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BROOKINGS DOHA CENTER

WHERE DOES THE ORGANIZATION OF THE ISLAMIC COOPERATION
STAND ON THE ARAB UPRISINGS?

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ANDERSON COURT REPORTING
706 Duke Street, Suite 100
Alexandria, VA 22314
Phone (703) 519-7180 Fax (703) 519-7190

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PARTICIPANTS:

Moderator:

SALMAN SHAIKH
Brookings Doha Center

Featured Speaker:

H.E. PROFESSOR EKMELEDDIN IHSANOGLU
Secretary General, Organization of Islamic
Cooperation

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P R O C E E D I N G S

MR. SHAIKH: (in progress) -- and I think has been proving himself to be a reformer par excellence in the reform and organization of the OIC. He's overseen a big process of change, in its charter, its aims, its outlook towards the world, its stance on major world issues. In fact, I was just joking with him earlier: "You've managed to change the name and even the logo in your time, which is not an easy thing to do."

And, of course, he's brought in a new-found focus on cooperation, on new partnerships, with key powers and other regional organizations.

He was -- of course, his association with the OIC is from 1980, as founding Director General of the Research Center for Islamic History, Cultural and Art in Istanbul. And he has, of course, pioneered activities towards creating awareness about Islamic culture across the world, through his research, through his publishing, and organizing of congresses in various areas.

He's, of course, contributed immensely to scholarly debates on inter-cultural dialogues. And with his institutional and personal (inaudible) and his recognition at the highest intellectual circles as a leading contributor to the rapprochement between cultures, particularly between the Muslim and Western worlds.

Professor, it's truly a pleasure to have you here. Thank you very much for taking the time in your incredibly busy schedule -- I know you're traveling again tomorrow in the region -- for coming to us to speak to us about what is the Organization of the Islamic Cooperation stand on the Arab Uprising.

Again, with pleasure, I welcome you to Doha, and to the BDC. (Applause)

MR. IHSANOGLU: Thank you.

Good evening, ladies and gentleman. It's a really great pleasure and honor to be here at this distinguished institution, Brookings at Doha. I have been to Brookings in Washington, D.C. I have been to different think-tanks in America. But to be here for

the first time, it is, for me, I think it's a very interesting experience, and I'm very grateful to you, sir, for your kind invitation.

Next Saturday will be the 17th of December. Today is the 12th, next Saturday will be the 17th. The 17th of December is the day Bouazizi passed away -- a vegetable vendor in a small town in Tunisia, who put himself to fire, and lost his life, because he couldn't earn his daily few dinars to look after his family. That was one year ago.

And that man who would have went all his life unknown even beyond his street where he lived in, entered the history as the one who lit the spark for great change in parts of the Arab world. And the collapse of a police state which entrenched there for so many decades, and then again in Egypt, and Libya, and Yemen, and Tunisia, and now in Syria -- everywhere -- that shows that the area was ready for a great change, and that was not noticed. That's why we need to study this carefully.

But when I was asked by the Director, by Mr. Shaikh, about the OIC and the Arab Uprising, what was its position, let me quote a statement which I wrote in my book in 2009, on the Muslim world. And being Secretary of OIC, I need to speak on the Muslim world, not the Arab world. So I hope you don't forget that the Arab world is a part of the Muslim world. And the 22 countries which are forming the Arab League are part and parcel of the 57 countries of the Muslim world.

So, in that book, the book title is *The Islamic World in the New Century*, published in 2010, on the occasion of the 40th anniversary of the establishment of OIC. I wrote: "The Muslim world aspires to regain its long status, and strives to be part of the mainstream global community, tackling contemporary concerns, and working towards development in all fields. Moreover, it yearns to benefit from the universal values of freedom, liberty, good governance, justice and human rights, and hopes to rejoice in the blessing of progress and prosperity."

I also wrote that, "There is no doubt that the future of the Muslim world depends, to a large extent, on the articulation and development of the principles of good governance, together with establishment of tradition, with pluralistic democratic practices. To be sure, this is no easy undertaking. It entails unflinching perseverance, and it is likely to span more than a generation.

"In recent history, many Muslim countries have not at all experienced democracy in the modern sense of the word. Similarly, those Muslim countries that have lived through some form of democratic governance have suffered setbacks, and confronted crises that have simply cut short the democratic experience. Yet, Islamic history and heritage are full of memorable instances of good governance, and immutable principles that uphold it.

"We believe that there is no fundamental dissonance between the application of heuristic democracy and the foundation of good governance in Islam.

Considering that the road to democracy was never paved with roses, in those countries with longstanding traditional democratic governance, we admit that the democratization as stated above cannot be achieved without establishing two critical principles -- the first, good governance. Good governance and transparency at the level of public affairs, management, and implementation of accountability -- this is the first principle, good governance.

And the second one is the need to allow political freedom to be ingrained in the well established rules of human rights. Without having these two principles applied -- good governance, and political freedom -- in a heuristic way, you cannot have them. That's what I have written in 2009.

So, without these two vital principles, the sole outlet for the politically active in the Muslim world will need to seek to achieve their ambitions by falling back on religious fear. This scenario, if it unfolds, will eventually complicate matters.

I also wrote on the relation between religious and political factors, saying, "In order for Muslim societies to move resolutely down the path of progress, they need to define the relationship between the religious and the political, without letting one intrude into the other. The relationship should be based on, first, mutual respect; second, allowing and accepting pluralism. And, third, allowing change and transition in political power through democratic means.

"Muslim societies ought to lift the control exercised by the religious over the political, and vice versa. They need to clearly determine the demarcation line between the two."

I have written this 2009. And then when one year ago the events started unfolding, with the death -- of the uprising of the Tunisian people, I found myself between two obligations.

First, my obligation as a Muslim intellectual, as one who belongs to this part of the world, and at the same time as the Secretary General

of Islamic Cooperation Organization, where you're bound by resolutions, decisions. But lately, we in the OIC -- as our chairman has just mentioned -- been through great reform. It started in 2005. And through this process of reform, we had two major documents which have been approved by -- unanimously by -- member states.

In the Extraordinary Mecca Summit 2005, in December, the summit approved a 10-year program of action. The 10-year program of action is the first action program accepted in the history of OIC, and it speaks about universal values, core values, like human rights, like democratization, good governance, accountability, transparency, fraud and corruption.

The second document, which is the charter -- mentioned by our chairman -- which was unanimously approved in Dakar, March 2008, again stipulates the same notions as objectives of the OIC.

So, building on this, I felt myself free to hope addressing the needs of the people. And I will give you an example of what we have done, at least in

Libya when events erupted. You can find, on our website, all statements made by the Secretary General from early 2011 until today, vis-a-vis every case of these countries. And later on, if you allow me, I will give example of the Libyan one, because I think it is -- as I'm going up tomorrow to Libya, I'll be happy to share this with you.

But before I go to cases, let me express other impressions and ideas about what happened. Is it really a "Spring?" I carefully listened to your introduction, Mr. Chairman, and you didn't use the word "Arab Spring." And I think "Arab Spring" is a wrong notion. It's the wrong definition, or giving a wrong name. And it's narrowing the events. Or it's not a good description, honest description, of what happened. Spring is a short period. It's one of the four seasons. And what started, what happened, and what is going on will take more than one spring, and more than four seasons.

If we need to find a catchy metaphoric expression, we can say, instead of "spring," we can say, it is the "autumn of Arab dictators."

But the rest is a long process. I think it is the revolutions of the 21st century started in this part of the world.

Now, when you look to reaction of the Europeans, Americans, Asians to the economic crisis, the financial crisis of the world, you find that they are doing the same as the people in Tunisia or in Tahrir Square, or elsewhere. They're taking to the streets, they are there. They are challenging the order -- economic order, or the state order -- and asking for changing of the financial regime, economic order, et cetera.

This is the first time in our big revolutions where you don't have philosophers, ideologues. The French Revolution, it has a generation of great philosophers, thinkers, and leaders. The same for Russian, for Chinese, and other revolutions -- big revolutions.

These revolutions are different ones. It is not what we have learned in the schools about revolutions, in the history books, or textbooks, about the big upheavals in history. It is something different. And using the "Arab Spring" is wrong and misleading, narrowing the understanding of what happened.

My expression to what happened is that the Arab people decided to join the context of history. These countries, people in this part of the world, were forced, since the First World War, to live outside the context of history. And by that event, which next Saturday will be completed one year, will be, the Arab people decided to join the context of history.

So, since the whole part of the Middle East, the leaders, the regimes, were decided by external powers, and the people in this part of the world lived under different dictatorship, using ideologies like nationalism, Arab nationalism, like socialism, like Baath party, Baath philosophy, et cetera, et cetera,

they were secluded, they were isolated. They were not allowed to join the history, the flow of history, or the context of time with other nations.

The fall of the Berlin Wall allowed Eastern Europe, Russia, southeast Europe, and many Eurasian countries in the Caucasus, et cetera, to join the history -- or to join the context of history. But this part of the world was living outside the context of history.

So, all through these decades, conditions, and socioeconomic parameters, led to what happened one year ago. It was kind of tension in tectonic layers of these societies that accumulated to a certain point. And at a certain moment, the earthquake took place.

So what were these factors? When we look to socioeconomic factors, of course political factors, which I briefly mentioned -- dictatorship, monopoly of power, and not allowing people to participate in decision-making, and elite giving the orders and the rest of the people has to obey.

And then you have accumulation of socioeconomic problems. When you look to, for instance, unemployment, you see that, according to ILO global employment trends in 2011, the total 6.3 in 2009. And in 2010, the global figure is 6.2 percent. When you look to the unemployment in the Middle East, you find it's 10.3 percent -- almost double. In East Africa, the unemployment is around 9.9 in 2009, and 9.8, 2010. Sub-Saharan Africa performed better than the Middle East and North Africa. Unemployment in Sub-Sahara was 8 percent, compared with 9.8 percent or 9.9 percent.

When you look to IMF regional Economic Outlook, you find that unemployment is one of the most important factors that affect, directly, the young population in the Arab world. Unemployment in Egypt, Jordan, Lebanon, Morocco, Syria, and Tunisia have an average of 12 percent over the past decade.

According to the IMF report, the surprise you find in there is that unemployment in the MENA region tends to increase by schooling. You know, when

you have schooling increasing, you expect that unemployment will decrease, and employment will increase. Here you find the contrary, that higher schooling, you have higher unemployment, not the contrary.

And this is the case with the tertiary education -- the third level education -- which is university, higher education, where you have exceeding 15 percent in Egypt, Jordan, and Tunisia.

When you look for the level of unemployment in these countries, you will find that the biggest share of unemployment is for youth. For instance, it is 40 percent, the share of unemployment of the youth in the total unemployment in Egypt, Lebanon, Syria, and Tunisia. And this is the highest rate of this share in the world.

So, of course, the first time in history we see revolutions taking place, and we are following these revolutions thanks to Al Jazeera and others, through media and live transmission. If you have read what the banners in Egypt and in Tunisia, when they

were first days, they were talking about "bread," "honor," and "freedom." So they were -- "bread" here is a symbol of employment, of earning money. And "honor" is a symbol of leading a decent life.

That's why, in my understanding, these events were inevitable, but none of us could expect it. There were indications -- these all figures are nothing new, they are all there in the reports. But none of us expected this to happen.

So, it is the citizens' access to economic development which was not a free one. It was economic -- when you look to the growth, the economic growth, of Egypt, Libya, and Tunisia, you find it's above 5 percent. And 5 percent is a very good economic growth. But this 5 percent were cut off at certain level, at the top of the social pyramid. The 5 percent didn't go up-down. It was kept up in the few hands of people. That's why the problem happened. Had this 5 percent, which was sustainable for a few years, both in Egypt, in Libya, with the huge resources, and in Tunisia, successful economic

development and social development -- which led to a difference in Tunisia -- it was not spread to the bottom of the social pyramid. That was one of the issues.

Of course, lack of social justice, lack of social mobility, lack of good governance -- and, of course, we don't need to forget illiteracy.

When we look to other aspects of what happened in this part of the world, we will find that the motivations of the uprisings were social, economic, and psychological, political. And I think the change of social media has contributed that. And you can see the difference between what happened in Tunisia, Egypt, and what happened in Libya. Social media is very instrumental in connecting people in Egypt and Syria -- in Tunisia, but not in Libya. Because social media is not spread among the Libyan young people.

When you look to the effect of Al Jazeera, for instance, in what happened, you'll see that for the first time, reporters and cameras in Alexandria in

more than one place, in Cairo in more than one place, in Suez, in Port Said, and different parts of Egypt -- all Al Jazeera people were there with their cameras, and connecting immediately, and giving information to each other.

So people in Tahrir Square, they knew through this connection what's happening in the other part of the country. And the same for Tunisia.

This is a very unique -- this is the first time happens in history. This is why the uprising in the Arab world is a great phenomenon which needs, really, a thorough study, a multi-phase study, or it needs multi-disciplinary study. And we have lived this. We have lived history.

Mr. Chairman, I can go more on that, but I think time is taking me. Let me give you one example on where OIC stood as to all this events.

For instance, if we talk about Libya, I would like to tell you that it's not only me as a writer or scholar who said what I have said at the beginning, and read to you in my book, *The Islamic*

World in the New Century -- but as a Secretary General.

The events in Benghazi started on 18th of February, I think. The first statement ever published by any international organization was the statement published on 22nd of February by Secretary General, OIC, where we voiced "strong condemnation of the excessive use of force" -- I'm reading to you from the statement, official statement, "Commending strong condemnation of the excessive use of force against civilians in the Arab Libyan Jamahiriya -- " -- official name -- " -- resulting in the death and injury of large numbers of people. The OIC considers the ongoing coercion and oppression in Libya as a humanitarian catastrophe which goes against Islamic and human values." And this sentence was quoted by Security Council resolution -- that this is against Islamic and human values.

The OIC called upon Libyan authorities to " -- stop immediately violence against innocent Libyans, and emphasizes the need to address their claims

peacefully, and through serious dialogue, instead of assassination and blood-shedding." In the same vein, the General Secretariat emphasized that people have the right to express their legitimate claims in a peaceful and civilized way. And we stated that, "OIC charter and the 10-year program of action underscore the importance for the states to consolidate the principles of good governance and human rights, combat corruption, expand political participation and comprehensive development, and address increasing political, social, and economic challenges, which cannot be addressed unless comprehensive reforms are introduced in various domains."

That was a statement on the 22nd of February, before any other international organization -- even some NGOs, before them, we did this. So this is where OIC stood, and where we stand vis-a-vis the democratization -- or the claims or the demands for democratization -- in the Muslim world.

Later on, on the 24th of February, and the 1st of March, and later on -- many statements -- and, of

course, we did not only produce statements. We immediately sent assistance for displaced people, humanitarian aid, through two neighboring countries -- Egypt and Tunisia, we established there. And we managed to cross the border from Egypt to Benghazi. But on the other side, from the western side, from Tunisia, we stopped at the Tunisian border and we cooperated with the Tunisian Red Crescent, and other humanitarian institutions, to help the people.

We made appeals for the assistance. And, of course, we participated in the international contact group meetings. And we advocated non-fly zone call to stop bombarding by the Qadaffi air forces. And, of course, we were all through the different processes for that.

Tomorrow, hopefully, in sha Allah, I will be flying to Tripoli to meet the new government leadership, and to assure them of our support, and of our help to them.

Mr. Chairman, ladies and gentlemen, in brief, this is where OIC stands for Arab Uprising.

But don't forget that what happened in the Arab world is nothing new. It happened elsewhere. And don't forget, two years ago, in a country called Kyrgyzstan which, of course, is not a member of the Arab League, but a member of OIC -- a Central Asian country -- had witnessed a similar event. And this is why, really, we need to think of wider perspective, bigger context, to what happened in Tunisia and Egypt, and here and there, is not unique. It is coming in a sequence.

I would call this natural events. There is pressure in the layers, tectonic layers, of the nations, millions. It is looking for some weak point to erupt and to change the whole scene in that country.

What is more important is that we have to help this change to be a constructive one, not devastating one. Otherwise, the price for this will be very heavy, and it will need decades and generations to bring it back to normal.

Thank you. (Applause)

MR. SHAIKH: Professor, let's see if these are working.

Professor Ihsanoglu, thank you very much for your remarks. It shows a remarkable and, I think, deep understanding of what's going on in the Arab world, but also in a wider context. And we could go on in other parts of the Muslim world, and in the drive towards democratization.

You also showed incredible optimism, with all the realism that one needs to have, for the spirit of -- for the human spirit to seek human rights, to seek opportunities, to seek their own futures. Thank you very much for that.

What we're going to do is slightly different -- perhaps some of our regular visitors -- we're going to have a conversation, myself and Professor Ihsanoglu. And then I will throw it open for questions.

So I'll ask you a few general questions first.

As you know, we are seeing, whether in Tunisia or in Egypt, now, the rise of new political actors who have been previously kept back, beaten down, kept out of the way. Particularly, I'm referring, of course, to the Islamist parties.

How do you see this? And what do you think are the responsibilities of those who are now entering government for the first time?

MR. IHSANOGLU: Well, thank you. Well, let us first put again these events, or the issue you have mentioned of the rising of political powers which associate itself with Islam. Of course, we have to be careful about saying "Islamic," "Islamist," et cetera -- "Islamism." And I think this is a lot of wrong connotations.

We have to understand why, first of all, these Islamic movements became so dominant. And I think we have to go back to the end of the Cold War. With the end of the Cold War, there was the collapse of ideologies like socialism, like communism, like, to a certain extent, capitalism -- and the derivatives of

all these ideologies, which took domestic or indigenous colors in certain countries in the world, whether it be our part of the world, whether it be in Africa, Asia, or Latin America.

When you don't have any ideology that people can consciously -- when you look to the left, the socialists or the communist Marxist left, in the Arab countries, or in my country, when you compare their position today with their position in '60s and '70s, uncomparable. They're almost not existing now.

Because they, by the fall of the Berlin Wall, that era ended to a great extent. What was left -- how the Arab world looked -- to give this way: these ideologies went out. But, of course, political parties took shape in Eastern Europe, Southeast Europe, fewer Asian countries, and Russia, and now it is starting in some -- in Kyrgyzstan, for instance, in East Asia, in Latin America, dictatorships collapsed. And then political parties, on different lines -- similar or un-similar to what happened in other

democratic countries, with the local flavor of the countries.

In this case, in our case here in the part of the Muslim world, this didn't happen. Because, as I said, these countries were living outside the context of history. So no political party -- political parties were not allowed, no political movements were allowed. The only place where people could get together and join each other was the mosque. So the mosque was the hub for anything -- for social activities, political activities. And, of course, Islam was the motivation, being dear to the hearts of everybody -- and the people in this part of the world are more religious than in other parts of the world -- so the politicization of Islam notions started to become very appealing to the people. And there is no other alternative.

So, where you have only the religious groups which are socially active, and economically active, and to a certain extent, politically active -- as it is allowed -- when you get the cover, let out of the

pressure, this is the only one which were powers were organized. And this is very natural to have them.

And now, as I said, the relationship between the religious -- the political and the religious factors -- has to observe certain criteria. First of all, there should be mutual respect between both. And, secondly, everybody has to agree on pluralism -- that they should allow pluralism. And third point, should allow, accept, the change and transition of political powers through democratic process. Means, if you come to power today, you have to know that you came by democratic decision because people voted for you. But tomorrow, if you are voted out, you have to accept this. And once this is accepted, I think there is no harm, and we have to respect the will of the people. And we have to give opportunity to these people to know how to form political parties on modern lines, on contemporary lines, and with the other experiences in the world, and to adhere to universal practices of governance and of change in power.

I don't think there is a danger, or that this is something we should avoid. In the country, we have to accept this. And we have to let this experience go in a peaceful way. We need not to forget what happened in Algiers in early '90s -- 1990s -- and that should not be -- this experience should be avoided.

MR. SHAIKH: Thank you.

I think it would be good for us to do a little tour of the region, if you don't mind. And let me first ask you, on Syria -- of course the OIC had a very important meeting at the end of the month, where the communique expressed very deep concern and, of course, urged the government -- and in all -- to stop using excessive force, to respect human rights, to fulfill its commitments to the OIC charter, and, of course, to carry out political reforms.

And yet, we're still having, you know, 20, 30, 40 people killed daily. The violence doesn't seem to be stopping, it seems to be only getting worse.

Have we exhausted all mechanisms to end the violence? What now, in terms of trying to move forward on this issue? And are negotiations still possible with the Assad regime?

MR. IHSANOGLU: Thank you.

For Syria, we know -- I see we have been since early April, trying to engage with the Syrian government in a quiet diplomacy to convince them to open channels for dialogue with them, and to tell them that the excessive use of force against civilians is not acceptable -- 2010 is not the time when, in the '80s, early '80s, Hama was devastated by heavy artillery, and thousands of people were killed. This could not be, this is not a time to repeat this.

And we have tried our best, through different channels -- even, I sent a special envoy to the president with a letter, and a candid letter, telling that they should engage with the opposition, and we should find a way to transform to a multi-party system, to a democratic situation, and to, first of all, respect human rights.

I have to say that we could not get what we expected to get. There have been many promises which were not kept -- invitations, other things, which did not work, not because we didn't want it. On the contrary, we wanted it very, very much.

Now, you asked me the most difficult question -- what to do next.

Let us first say what we should not do. What is the red line? And if we define what is the red line, what we should not do, maybe we can next say that this is things which we can do.

What we should not do is to repeat what happened in Iraq, or what happened in Libya -- or what previously happened in Afghanistan or in Somalia. This we should not do. That's why we are against external intervention.

This is for the sake of the -- this is for the safety of the Syrian people, the country, and the region. If we lose this red line, we will really put the whole area on fire, in jeopardy, and I think it will open the gates of hell. And what we lived since

2003, in Iraq, would have a worse version in Syria. And it will spill out in the whole region. Nobody can expect what will happen in the region if this is allowed. We should not encourage this.

If you agree with me on this, what really to do is to put more pressure to get the internal dynamics to be more active. And I think, here, the Yemeni example is the one to get some hope from, to be inspired. At the end of the day, President Saleh had to resign. And the new democratic process started.

Here, we have to do that. Otherwise, the options -- if nothing happened from within the society, from within the country itself, which put the events on the right course -- and this could be feasible. We don't know that. We cannot -- at least, I don't know that. Maybe there are certain places who would know this. But certainly, if this happens, that would be really helpful event, a good luck, that avoids more bloodshed.

So this is what I'm saying, that we have to carry on pressure, political pressure, other pressures, and we're supporting the Arab initiative.

MR. SHAIKH: Let's take this one off.

MR. IHSANOGLU: Okay.

MR. SHAIKH: Let's just take this one off.

MR. IHSANOGLU: So we have to carry on the pressures, and the -- encourage the democratic -- through transformation and opposition. And also, to -- I'm sure, at a certain point -- those in power will understand that, for their own sake, for the country's safety, and for all the safety -- having all these examples -- at a certain point, I think they will come to understand that there is no other way.

MR. SHAIKH: Thank you. Let me just follow up just a little bit more on that.

There is, of course, the issue of protection of civilians every day. And every day, as I said, we are having a large number of casualties. Now, some have suggested -- at least on humanitarian grounds -- some concept of maybe even voluntarily-supervised

areas, safe areas, or humanitarian corridors, to try and at least put further pressure on the authorities to respect and protect civilians in this situation.

Is this -- does this come under the banner of "international intervention?" Or is this something that can be looked at further?

MR. IHSANOGLU: Well, on humanitarian grounds, I think we have, in our decision, we have opened the way to humanitarian intervention. Because in our resolution of the OIC Ministerial Meeting, we have a clause which invites the Syrian government to allow Islamic and international humanitarian groups to come there and to help.

We will try. Now, we're trying, through our channels, official channels, to send some humanitarian aid groups to Syria. And we hope that we will succeed. Of course, if this does not succeed, then the next station would be the United Nations, the Security Council. And I really don't know how far the veto -- the Russian veto, the Chinese veto -- will endure. But I'm sure, at a certain point, the whole

world will not tolerate this bloodshed to higher dimensions.

MR. SHAIKH: Thank you.

Let us switch to Egypt. How do you think -- and, of course, the role of the military is being criticized. We've seen, at least, protesters return to Tahrir. Some of them still remain. And yet we're having elections for a new parliament. How do you think -- and yet there are sporadic episodes now, of violence. When we were speaking earlier you were saying, of course, that Egypt is so crucial and so important.

How do you think the transition is going in Egypt?

MR. IHSANOGLU: Well, look -- if you take, for instance, the Tunisian case and the Egyptian case, you find that they are totally different, because of the history, the structure, the history of the country, or society, the history of institutions.

In Tunisia, the army is very small. When Bourguiba established the new republic, or the new

state of Yemen [sic], he, I think, established an army around 80,000 people. And he said that "we don't need more than that. We have no territorial claims. And we should not spend money on the army." And he spent his money on education, on infrastructure, and other things. This is what made the difference in Tunisia, that you have around 70 percent of the population middle class.

And this is why, in my understanding, the transformation in Tunisia would be -- is, until today, and now it's one year, next Saturday it will be one year -- and it is the most smooth one, almost no bloodshed, and consensus on every level of the new steps taken. I think this is a good example. But, of course, you have to take into consideration its history, demographic structure, development status, et cetera, et cetera -- and the culture of the Tunisian people.

When you look to the Egyptian case, you find that this is the oldest Arab army. It's an army which was established in 1815, by Mohammed Ali Pasha --

Mohammed Ali. And since then, it is the biggest Arab army, and the most structured army.

Of course, until 1952, it was not the only power. It was, again, a secondary power in the country. Maybe it was bigger than, in proportion with, the Tunisian one, but it was not the dominant power in the country. But after the coup d'etat of 1952, the army took over. And since '52, the army in power. Three heads of state -- Colonel Nasser, and Colonel Sadat, and then President Mubarak -- he was, I think, General in the Air Force. And they built their regime on the army forces.

And all other social -- organized powers, political parties, political actors, were all excluded. This is why you don't have any second power in the society.

Now, the role of the army here will certainly be different. And it will be different than the Turkish army -- because there's always reference to the Turkish army, Turkish case, because in Turkey, yes army is a very important institution. It has an

old history. It's not only 200 years, it's 1,000-year army. But there were other state players, social players, political actors. And the balance between these actors made what's Turkey today, for democracy and other things.

MR. SHAIKH: Thank you.

I want to ask you about Bahrain. And here, it's not just about Bahrain, but the dangers of the sectarianization of the region -- particularly between Sunni and Shia Islam.

Many see the uprising as part of the change that is taking place in the region. Others, including the ruling King Khalifa and the ruling elite, see it as a result of outside interference. I don't need to say all of this to you -- you, of course, know it extremely well.

What do you think is the way forward in Bahrain?

MR. IHSANOGLU: Well, let me -- I will answer this question on two tiers, on two levels.

One, I will address the issue of Sunni and Shia aspects, and then the Bahrain case.

Let me first start with the general one. I will go back to the very important document which the historical summit in Mecca, Makkah al Mukarramah, in 2005, approved 10-year program of action and Mecca Declaration. This is the Extraordinary Summit which was convened in that time.

In that summit -- and the first time in the history of the Muslim world -- eight mazhabs were considered equal: four Sunni mazhabs -- Hanafi, Shafi'i, Maliki, Hanbalii, two Shia mazhabs -- Zaidi and Ja'fari -- Zaidi is in Yemen, Ja'fari in this part of the world, in Iran, Iraq, et cetera, and this part of the world. And two other mazhabs -- Ibadi and Zahiri.

Eight mazhabs, and the followers of the mazhabs considered equal, and it was mentioned that there is no differentiation, and this is totally similar to each other. And this should be respected, and no differentiation be made.

This is the first time in the history of modern Islam that there is a Summit resolution to this effect. This is number one.

Number two, in 2005, we in the OIC made an initiative to address the very sad and very dangerous events, turn of events, in Iraq when fighting between Sunnis and Shias started to be on identity: "I kill you because you are belonging to this mazhab, which is different, a mazhab." "I will demolish your mosque because you belong to this sect -- " -- and et cetera, et cetera. It went to the extent that mixed marriages -- "Oh, you are not Sunni," "You are not Shia." "No, no -- haraam. I will not live with you -- haraam." They were married for 30 years, 20 years, having kids and grandkids, and they would say, "No, no -- haraam. You are -- " -- so that was the case.

So I said to myself -- and you will remember that, in those days, there were many -- big attempts of reconciliation, which took place in different parts -- the Arab League and other places -- that attempts to reconcile, create reconciliation between

different factions, tribes, and et cetera, political parties, and others. I told my colleagues, "Let's focus on one area, and try our hand in helping defuse tension in Iraq." And we have chosen the -- to initiate this.

And I went there, and I sent my colleagues, speaking to the religious leaders, only religious leaders, of Sunnis and Shias -- the Grand Muftis, the Grand Ayatollahs, and all this. First, they were apprehensive. They said, "Oh, no, no, no. We will not come with them, we'll never get with them. Even before the world, during Saddam, even during the kingdom, we never came together. We are our own, we will not come with them"

We started talking to them and, at the end, we convinced them to get together. And they both came together, and we worked out a text -- which is composed of 10 items, which calls all of them to respect each other, and to remind that what has been going on is against the essence of Islam. It's nothing to be mention in the two big references of

Islam, the sources, the main sources -- the Koran and Sunnah -- and nobody in the history of Islam has allowed this or encouraged this. On the contrary, all the grand references of authorities of the history of Islam -- Shias or Sunnis, or this mazhab or that mazhab, they were all forbidden and condemning all this. We reminded them of this.

At a certain point, they said, "Oh, what's that?" And then they came and signed this. And we did this ceremony near the Kaaba, in Makkah al Mukarramah. And I have to tell you that this document -- it is there on the website, and it's all these documents in my book, also, for those who would like to see it.

I think, now, the issue between Sunnis and Shias that are represented by -- they have two, (inaudible) for Sunni and for Shia in Iraq. They have very good relations between themselves.

Now, coming to Bahrain, I have to tell you that we, in Bahrain, on 23rd of February, issued a statement after the events started -- issued a

statement that expressed that we are following with great interest the developments in Bahrain. And we supported the call for dialogue, comprehensive dialogue, comprehensive national dialogue on the basis of the rule of law, freedom of speech and opinion, and promotion of Bahrain citizens' exercise of all their legitimate rights. And we appealed to all concerned parties to respond positively to the initiative of the national dialogue.

We then came in discussion with the Gulf, GCC, people and issued a statement with the GCC on the issue. And then, of course, we have here to express that it's the first time that a monarch asked for independent investigation. And the King of Bahrain has commissioned a well-known jurist and a well-known personality like Cherif Bassiouni, Professor Cherif Bassiouni, to conduct an investigation. And the investigation came with certain result, which was against -- let's put it this way, which criticized the dominant position. And it was accepted.

I think this is important. We have to acknowledge that this is done.

And let me tell you one thing here. It looks like monarchies in the Arab world are more wise than republics. When you look to all the events -- for instance, we all forgot what happened in Oman. In the same time, or when all these things happened here and there, certain events started in Oman. The monarch in Oman, he took immediately -- not police measures. He took social measures, socioeconomic measures. And he defused this -- finished. In Oman, there is no problem now.

And look what happened in Morocco. In Morocco, an old dynasty, a monarchy -- very old monarchy, generations. And the monarch, there, is in a way (Speaking Arabic), as it's said -- you know, (Speaking Arabic), and all that. But he took radical reforms. He abandoned many of his authorities and gave it to the government, and changed the constitution himself -- conducted new elections, and a new government came in, sworn in. And you see that

happen in monarchies, which were accused to be reactionary, old-fashioned, conservative.

And in countries which had the monopoly of "progress," and avantgardism and revolution, and all these nice words of progress and values of the time -- and they -- look, they are killing their people, you see.

So, really, here, we living (inaudible), you say in the Arab world. And that shows that in Bahrain also we will witness at a certain time that the normalization of relations between Sunni and Shia will be back.

And I think democratization, when it takes place, that this tension will be defused. We hope so.

MR. SHAIKH: Thank you.

I'm going to throw it open in one minute, I promise you. I'm going to ask for just one more question.

At the end of the day, we always come back to the Arab-Israeli conflict. We always come back to the Israeli-Palestinian issues.

A very simple question for you -- as you know, in 2002, the Arab Peace Initiative was launched in Beirut. In fact, I was there, as well, at the time. And, of course, this is something which is still, theoretically, on the table.

Is the Arab Peace Initiative still valid? Is it still -- and is the two-state solution still viable, in your view?

MR. IHSANOGLU: Yes, I think so. It's valid, and there's no other solution. The two-state solution is the only way.

And let me tell you -- since we are speaking about the Arab Uprising -- I think democratization in the Arab world, after the regimes, the new regimes are formed and established, will help the Palestinian case -- in a different way.

And also, it will help Israel, you see. Because dictators can wage war, and can be destructive. Democracies will not wage war. So that is for the interest of Israel.

But, of course, if you look to the new outcome, the new democracies, the new parliaments, and new governments, it will be expressive of the national aspiration of the people. And the national aspiration of the people would be in sympathy with the aspiration of the Palestinian people. So that will help Palestinians in furthering their cause peacefully. Because I have said only dictators wage war.

This is why I see the Arab Peace Initiative is on the table. And now I think it has its fruition. And I have to say that it looks to me that Palestinian leadership recognize that all factions, it is high time to get together, and to take all cards in their hands.

And I think, now, with having the cards in their hands, the example of the application to U.N. membership, to UNESCO membership, which happened -- I think, yesterday or today was the day where full Palestinian flag was raised in UNESCO and et cetera, et cetera, after the decision was accepted. I think

that the future now is for two-state solution more than anytime else.

But, of course, the Palestinian leadership has to take cards in their hands, and be cognizant of the new changes. And that they themselves should go to the more democratic representation among themselves.

MR. SHAIKH: Okay. I'm going to throw it open for questions. We'll take three at a time.

And, really, we are looking for questions, because I'd like to get as many of you as possible. Otherwise, I will be a little bit rude.

The lady at the front, then the gentleman just behind her. And then this gentleman here.

SPEAKER: It's good to see you, Mr. Secretary.

I want to go briefly and quickly to your argument about Syria, and the exit strategy that you think it might be a solution -- which might be a solution, actually.

I'm going to take the argument further, and ask you: If the regime -- and I would bet that at least most of us know that the regime will not accept such an offer, will not grasp this window of opportunity, and actually resign or allow a democratic transition of power for a national, for a Syrian national unity -- and he decided he was actually ringing the bells and threatening of words.

And also I want to ask you a question about the external interventions. And I agree with you about the threats associated with external interventions. But don't you think that also applies to Iran, as well, who's meddling in Syrian and Lebanese issues?

And if the OIC -- and how they can pressure Iran, which is a member of the OIC, to take at least a neutral stance in what's going on in Syria? And rather than supporting the regime and giving all these public statements about fighting to the end behind the regime -- how can the OIC advise Iran, which was one of the founding members of the OIC, to play at least a

(inaudible), and just to stand still and wait, and leave the Syrian people fight their own government, rather than fighting on different fronts?

Thank you.

MR. SHAIKH: Thank you very much.

The gentleman behind you. If you could just introduce yourself, please?

MR. BALDAR: Yes, my name is Aki Baldar. I'm a journalist from Israel. And thank you for inviting me to this event.

And I was a little offended, Mr. Chairman, that you didn't mention Israel as the first one that was inspired by the Tahrir Square revolution, and taking to the streets with the calling for social justice. So we were really inspired by the Arab Spring. And we're still actually turning into winter, and still struggling for this.

And following up on Salman's question regarding the Arab Peace Initiative, I am also active in the Israeli Peace Initiative as a civil society activity and NGO. And we are very hoping, since the

Arab Peace Initiative, as you well know, was also introduced to the Israeli civil society, not just to the government. Since the government declined to pick it up and reply, we were hoping to find parties in the Arab world, and in the Muslim world, since it was also endorsed by the Muslim countries as well as the Arab countries. Initially, it was done in Teheran a few months after it was launched in Beirut.

And my second question is regarding the campaign to contain the Iranian nuclear ambitions. How do you think the international community should tackle the threat of a nuclear Iran?

Thank you.

MR. SHAIKH: Thank you.

Then the gentleman in the same row. We'll come to this side in a minute.

SPEAKER: My question will be about democracy and its relation to economy.

So we said that if we don't want the Arab Spring to be just a spring, we need to support the

people with some kind of democratic circle, some kind of economical support.

So is the OIC, or has OIC taken any measures to support the Arab people, the grassroots Arab people? Are there any projects to make them economically stronger so that democracy can survive?

Because without economical power in grassroots, I don't think the democracy is going to survive.

Thanks.

MR. SHAIKH: The floor is yours.

MR. IHSANOGLU: Well, thank you.

If the regime in Syria will not respond, do not heed to all this, what will happen? I think what will happen is we will see more bloodshed. But at the same time, we have to see also that the regime will not, cannot, sustain itself through a long time. At a certain point, I think those who are with the regime will start reconsidering their positions. And if we follow the last day, what happened, the civil disobedience that happened, I think this is a new

phenomenon. It never happened. And this just happened yesterday, I think.

If this spreads -- don't forget we have Fridays. Every Friday is special to us. And I'm sure next Friday something will happen.

I think nobody, no regime can stand refusal of its population, the peoples themselves. They cannot stand it.

For the -- there are two questions related to Iran. Of course, now, for the Iranian nuclear power, we have to say that the -- we have to differentiate between political claims and realities on the ground.

There is no evidence that there is -- and there is no proof that Iran is developing nuclear weapons. All statements by the Iranian officials, and the IAEA report, speak about "suspicions" on computer programs related to the nuclear weaponry or armament. I think there is no clear-cut, yet, proof to that.

But, of course, we here, we have very clear position. Our position consists of two ideas, or two

lines. The first one: Every country has the right to develop peaceful nuclear energy programs for its own use. And this is -- Iran should not be denied. And this is under IAEA, and under international law is currently.

Secondly, that countries who develop nuclear facilities should be open and transparent to international inspection. And this inspection is a duty, on behalf of the international community, is given to the International Atomic Energy Agency -- IAEA. And as long as this is observed, I don't think there should be -- we should be worried about that.

But, of course, the discussions, we should really also encourage negotiation between Iran and the international community. We do believe, in OIC, that negotiation between Iran and neighboring countries, who are all our members, OIC members, should start, to defuse the tension between the neighboring countries, who belong, all, to OIC.

There was a statement by Sheikh Mohammed bin Rashid, the Prime Minister of UAE, and the Emir of

Dubai, about the nuclear power, or about Iran's program on nuclear energy. And I think it's an important statement, which really reflects how certain statesmen in this part of the world think of the Iranian program.

We really need to be open about it. And we encourage Iranians to be transparent about it, to accept international inspection, and to defuse all suspicions about their program. We stress that.

The last question, by the gentleman, about the support for grassroots -- we have, in OIC, many programs. We have programs for poverty alleviation. We have a poverty alleviation fund which works for that. And this fund is administered by one of OIC's institutions, which is IDB -- Islamic Development Bank. This is one of our specialized organs. And many other things, of course.

But if you're telling me -- he's asking me -- about the immediate now, with what happened after the revolutions, or uprisings, of course it needs to first to settle. We have to see the governments, and

their programs, and engage with them. We cannot go just like that.

MR. SHAIKH: Okay, we'll take two more questions. And we'll take this gentleman here.

Yes -- question, please.

SPEAKER: Your Excellency -- I am one of the Egyptians. The big threat for us is (inaudible) -- the Egyptian revolution, the big threat is Israel. I mean, nuclear threat of Israel.

So, we are going to ask Israel to unveil its nuclear capabilities, and to subject its nuclear installation to IAEA. Otherwise, we are going to reconsider the Peace Treaty.

Thank you very much. Will you support us -- as OIC?

MR. SHAIKH: In the middle.

MR. ZILAL: (Inaudible) Zilal, from Palestine. I have an interesting observation I would like to ask your opinion about. And then a question building on that.

It seems that as the Arab Spring -- or whatever name you would like to call it -- is spreading, and there is more and more pluralism and acceptance, and democratization in the Arab world, and in the Muslim world, in Kyrgyzstan, and so on.

In Israel, it's the opposite. Gradually, there is more -- there is less tolerance of others. There is acceleration of ethnic cleansing. It used to happen in a more subtle way. Now it's a little bit less subtle, and so on.

Is there any theoretical -- is there any way of seeing these two happening at the same time? I mean, this is becoming more and more democratic, and this is where the right, and less and less democratic. Is there any relationship, do you think, between these two?

The second question is, in terms of the spirit of the Arab Spring, can this inspire a new way of addressing the Palestinian problem?

Actually, the Palestinian problem is actually three problem. One is the problem of the

people in the West Bank and the Gaza Strip. And one is the Palestinians in the diaspora. And one is the Palestinians in Israel. Can there be a way of actually, shall we say, a peaceful that guarantees everybody the right of coexistence but, at the same time, not give up the rights of the Palestinians that can actually undo the injustice of the ethnic cleansing that happened since '48, until today.

Thank you.

MR. SHAIKH: Thank you. Thank you very much.

Okay, I'll take one more from this gentleman here.

DR. DIAB: A salaam alaikum. My name is Dr. Halid Diab.

Frankly speaking, do you believe that -- I do believe, first of all, that the reform which was done under your leadership is, masha Allah, working well, hopefully. And we have seen a lot of changes happening within OIC. And you will take credit for that.

But, in reality, do you think that just condemnation from OIC, and sending relief items is a solution to the Muslim ummah? Don't you believe that we should have some initiative within OIC that can just let us follow the ayah from the Koran, when (Speaking Arabic).

Don't you believe that we should have tools to respond to the crisis of our ummah?

I'm working in Somalia. And I know, for example, that in Somalia they are welcoming OIC, the humanitarian department, and they are not really welcoming any UN organization. So I do believe, as Muslims, we have to -- we do believe that OIC should have more and more role to play within our ummah. Thank you very much.

MR. SHAIKH: Thank you.

MR. IHSANOGLU: Well, thank you, gentlemen, for all these questions.

Let me first address the Palestinian-Israeli issue first. I think I made a remark to that. Maybe it was not clear, and it went unnoticed.

I do believe, now, we have to talk about the future, not about the past. I think the future of the Arab-Israeli issue, or the Palestinian-Israeli issue, will be different -- no doubt, different.

And I said that here we have two elements. The first element, that democratization, and the new regimes in the area will be more expressive to the aspirations of the Arab people -- whether it be Egyptians, Libyans, et cetera. And it will be direct expression. It will not be, as it was in the old days, calculated through international criteria, or through the international prism. It will be direct -- more akin to the direct expression of the people. And that will help Palestinian cause, no doubt.

And I said also that because it will be more -- it will be democratic regimes, I don't think there will be, as it was the case in the dictatorial regimes, there will be no waging wars against Zion.

And I don't think that Arab, new Arab regimes, will start playing by the Palestinian card, as it was the case in the old days. I think the

Palestinians need to seize the opportunity, and to get the cards in their hands -- not to disperse these cards between different capitals, as it was the case. And that they have to rely on the support, popular support reflected to parliament, reflected to government. And this is for the interest of solving the problem, whether it be in Gaza, or West Bank, or whether it be in the diaspora. That includes all.

For the last question, of the gentleman -- and he quoted the verse from the holy Koran (Speaking Arabic), and he gave the example of Somalia. Yes, we are active in Somalia. Now we are active in the humanitarian issue. And I think we're doing very well. We are cooperating with everybody, particularly with the United Nations, with the OSHA. And I think my colleague was here who is in charge of this file. I think he left.

Coming to the political issue, I have to tell you that it was OIC who helped Sheikh Sharif to be in what he is now today -- meaning that when he started, with Mehakhan movement, he was marginalized. He was not accepted as counterpart, or as political actor. We convinced him to be more moderate, and we convinced the international community to open channels with him. And that helped him to be established as a democratically elected president.

Now, we tried our best to complete the story. But we have to acknowledge that these things don't happen in one day, and that you should only tell the story after you finish it. And you cannot announce everything you do until you get a result. Otherwise, it will not be conducive to get the result.

MR. SHAIKH: Thank you very much. I think I'm going to have to cut it here.

Professor Ihsanoglu, you've been very kind in actually giving us a little bit more time. You've got an important trip tomorrow. We wish you absolutely the best to Libya.

I just, of course, would like to express the thanks of everybody for your time, and for your patience in answering all of my questions, and also addressing some of the issues that were asked from the floor

MR. IHSANOGLU: Thank you.

MR. SHAIKH: Thank you very much for coming.

(Applause)

MR. IHSANOGLU: I thank you, and thank everybody. (Applause)

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