**Challenges:**

Today, the Islamic world is confronted with many challenges. Some of these challenges have gathered over past decades and others are collateral consequences of the transformations experienced by the world at the current juncture. Others yet grew out of specific factors inherent to the approaches adopted in tackling these critical issues.

The gravity of these problems has worsened to such extent as to constitute a serious source of alarm, in the absence of a suitable resolution applied with strength of mind, clear vision and a realistic approach that takes cognizance of all elements and can delve to the core of matters while steering clear of the phantasms and delusions that result from lack of civilizational vision and a flawed understanding of the nature of all these challenges.

Today, the Islamic world has chosen to tackle the challenges of a millennium that is witnessing an increased responsibility of states in the fight against economic, social and developmental crises at all levels. This calls for total mobilization in the different fields of joint Islamic action, for combining well-coordinated and harmonious efforts and solidarity to overcome a difficult juncture where the available resources are too meager to bring to fruition the great Islamic civilizational project considering the insignificant impact of the Islamic solidarity mechanisms adopted thus far, despite the lapsing of more than four decades since the inception of the Organization of Islamic Cooperation (OIC).

The Islamic world is standing at a crossroads today, besieged by difficulties from all sides and fielding onslaughts from all fronts, yet it is endeavoring to forge ahead as it battles the pressures of superpowers to keep it in the shackles of helplessness, hesitation and vulnerability, unable to set out in the right direction and embark on a new civilizational cycle that would link the present to the past and lay the foundations of the future.

# Some of the main problems facing the Muslims today are as follows:

1. **Lack of unity**

Success of any nation is concealed in the mutual unity and harmony between its members. A strongly united nation becomes an invincible force and overcomes every hindrance which comes in their way. No one dares to confront such a tide and strong nation.

No doubt unity and consensus has a miraculous role in developing a nation and achieving their higher goals.

Muslim's unity is a major and undeniable problem of the time. The increasing sectarian ethnocentrism has spattered and blemished the fundamental Islamic teachings. Today's Muslims are suffering from numerous problems, and the basic reasons for their plight are i.e. sectarian hatred, creed prejudices, lust for power, intolerance and many other materialistic interests. All these things have combined to confirm falling for Muslims, which deprived them of their honor, dignity and power. On the other hand the enemies of Muslim are united and they are fully aware that their strength lies in the weakness of Muslims. Hence they are engaged in making conspiracies to divide Muslims. Historically, it is proved that sowing germs of disunity and disintegration among Muslims has been a very old and an effective tool of Jews and Christians. Whereas the Holy Quran warns us to be united and to remain aloof from them. God also commands Muslims to observe patience and retain unity among them by following the principles of piety and brotherhood. It is possible only when Muslims involved in "fraternity" with broadmindedness. At the same time, it remains the core responsibility of the Muslim rulers to play their role in this connection.

# Illiteracy: a main impediment to development

Looking at the challenges facing the Islamic world today and undermining its potentialities and development plans, we find that illiteracy, rife throughout all Muslim countries, comes at the top of all these challenges. It is indeed the mother of all banes plaguing Muslim societies.

According to data collected by the UNESCO Institute for Statistics, ISESCO’s statistics and to the annual human development reports drawn up by international organizations, illiteracy rates in Islamic countries range between 45% of all males and 65% of females . These rates are higher by almost 10% in rural areas and drop to 30% in a few countries. A very small proportion of Islamic countries have achieved significant progress in eradicating illiteracy with rates in these countries dropping to 1%.

Unfortunately, illiteracy continues to hold a low priority status on the agenda of most Islamic countries which continue to consider it as a purely educational and moral issue and not an economic, social, developmental and political issue

In some Islamic countries, illiteracy rates have climbed to alarming levels and become a dangerous social phenomenon, surpassing in its gravity the phenomena of poverty, ignorance, disease, instability and the disruption of peace and security in many Islamic countries. In fact, illiteracy lies behind many of these phenomena which in turn hinder growth and weigh down societies despite their efforts to overcome these obstacles and lay the foundations of a global sustainable development that can radically change these societies. One of the factors behind poverty is illiteracy, ignorance is the outcome of illiteracy, and one of the causes of sickness is illiteracy.

The highest rates of adult functional literacy are encountered in the following OIC Member States:

* Uzbekistan: 99.9%
* Kazakhstan: 99.6%
* Turkmenistan: 99.5%

1. Statistical overview on OIC Member States (SESRIC ).
2. SESRIC educational indicators for OIC Member States in 2012 (Indicator Selection).
   * Tajikistan: 99.4%
   * Azerbaijan: 99.4%
   * Kirgizstan: 99.3%
   * Albania: 99%
   * Maldives: 97%
   * Brunei Darussalam: 94.9%
   * State of Kuwait: 93.9%
   * State of Palestine: 92.4%
   * Malaysia: 91.9%
   * United Arab Emirates: 90.4%
   * State of Qatar: 90.1%
   * Republic of Turkey: 88.4%

# Educational conditions in the Islamic world

Many Islamic countries are failing to generalize primary education, improve the quality of secondary education and develop university education. This failure impacts on scientific research which is struggling to rise to the status it deserves within adopted action plans and strategies. ISESCO’s reports, which concur in their findings with UNESCO’s, indicate that budget percentages allocated to scientific research in Islamic countries are below 1% of each country’s GDP when scientific research in advanced countries benefits from financing that exceeds 3% of the GDP. Although ISESCO devised a **Strategy for Sciences, Technology and Innovation** which was approved by the Islamic Summit meeting, this strategy, similar to the other sixteen strategies developed by ISESCO, falls short of implementation which remains conditional upon a strong and efficient political willpower that is capable of reform, development and modernization.

Statistical data on sciences and technology indicate that the percentage of GDP spending on scientific research in Islamic countries remains extremely low. In some countries, this percentage drops below 0.1%, and more than half of the OIC Member States do not allocate any GDP percentage whatsoever to scientific research. The highest rates of spending on scientific research occur in the following countries:(7)

* Tunisian Republic: 0.73%
* Republic of Turkey: 0.69%
* Kingdom of Morocco: 0.60%
* Islamic Republic of Iran: 0.59%
* Malaysia: 0.59%
* Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan: 0.34%
* Republic of Azerbaijan: 0.30%
* Islamic Republic of Pakistan: 0.24%

With such dismal figures, we are facing bleak prospects of scientific regression which prevails in the quasi majority of Islamic States and generates weak economies, stumbling progress, exacerbated economic crises and social problems that impede the fulfillment of the goals set out in global sustainable development plans.

# Confronting external challenges

The tumultuous crises gripping the Islamic world today as a result of escalating conflicts and multiple disputes cannot always be attributed to external factors. Let us consider the Palestinian issue for example, already more than 65 years old (since 1948) and the result of Israeli occupation of Palestinian lands, the crimes of war and crimes against humanity committed by Israel against the Palestinian people, the atrocities perpetrated by Israel’s repressive regimes, and all the criminal acts and oppressive practices that have weakened the greater Islamic edifice and impacted negatively on the Muslims’ present reality, all of this is in fact the fruit of internal