

*** Diouf: Aid for Islamic Media**

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[Speech by President Abdou Diouf to third session of COMIAC]

[Text] I shall begin by giving thanks to All-Powerful God, who has enabled us for the third time to organize a session of the Standing Committee for Information and Cultural Affairs [COMIAC] over which I have the honor of presiding.

Next, I should like to express my pleasure at having with us in Dakar the different members of this committee who, by their presence, bear witness to their commitment to joining with us in achieving the objectives that the Ummah as a whole has assigned us.

I wish them all a warm welcome to the land of Senegal.

Ladies and gentlemen, Mr. Secretary General:

The Sixth Islamic Summit Conference will be held in Dakar in January 1991, *in cha Allah*. Only a few months from that great rendezvous, I deemed it useful to summon our committee to analyze progress on the mission assigned to it since 1981 by the summit conference of Makkah Al Moukkaramah.

You will recall that at our second session in October-November 1985, I asked the honorable delegates to work to strengthen and expand cooperation in the fields indicated by the Mecca Declaration.

Two series of recommendations were adopted at the conclusion of our work relating to information, on the one hand, and culture, on the other.

I now realize that the heads of the different sectors quickly set to work and that a series of meetings took place and produced important results.

At the outset, those results could already be appreciated at the first Islamic Conference of Ministers of Information held in Jidda in October 1988 and at the first Islamic Conference of Ministers of Culture that Dakar hosted in January 1989.

I shall only return to the subject to say that the international context instructs us to consolidate those results.

Actually, the third session of the Standing Committee for Information and Cultural Affairs is being held in a special environment: the proclamation of the State of Palestine, profound changes under way in the East Bloc countries, the independence of Namibia, the initiation of a dialogue in South Africa between the Pretoria government and the African National Congress (ANC), transformations in Sub-Saharan Africa, and so on.

We can only rejoice at these events, but the speed with which they have circled the globe and the way in which some of them—the ones that concern us the most directly—have taken place show us one more time the importance of information and communications as well as how far we still have to go in this field.

This is why I should like to seize the opportunity of this opening ceremony to give you a few ideas in order to emphasize the role of the media in achieving the objectives of the committee and, more generally, those of the OCI [Organization of the Islamic Conference].

I would like to say straightaway that it is a primary role, inasmuch as information and communication are essential to training and, in most of the countries belonging to the Islamic Ummah, the task of national construction. They bring peoples closer together and deal with the regulation of life in society.

Factor of Understanding

Although I may be restating the obvious, I would add that they also comprise a factor of understanding between nations and peoples and therefore make it possible to avoid the hatred and intolerance that lie at the root of so many conflicts.

Unfortunately, we also realize with every passing day that the media can aggravate tension, poison bilateral relations, and stir up quarrels. And yet, what is very often in question is less the fact of conveying information than a misunderstanding of the facts described and it is usually our countries that pay the price.

The need to put an end to such a situation or, at least, reduce the consequences and, in a more positive way, our desire to achieve a better mutual knowledge of our

peoples, have led us to set up the Standing Committee for Information and Cultural Affairs, the International Islamic Press Agency (IINA) and the Organization of Radiobroadcasters of Islamic States (ISBO).

They are also at the root of our decision to bring together our ministers of information and culture.

These are all important steps, but in addition, we now need a global vision on a par with the scope of the challenges of this era of fleeting happenings and scenarios, as well as equal to the ambitions we have for our peoples.

Revitalized and more coherent, the structures we have set up must enable us to succeed. I am particularly thinking of the IINA and ISBO, our two institutions specializing in information and communication.

Concerning these two organs, I would note that thanks to the support of the government of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, they are beginning to get a new wind and handle their mission, but their consolidation requires the efforts of everyone. This is why, while expressing our most sincere thanks to the servant of the two holy mosques, King Fahd bin 'Abd al-'Aziz Al Sa'ud, I issue an appeal to member states that have not yet done so to pay their back contributions to the IINA and ISBO budgets.

In this way, the latter will be able to more effectively promote information reflecting our situation and expressing our concerns.

Effective Tool of Development

I repeat: This information will constitute for us an effective tool of development if judiciously used.

This presumes the conception and execution of both written and audiovisual Islamic information programs. As if there were any need to do so, it stresses the overriding need to develop production within our Islamic community, use such production to pull down the barriers that still exist between our peoples, and, in particular, help us get to know and understand one another better.

Obviously such programs would also be the best possible protection against deculturation and the danger of mimicry that necessarily accompany ignorance.

My dear ministers and Mr. Secretary General:

The Islamic Ummah has never been a community turned in on itself or a community exclusively turned toward the past. On the contrary, the values of the people comprising it espouse the fundamental aspirations of man and open it to the future.

It is not an easy task to have the fact accepted but it is comforting to observe, on the heels of the 20th anniversary of the OCI, that the latter increasingly stands out as a crucible of cultures linked to one another by a common religion and as a system of bilateral or multilateral

relations between modern states. In fact, our organization, which is enjoying a second youth, is now perceived as a force with which one must increasingly reckon.

However fortunate it may be, this evolution is not irreversible and must not prevent us from continuing to seek ways of strengthening our cohesion which, one can never repeat often enough, depends on better mutual understanding.

There is cause for optimism and I should in particular like to express my pleasure over the interest that all member nations have in the execution of a cultural strategy plan for our community and the drafting of statutes to govern the various standing committees we have set up. However, our community will only respond to the hopes placed in it if we speak the same language, meaning if information and communication are shared, if the cultural identity is accepted and respected and if, beyond what is contained in legal texts, the action of institutions is effectively organized in a coherent dynamic.

This is why I deem the institution of a true cultural community between the members of the OCI to be one of our priorities.

Participants in these sessions of our committee must look at the document concerning the proposed Islamic cultural community that we wish to shape and the premises for which have already been outlined.

New Cultural Dynamic

The spirit of this plan is now known. It is an overall program or better, the general configuration of a program aimed at instituting a new cultural dynamic on the same scale as all our institutions, organs, and centers.

It is up to each of the participants to evaluate the possibilities and chances, in a word, the destiny of our complex and moving system. The process will be derived from the wager and the act of faith, but hope and determination must be equally present, along with the spirit of organization and method.

It must lead to increased support for cultural institutions, thematic systems for their activities, and the creation of a fund to maintain the momentum gained if we wish to have a vital cultural community. In this process, we have the backing and support of all member states expressed at the highest level.

I recall in particular that the summit conference in Kuwait City, whose success we still vividly remember, unreservedly passed the projects I submitted to it, projects aimed at broadening the field of our action.

I happily note that the different plans of strategy worked out since that time move in the same direction and all seek to obtain a better identification of the Islamic cultural space, an intensification of exchanges of men, ideas, and knowledge, and a greater popularization of Islamic information and education, amidst solidarity

and mutual respect. They all contain wide-ranging cultural programs whose execution would help the organization we are setting up and our countries individually.

It will be up to our committee to manage them.

I therefore ask you now to measure the size of the stakes involved, to explore the road they are opening up toward a shared goal, in short, to allow our committee to perform its heavy but thrilling mission.

We shall have to explore the field of the possible and make the most of our community objectives. In particular, we must take advantage of the possibilities offered by the awareness characterizing each of our meetings. New and more coherent paths are opening up before us. Let us move down them with the same resolution, convinced that the future of unity, peace, and shared well-being that we want for the Islamic Ummah depends to a great extent on our capacity to adopt and implement a cultural strategy based on our values.

My dear delegates:

In placing emphasis on information and communications, the vectors of culture, I am not forgetting the education and training that are inseparable from them and that they help promote.

These two domains are even at the center of our concerns and we have already made considerable efforts in their behalf, but the crisis of values in the world today makes them even more important. There is also a need to follow the march of history, enabling our countries' youth to gain access to knowledge and technological progress.

It is comforting to note that by trying to rouse a better awareness of the cultural values of Islam in the face of multiple attacks on our values, the institutions and organs of the OCI have not lost sight of this element.

Nevertheless, it is understood that better coordination of their activities is indispensable in order to avoid scattering and duplication.

The cultural strategy with whose drafting our committee has been entrusted will promote such coordination, but reflection must be constant and above all, come through periodic concertation between cultural institutions and on the occasion of statutory conferences of the ministers of culture. Creation of the Special Fund for the Development of Information and Cultural Affairs will also help.

My dear delegates:

In order to combine development and modernity, we must also have cohesion and rationality. I know that you are aware of this and that you will succeed in demonstrating imagination and tolerance in the search for the most appropriate paths leading to the achievement of objectives assigned to this session.

It is in this hope that I wish the third session of the Standing Committee of the OCI for Information and Cultural Affairs complete success and hereby declare it officially open.

Thank you. *Assalamou alaikoun wa rahmatoullah wa barakaatouhou!*