

Remarks of Special Envoy Rashad Hussain to the
Council of the OIC Foreign Ministers

Secretary General Ihsanoglu, secretary-general-elect Madani, Honorable Ministers, and Distinguished Delegates of the 40th session of the Council of Foreign Ministers of the Organization of Islamic Cooperation, I am honored to have the opportunity to participate again in this historic event and am particularly pleased to be here in Guinea.

For the past 3 and a half years, I have been working as President Obama's Special Envoy to the Organization for Islamic Cooperation. My role is to work with the OIC and its member countries to deepen and expand the President's framework for engaging Muslim communities to build partnerships in areas of mutual interest and to address areas of tension and disagreement.

While much work remains, we are making steady progress on issues of mutual concern. We've ended the Iraq war and U.S., NATO, and non-NATO ISAF Forces are working with the Afghans to transition full security responsibility to the Afghan National Security Forces by the end of 2014. We are continuing to support democratic transitions in Tunisia, Egypt, Yemen, and in Libya, where we intervened with the international community to avert a massacre in 2011. We also continue to work with the international community to build pressure on the regime of Bashar al-Assad to halt its merciless attacks on its own people and to make clear that he must step aside as part of the transition of power. And together with our close allies and partners, we have taken an important first step towards a comprehensive solution that addresses our concerns with the Islamic Republic of Iran's nuclear program. And we will continue the difficult work that we began in the first days of the Administration to seek a two-state solution between the Israelis and Palestinians, promoting comprehensive peace in the Middle East.

As we address these areas of political conflict, we continue to build partnerships with Muslim communities around the world in areas of mutual interest and mutual respect. We do so because we believe that all people around the world have the same fundamental aspirations – to be able to live in dignity and peace, to support their families, to have access to education and health care. That's why we have implemented dozens of programs in areas such as education, entrepreneurship, health, and science and technology.

The current United States-OIC partnership has prospered under the leadership of Secretary General Ihsanoglu, which has been demonstrated by the partnerships we have built in a number of important areas. For example, the United States and the OIC are now partners in advancing our shared goal of a complete worldwide polio eradication. We also formed the U.S.-OIC Maternal-Newborn Health Task Force, which has made progress in

several OIC countries. Since Cairo, the U.S. and the OIC worked together through various programs such as “Partners for a New Beginning” to support projects leading to improved economic opportunity, education, academic exchange as well as science and technology. The U.S. and OIC are also expanding partnerships to support women in science, technology, engineering, and mathematics. As the Secretary General mentioned, through the Istanbul Process we are working with the OIC on promoting state implementation of UN Human Rights Council Resolution 16/18, which breaks from the previous defamation of religions approach and promotes religious tolerance in a way that protects the freedoms of expression.

We are also working to ensure that the rights of people of all faiths are protected, including religious minorities living in the Muslim world. Restrictions on places of worship, including churches and synagogues, and discriminatory treatment are unacceptable. And as many scholars have recognized, such policies and practices are inconsistent with Islamic principles.

In addition the United States and the OIC collaborate on numerous political issues. The OIC was among the first to call for a No-Fly zone over Libya, helping to build the international consensus necessary for its success. We appreciated the work of the OIC in sending a representative to Afghanistan to coordinate the many assistance programs from OIC member states. The United States welcomed the OIC’s suspension of Syria due to the serious human rights violations and the Syrian government’s non-responsiveness to UN-Arab League efforts to resolve the crisis.

Recently the united states has been working with its partners at the UN, including many OIC countries, to address the dangerous situation in the Central African Republic. We are deeply disturbed by reports that over 300 individuals have been killed in Bangui in the past few days and that tens of thousands of Catholics and Muslims have been forced to seek shelter on church grounds and other locations in Bossangoa. We share your concern that the current violence in the CAR also threatens regional security.

To those countries that have contributed troops to the peace keeping effort, we recognize your commitment to restoring security to the CAR. We worked hard with our partners on the UN Security Council to adopt resolution 2127 authorizing the multinational stabilization force and French support for MISCA under Chapter VII. We are confident that multinational force can restore security, prevent further atrocities, and take a proactive and forward-leaning approach to protect civilians and establish an environment that allows for the provision of humanitarian assistance.

In the broader realm of humanitarian assistance, in March 2012, OIC Secretary General Ihsanoglu signed a Memorandum of Understanding with the United States Agency for International Development (USAID), which led to specific U.S.-OIC cooperation in responding to disasters, including cooperation on famine in the Horn of Africa as well as global partnerships to address other emerging crises in the Sahel, Syria, and Yemen.

Of course there is still much work to be done. Fortunately, there is much potential for success as well. Muslim communities often discuss the challenges they are facing and what they can do to overcome them. With over 1.6 billion people, there is no shortage of human resources. With so many brilliant and successful pioneers, including young people, there is no shortage of talent. And with countries and communities that span across the globe, there is certainly no shortage of natural resources. We must continue to work together to address long term challenges, including access to education for all, secular and religious, and for both boys and girls. Lack of access to education breeds violent extremism and makes young people susceptible to those seeking to advance their own agendas. It also inhibits development and is a major cause of many of the health challenges we face. The lack of education is also a key factor when sectarian tensions escalate. I remember a young boy and my father used to be asked if he was a sunni or a shia. He would always say 'I am just a Muslim'. The violence perpetrated by Muslims against innocent men, women, and children, most often in Muslim-majority countries, is based on ignorance and its time to stop pretending that its root cause is the foreign policy of outside countries around the world.

Our partnerships with the OIC demonstrate that we can work together to advance mutual interests. 7 million Muslims prospering in the US prove that our commonly held values can in fact be the foundation for working together to achieve our potential and advance prosperity

In the coming years, the United States looks forward to continuing to expand the many U.S. partnerships with the OIC in order to promote and enhance cross cultural understanding and to help prevent extremism in all its forms. We again congratulate Guinea for hosting a successful Council of Foreign Ministers meeting, and applaud Professor Ihsanoglu for his visionary tenure as Secretary General of the OIC.