup>rd</sup> Ministerial Session of COMCEC, the Standing Committee for Economic and Commercial Cooperation of the Organization of Islamic Cooperation. As the Term Chairman of the Organization of Islamic Cooperation and Chairman of the COMCEC, I would like to welcome all our guests to our country.

We are elated to be hosting such a distinguished and select community at this cross-roads of continents, civilizations and cultures, in the venerable city of İstanbul that was much praised by the Prophet (s.a.w.).

I call upon the Almighty to bless this COMCEC meeting we are holding at a critical juncture and I pray that the Session will be fruitful for our countries, the region and the world of Islam.

In our holy book the Koran, the guiding light of our lives, the Almighty says:

“VE EMRUHUM SÛRÂ BEYNEHUM”, in other words, that “THEIR DEALINGS SHALL BE THROUGH CONSULTATION”.

**“Unofficial Translation”**

Also, Rasul-i Ekrem (S.A.W.) says that “one who, in performing a task, consults a person adept at it, will deserve the best of outcomes.”

We have been striving to implement this principle through the COMCEC and through the Chairmanship of the Organization of Islamic Cooperation, for which we have assumed the Term Chairmanship for one and a half years.

At almost every opportunity, we seek to learn the views, opinions and, more importantly, the criticism voiced by our brothers and sisters.

Insh’Allah, we will today have the opportunity to listen first-hand to the thoughts and opinions of you, our valuable friends.

In addition to the economic, social and commercial matters on our agenda today, we will, without doubt, also discuss the circumstances in which our region and the Islamic world finds itself today.

As COMCEC, we will not only examine this year, which is now drawing to a close, but will also consider our projects for the future.

I want to sincerely thank in advance all our brothers and sisters who will enrich our meeting with their proposals, thoughts, criticism and comments;

however, there is one point, one that we feel to be lacking, to which I would like to draw your attention to that point.

For these consultations to achieve their intended purpose, they have to be sincere and moreover the decisions taken need to be implemented and realized.

Regardless of how inspiring and eye-opening it may be, an idea that cannot be implemented is doomed to remain as a pleasant yet hollow statement.

These meetings should have meaning, a purpose, one that goes beyond the exchange of views.

In this respect, we also have to strive to ensure that the matters we discuss and on which we take decisions here can be transformed from intentions into actions.

It is only then that our efforts will gain true meaning, and yield results that may remedy the troubles of the ummah.

I believe that with your contributions and efforts, COMCEC will, Insh’Allah, continue on its path with this perspective.

My Dearest Brothers and Sisters,

**“Unofficial Translation”**

We have a wise saying that goes: “PEOPLE SPEAK THROUGH THEIR PAIN”.

And today, I wish to speak with you openly, WITHOUT DRAWING any VEIL between MY HEART and MY WORDS.

It is obvious that the Islamic world has, in recent years, been going through a period of economic, political and social troubles, a period that may aptly be called a TIME of STRIFE.

Our cities, which for centuries have stood as centers of science, learning and wisdom are now writhing under the weight of destruction, suffering and tears.

From cities that were once havens of peace not only for their inhabitants, but also for the oppressed people from all corners of the world, now rises the cries and laments of mothers desperately clinging to the lifeless bodies of their children.

The sound of the azan is no longer heard from many of Aleppo’s centuries-old mosques.

The once dazzling brightness and luster of Damascus has faded long ago.

Baghdad’s once wealthy libraries and centuries-old manuscripts have been plundered.

Locations in Yemen that once enchanted visitors are now gradually turning into ruins.

As well as our cities, our joint history and the heritage of our 1400 years-old civilization is being destroyed, piece by piece, before our very eyes.

What is being destroyed and turned to rubble is not merely our buildings, our works, and our material and spiritual heritage; it is also our future.

What is being obliterated is not just the traces that the Muslim civilization has left on these lands, but also our honor and our dignity.

Those apparently responsible for these events that deeply wound our hearts are of course the dictators that oppress their people, and terror organizations that thrive on blood and tears.

We have all seen how packs of murderers such as DAESH, AL QAEDA, BOKO HARAM, YPG and FETÖ are committing widespread massacres in our region, from Syria to Iraq, and from Yemen to Libya;

however, these pawns we see at the front of the stage should not prevent us from seeing the main actors and the screenwriters hiding behind the curtains.

**“Unofficial Translation”**

As Mevlana once said, “IT IS NOT FIRE THAT BURNS THE MAN, BUT HIS OWN HEEDLESSNESS.”

As told in the hadith-i sheriff in which our Prophet (S.A.W.) says, “BEWARE OF THE INTUITON OF THE BELIEVER!” VERILY HE SEES WITH THE LIGHT OF ALLAH!”, we must also approach the events in our region with this intuition and insight.

The picture we have in front of us clearly points to a simple fact:

There is a malevolent scenario at play, aiming to destroy the unity, solidarity, richness and, most important of all, the future of the Islamic world.

There is a dedicated attempt to unravel Muslim societies from within, by exploiting sometimes the ethnic, and at other times the religious and sectarian differences in these societies.

They want the Muslim world to waste its energy in internal conflicts by deepening the fault lines among us.

They are aiming to achieve a conflicted, disputed social structure where neighbors consider themselves to be enemies; even brothers and sisters consider each other as enemies and worst of all, they marginalize each other.

Clearly, the West is now trying to guarantee its future by exporting all the malicious issues coming from its past to the Islamic world.

By increasing the tension, they make the resources of the Muslims, through inappropriate means, available to the weapons industry, usurers, speculators, and barons using hot money resources.

In this way, the funds that should have been spent for the youth, women, people in need and for the improvement and construction of our cities are unfortunately being spent for the benefit of the western countries and companies.

Some two to three centuries ago, during the COLONIALIST era, the western world established a prosperity order based on the resources and blood of the oppressed.

The west of today, the time which we can also define as the NEO-COLONIALIST era, is making an effort to maintain and prolong their exploitative system, again upon the resources, pains and lives of the oppressed.

**“Unofficial Translation”**

My Dear Friends,

Of course, it is not only our oil, natural resources and labor force targeted here.

What is plundered is not only our earthly wealth.

The main target now is to destroy the life sources of the Islamic civilization.

Their objective is to crush the spine of Muslim societies, and to paralyze all of us economically, politically and socially.

This is because Muslims have succeeded in maintaining their ambitions globally despite the difficulties, problems and attacks they have faced during the last two centuries.

Traits such as unity, justice, freedom and social ethics are still standing as the main pillars of the Islamic faith.

Islam is still considered to be the only way for salvation from the grip of nihilism and materialism that have captured the modern individual.

The reputation of western institutions and organizations has been increasingly crumpled.

Established after the first world war and strengthened with the second world war, the global system has generally been one of the biggest obstacles to, rather than, ensuring justice and freedom.

Indifference to the atrocities being witnessed in Syria for seven years, inhuman treatments to refugees at border gates, and irresponsiveness against the genocide in Arakan have shown the true nature of the west.

Values, such as democracy, human rights and freedoms, have been superseded by increasing Islamophobia, Neo-Nazism and racism.

This list could be made much longer.

My Brothers and Sisters,

In the face of the current picture, I believe that we should sincerely ask ourselves the following questions.

Who are the actual winners for the hundred billion dollar orders being placed for arms by Islamic countries to western countries?

**“Unofficial Translation”**

Who are benefiting by setting the sisters and brothers turning towards the same *Qibla* everyday for five times against each other, sometimes over their origin, sometimes over their sect and sometimes their ideological differences?

Who are actually benefiting from fracturing our countries by artificial borders?

I believe that the sincere answers to be given to these questions will lead us to have a new perspective and let us approach the issues in a different manner.

When we succeed we will not only crush the traps, we will also prevent the ones who grow upon our resources.

Muslims cannot unquestioningly accept the role they are given, and they cannot give consent to such roles which will lead to the demolishing of their future through internal conflicts.

As we know now who brought up, nourished and raised this pack of killers, which is blindingly obvious, we can not sit back and watch these enemies of Islam.

Incriminating the entire Muslim world over the activities of the terrorist organizations and grabbing the most fundamental rights on this basis reveals the true intention.

On the other hand, of course if you are ambitious then you should have the resources as well.

Muslims indeed have extensive potential with respect to population, underground resources and geography.

The main point here is to value all of these potential properly, in other words to prepare halva by blending flour, sugar and butter.

Our mission here is to transform Islamic geography into a remarkable manufacturing base by taking the required economic, technological and cultural development strides and to produce a model for this.

Developing our economic and commercial cooperation has become indispensable for assuring the prosperous lives that our people much deserve.

Therefore, we should find the ways to utilize the platforms such as Organization of Islamic Cooperation and COMCEC more efficiently.

but at this point we are still encountering serious problems.

We cannot utilize the means we have as effectively as they should be.

We cannot have any immediate control over the developments in our region and the problems effecting our respective countries.

**“Unofficial Translation”**

We can obviously see that our economic and human relations are not at the desired level.

In order to overcome these problems, we have to utilize all the means we have, particularly COMCEC, as an effective platform.

As you know, since the implementation of the COMCEC Strategy in 2013, the cooperation activities have gained significant momentum, although it is still not enough.

The Working Groups and Project Funding Mechanism, established to oversee the implementation of the strategy, are continuing their activities with the support of COMCEC member countries.

The policy recommendations of these groups are implemented with multilateral cooperation projects supported by the COMCEC Project Funding.

Thus, while the institutional and human capacities of our countries are being mobilized on the one hand, a culture of working together for the solution of common problems is also being developed.

I call on the member countries to actively participate in the Working Groups and to benefit more actively from the COMCEC Project Funding mechanism.

My Dearest Brothers and Sisters,

We should focus on projects aimed at increasing trade among us.

For this purpose, we should immediately ensure that the Trade Preferential System (TPS-OIC), which has long been on our agenda, is in operation.

Frankly speaking, every day that we delay in taking action on this matter is a huge loss for us.

I invite all relevant Member Countries to move in this direction.

I also see the work of the STANDARDS and METROLOGY INSTITUTE for ISLAMIC COUNTRIES (SMIIC), which we host in Turkey, as crucial.

The Institute is carrying out serious activities in the standards in various fields, especially in the determination of halal standards in member countries and throughout the world.

We do our best to provide the highest contribution to this work.

Within this scope, we established a Halal Accreditation Committee.

**“Unofficial Translation”**

We also expect our member countries to actively participate in the SMIC’s activities.

As we increase our trade and investments, we should also develop the ability to resolve our own challenges.

In my speech at the 13<sup>th</sup> Islamic Summit last year, I have stated that we need to develop a mechanism for the settlement of trade and investment disputes among Member Countries.

For this purpose, I emphasized the importance of establishing an Arbitration Center within the Organization of Islamic Cooperation.

I am closely following the work for the establishment of this Center being jointly conducted by the Union of Chambers and Commodity Exchanges of Turkey (TOBB) and the Islamic Chamber of Commerce, Industry and Agriculture (ICCIA).

I believe that with the establishment of this Center, we will gain an organization that will enable the rapid, least costly and fair resolution of commercial and investment-related disputes.

Furthermore, it is my hope that the work related to the establishment of the COMCEC Real Estate and Gold Exchanges will soon be completed.

In this regard, we will be pleased to share with you the serious experience and infrastructure that we have in BORSA İSTANBUL (the ISTANBUL STOCK EXCHANGE).

Distinguished Guests,

There is an old saying: “IF YOU’RE THINKING OF ONE YEAR AHEAD, GROW WHEAT. IF YOU’RE THINKING OF TEN YEARS AHEAD, PLANT TREES. IF YOU’RE THINKING FOR 100 YEARS AHEAD, EDUCATE PEOPLE.”

We also need to pay special attention to our young generations, who provide the assurance for our future.

This can be achieved by educating qualified, cognizant and self-confident individuals.

In 2017 we took an important step for this objective, when we organized the Science and Technology Summit of the Organization of Islamic Cooperation in Astana.

During this event, we took crucial decisions about the scientific and technological cooperation among our countries.

At this summit we accepted the OIC Science, Technology and Innovations (STI) Agenda 2026.

**“Unofficial Translation”**

The initiatives that we will launch in science, industry and technology, and the innovations that we will make in the field of manufacturing technology and services will provide extremely valuable contributions to our economic development and cooperation.

We need to increase the mobility of our students and academicians in order to fully implement the decisions we have taken.

We, as Turkey, offer higher education opportunities every year to 4500 students coming from 155 countries through the Türkiye Scholarships.

The majority of these students are our own children from Islamic countries.

At present, 9,500 students from OIC member countries are continuing their higher education at Turkish universities through these scholarships.

I hope this number will continue to increase every year, Insh'Allah.

None of our problems is unsolvable.

There is no insurmountable obstacle as long as we act in solidarity and unite our forces.

We must develop cooperation, not only among our member countries but also among diaspora communities spread across scores of countries around the world.

Our people living abroad are of great importance especially in the fight against Islamophobia, xenophobia and cultural racism.

I appreciate the recent steps taken in this perspective and wish its continuation.

I find it particularly significant that this year's Ministerial Session's theme has been given the title "The Improvement of Trans-border Transport Corridors in Member Countries."

I believe that our ministers will take important decisions about the development of transport corridors.

Furthermore, in the special sessions to be held tomorrow, the perspective of stakeholders in relation to transport corridors will be discussed in detail, from all dimensions.

I invite all our delegates to actively take part in these important events.

Before concluding my speech with these thoughts, I would once again like to express my pleasure in welcoming you as guests to our city of Istanbul.

**“Unofficial Translation”**

I hope that the 33rd COMCEC meetings will prove to be most beneficial for our countries, and I wish every success to the participants in their work.

May Allah be our supporter and helper.

May Allah open our path and destiny.

Take good care of yourselves...

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