

Open Letter from the Organization of the Islamic Conference to American President Barak Obama



An Invitation to a New Partnership from the organization of the Islamic Conference (OIC) to President Barack Obama

January 21, 2009

Dear President OBAMA:

With great respect, the Organization of the Islamic Conference would like to congratulate you on behalf of the Muslim world on your groundbreaking election as President of the United States. The Muslim world has cheered your election and holds high hopes for your historic presidency. The eyes of the world now eagerly await your leadership and the fulfillment of your vision, promises, and pledges beyond America's shores.



The Organization of the Islamic Conference (OIC), which I have the honor to represent, is not a religious organization. After the United Nations, it is the largest official, inter-governmental organization in the world. It is composed of 57 sovereign states, almost all of whom are secular. The population of these states collectively amounts to 1.5 billion—or one fourth of humanity.

The desire for peace is universal. Yet as the conflicts of the last decade have shown, the quest for peace is easily frustrated. We warmly welcome your expressed desire to give a major address in a Muslim nation soon after you assume the presidency and hope that it will mark the beginning of a more fruitful and better-informed dialogue between the West and the Muslim world.

Above all, what is needed is the restoration of mutual confidence. Throughout the globe, Muslims hunger for a new era of peace, concordance, and tranquility. We firmly believe that America, with your guidance,

can help foster that peace, though real peace can only be shared—never imposed. A nation can either be great or feared, but rarely both at the same time.

Myths

Many myths about Islam, fostered by extremists in both the West and East, have proliferated in the last decade, and a new word—"Islamophobia"—has even entered the world's lexicon to describe anti-Muslim acts of prejudice and violence. Despite these pernicious myths, you will find that Islam is a religion of peace. Tolerance is its benchmark and borne of the very nature of Islam. Nor is Islam an exclusive religion. It is an integral part of the history of world religions. It continues and confirms the previous scriptures. Along with Christianity and Judaism, Islam emanates from the same part of the world, comes from the same God, and holds to the same Prophets, mainly Abraham. It has been tested over fourteen hundred years, and shown itself to be a religion of compassion, mercy, justice, and equality.

Extremists in any faith or tradition are rare, though they often command disproportionate attention. But the often overlooked truth is Islam is also the religion of moderation. It celebrates diversity and acknowledges and venerates a wide array of religions.

Islam, in fact, abhors extremism and fanaticism and calls for treading the path of the “middle way” in favor of tolerance and reconciliation. It exhorts Muslims to be morally responsive to the truth and to goodness, and to be alert to all that is false, evil or destructive.

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Moderation and Modernization

One of the OIC’s guiding principles is to practice “moderation and modernization.” To cite one example, it was at our demand that the UN General Assembly organized a host of events and activities around the world to disseminate the idea of “Dialogue among civilizations” as an alternative to those who predict a coming “clash of civilizations.”

We have been alarmed by this tendency to divide the world into rival civilizations—civilized and uncivilized, good and evil, friend and enemy. As a youth who spent part of his childhood abroad, you are well aware of the dangers of stereotyping. We believe you will have a unique opportunity to

promote tolerance and nurture vibrant multi-cultural societies.

It is for these reasons that the OIC has been in the forefront of the Muslim battle against terrorism.

Terrorism is a global phenomenon. It has no specific culture, race, or region. The root causes of terrorism are surely complicated but they include deprivation, poverty, despair and, most importantly, political injustice. Children do not emerge from the womb to announce they will become terrorists. They learn to be terrorists when injustice and tragedy are twinned with powerlessness. The decades-long suffering of the Palestinian people provides only the most recent and potent illustration of the link between oppression, injustice, and violence. The violence in the Mideast and the Palestinian people deserve an urgent and just remedy.

Change and Partnership

The most powerful word in your election campaign was “change.” Change must make the world a better place, correct wrongs and right the twisted. As an organization, we too have undergone substantial reform in charting an enlightened future for the Muslim world. As Secretary General of the Organization of the Islamic Conference, I wish to assure you that we will be at your side to see that justice prevails and that the forces which are out to undo peace are defeated. At the OIC we are firmly committed to cooperating with you and your new administration to foster constructive dialogue and facilitate solutions to the intractable predicaments plaguing the Muslim world and beyond.

In this regard, we are keen to build on the commendable initiative taken recently

regarding the appointment of a U.S. Special Envoy to the OIC, and opening an office for him in the U.S. State Department. We are confident that this useful post will be endorsed and perhaps expanded under your leadership.

We also look forward to working with the new Secretary of State Ms. Hillary Rodham Clinton, who is no stranger to the Muslim world. In the coming months, we hope to build on the existing channel of communication between the United States and the OIC and open new ones.

Muslims today, around the world, believe that they have compelling strategic and moral reasons to cooperate and peacefully co-exist with the United States in particular, and with the West in general. Past episodes of short-lived misunderstandings should give way to a long future of peaceful cohabitation, making use of our shared civilizations and values to build a better future for all mankind. As you eloquently stated in your election-night acceptance speech in November, “our stories are singular but our destiny is shared.”

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