

**SPEECH BY H.E. AMBASSADOR AHMET YILDIZ,
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TURKEY, AT THE FIRST OIC MEMBER STATES CONFERENCE ON
MEDIATION**

Istanbul, 21 November 2017

H.E. Mr. Assistant Secretary-General,
Excellencies,
Distinguished Participants,
Distinguished Members of the Press,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

It is a distinct pleasure for me to welcome you all to the First OIC Member States Conference on Mediation. It is an honor for me to address such a representative and esteemed audience today. I also bring the greetings and best wishes of Minister of Foreign Affairs, H.E. Mevlüt Çavuşoğlu.

I attach a lot of importance to this conference. I know about the OIC as I served as Consul General in Jeddah and also as a Turkish diplomat in Damascus and Mosul, where we witness the most devastating conflicts in the world. Hopefully, we will manage to find solutions to conflicts in our region.

Turkey assumed the Summit Chairmanship of the OIC in April 2016. Since then, Turkey's Chairmanship has been guided by one understanding: Our common problems can only be overcome through our commonly developed solutions.

It was with this understanding that we have decided to organize this conference.

I hope the conference will contribute to the efforts to carry the mediation agenda forward in the OIC geography and to promote sustainable peace in the Islamic world.

Distinguished guests,

There is human suffering in different forms all around the world.

Unfortunately, Islamic World is no exception to this. Quite to the contrary.

As indicated in the SESRIC¹ Report of February 2017, titled "Humanitarian Crises in OIC Countries":

¹Statistical, Economic and Social Research and Training Centre for Islamic Countries

“In 2015, 30 of 50 conflicts recorded worldwide occurred in OIC countries...As a direct outcome, today OIC countries account for 61.5% of all displaced population in the world...Moreover, 71% of people who globally require humanitarian assistance reside in OIC countries.”

This is not inevitable. It is entirely man-made.

Throughout history there were various internal and external sources of instability, problems and difficulties.

Yet, one thing is clear: the challenges have never been as complex, multifaceted and contagious as they are today.

Against this backdrop, we have no other option but to act together in a true spirit of Islamic solidarity and cooperation.

Islam is a religion of peace. Our Prophet (S.A.V.) is a messenger of peace.

It is incumbent upon the OIC to spread the message of peace more effectively.

As H.E. President Erdoğan said in the 13th Islamic Summit in Istanbul, in order to achieve this:

“We need to be unitive, not divisive. We need to enhance alliances, not conflicts; enhance friendships, not animosities. Because those who suffer from conflicts, competitions and animosities is no one else but Moslems, Moslem countries.”

Excellencies,

OIC is the largest international organization after the UN in geographical outreach and population. It is and should be the voice of more than 1.6 billion people from 57 countries, in 4 continents.

Thanks to this representative nature, OIC has a huge potential and a genuine comparative advantage in the global search for peace and stability.

For this potential to come true, we need more sound initiatives in the context of global peacemaking agenda.

Mediation is the right tool to do this. It is a cost-effective instrument with extensive benefits.

Mediation is even enshrined in our Holy Book, al Qur’an al Karim. The Surah Al Hujurat reads as *“If two parties among the Believers fall into a quarrel, make peace between them....The Believers are but a single Brotherhood: So make peace and reconciliation between your two (contending) brothers.”*

The Surah also calls on us to make mediation with justice.

In line with the call of the Holy al Qur'an al Karim and cognizant of the benefits of mediation, OIC Charter already has a reference to mediation as a way of peaceful settlement of disputes.

Accordingly, OIC has been taking significant steps for more effective and wider use of mediation in our geography, Islamic world.

Turkey strongly supports the work of the OIC to this end.

We need to make better use of the OIC for the sake of sustainable peace and stability in our own geography.

Distinguished Participants,

In order to sort out our own problems among ourselves, two issues have to be addressed, also in the Middle East.

One is political will and the other is capacity.

Political will is an issue that can be addressed at the Summit levels. The Honourable President of Turkey considers this to be a key emphasis during our Chairmanship.

One solution we propose is to build political will by building capacity.

Turkey's efforts at global and regional levels is a case in point. We help raise awareness, help build capacity, help develop normative and methodological thinking and basis, and increasingly we will help practical application of mediation.

Let me explain.

Mediation is a particular methodology. It is listed in the Article 33 of the UN Charter as one of the methods of peaceful settlement of disputes.

The UN and a number of international organizations have established Mediation Support Units to develop in-house capacity to assist in mediation efforts. These units assist the chief mediators in developing a gameplan and implementing these plans.

The OIC has also taken steps to institutionalize and enhance its mediation efforts. As Summit Chair, we strongly support strengthening these efforts.

We also support the development of an OIC capacity to rapidly provide analysis and mediation support to willing member states.

If member states want it, the OIC should be able and ready to provide it.

Of course, this organization has several success stories. We can build on those to promote peace, security and prosperity.

Promoting more effective and wider use of mediation has been one of the principal objectives of Turkey's enterprising and humanitarian foreign policy, not just within this organization, but in international arena.

Turkey has been striving hard for strengthening the role of mediation in the peaceful prevention and resolution of conflicts - at the UN, the OSCE and other international fora.

With this understanding, we launched the "Mediation for Peace Initiative" at the UN and carried it on to the OSCE as well.

Turkey co-chairs two distinct Groups of Friends of Mediation in these two organizations.

The activities of these groups have been instrumental in raising the profile of mediation globally.

Since its inception, the Group at the UN has laid the groundwork and raised capacity for future initiatives on mediation. I had the privilege to co-chair some of the meetings of this Group. They were very useful and exemplary.

The Group promoted four General Assembly Resolutions so far. These resolutions establish a strong normative base and guide the international community for further mediation work.

The Group also contributed to the 2012 UN Guidance on Effective Mediation, which has been an essential reference document for people working in the field of mediation.

The Group today proudly has 56 members, including the OIC.

Yet, only 11 OIC member states (including Turkey) are members of this Group. I call on other OIC members, as well, to join the UN Group of Friends of Mediation.

This is the first step the OIC members can make in promoting mediation around the world.

Secondly, as a reflection of the importance attached to mediation, Turkey also hosts the annual events of the Istanbul Conferences on Mediation.

These flagship events present a significant venue for intellectual exchange among leading practitioners and scholars in the field of mediation.

Taking stock of the experiences of the international community, they also create new opportunities for further progress in the field of mediation.

In June this year, we hosted the Fourth Istanbul Conference on Mediation.

The main finding of the conference was the need for a broader perspective and comprehensive approach in the use of mediation today.

This comprehensive approach calls for "mediation for sustaining peace", as opposed to a more limited understanding of "mediation for conflict-resolution".

Accordingly, mediation should be utilized at all stages of conflict continuum - not only at the conflict stage, but also in the pre-conflict and post-conflict phases as well.

Prevention of conflicts deserves our particular attention. We need more awareness-rising and capacity-building in mediation to improve our ability to act on potential conflicts.

We also need to sustain peace. This requires addressing the structural causes of conflicts and further investment in economic, political and social resilience and infrastructures.

One important outcome of the Fourth Istanbul Conference was the call for broader use of mediation, especially in unconventional type of conflicts and tensions driven by political, social and religious animosities, such as xenophobia and racism.

The OIC has been one of the leading organizations drawing attention to such conflicts and working hard to prevent and resolve them.

Among these efforts are the establishment of an OIC Contact Group on European Muslims at the Istanbul Summit upon the proposal of H.E. President Erdoğan.

As part of our Chairmanship, we co-hosted in Istanbul, in cooperation with IRCICA and the OIC General Secretariat, a symposium to invigorate Islamophobia Observatory on 4-5 April 2017.

We need to inscribe mediation into such work.

Firmly centered on mutual understanding and greater communication, mediation is a key instrument for our efforts.

Excellencies,
Distinguished Participants,

Conflicts and disputes do not end by themselves. Peaceful prevention and resolution of conflicts require political will, but also a capacity and a method.

We, the diplomats, are the ones to help build this capacity in order to turn the will of our leaders into successes.

As Turkey and as the Chair of the OIC Summit, we call upon the OIC and all its Member States to play a more visible and active role in mediation efforts and help build awareness and capacity.

I hope that today's reflections will be beneficial for the whole Islamic World, and would contribute to peace and prosperity in our geography.

Personally, I will be here to get more insights on the issue and to turn these issues into concrete results.

In Islamic world, unfortunately, some simple disputes that can be averted or contained at initial stages turn into the most violent conflicts.

The suffering is extensive in Syria and Iraq. My experiences in these countries still tell me that these conflicts could be averted. May be, we should have established this capacity before, but it is never too late.

I really value the opinion of all experts. Hopefully, at the closing session, we can draw some realistic conclusions regarding the role of the OIC in mediation.

I wish every success to the Conference.

Thank you.