

Opening Statement of Dr. Savaş Alpay, Director General of the SESRIC, at the Fourth Meeting of the Monitoring and Advisory Committee of the Vocational Education and Training Programme for OIC Member Countries

Yaoundé, Republic of Cameroon

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بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمَنِ الرَّحِيمِ

Respected Minister,

Distinguished Delegates,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Assalamu Alaykum we Rahmatullahi we Barakatuhu

I am honoured to address the Fourth Meeting of the Monitoring and Advisory Committee of the Vocational Education and Training Programme for OIC Member Countries. Let me, at the outset; express my sincere appreciation and thanks to all of you for accepting the invitation and designating time to attend this very important meeting. Taking this opportunity, I also would like to extend my sincere thanks to the Ministry of Employment and Vocational Training of the Republic of Cameroon for hosting this significant meeting at this beautiful city, Yaoundé.

The main objective of this meeting is to review the progress that has been achieved since the Third Meeting of MAC held in Iran last year, and to discuss ways and means of cooperation and collaboration among National Focal Points of the Programme in implementing projects in OIC Member Countries. In this meeting, we expect to consolidate the existing relationships between the National Focal Points further in order to help them generate a better outcome in providing vocational education and training to the individuals in their countries. As you all know, the OIC-VET Programme emphasizes the importance of coordination and cooperation among all Member States to improve the quality of vocational education and training in the public and private sectors with the aim of supporting and enhancing the opportunities for individuals to develop their knowledge and skills and thus to contribute to the development and competitiveness of the economies of their countries. Therefore, as an important step towards this ultimate goal, we are sure that our gathering here today will take place in a fruitful and most productive atmosphere. I would also like to mention that it is promising to see number of participants and also interest and support of the Member Countries to the Programme have been increasing each year. In this regard, once again I would like to thank all the respected representatives for their participation and invaluable contribution to this meeting.

As you may all agree, during the last decades, need of skilled labor force in particular sectors has aroused as a problem of economies that want to move up the value chain beyond simple production processes and products. Governments and educational institutions have many attempts to address the skill gap problem faced by many OIC Member Countries, such as adding vocational education to the formal education process. Re-training the current employees to respond to the needs of the sector is perceived as another sound solution to overcome the adaptation problem to the new developments and technologies that needed for retaining competitiveness. As production gets more onto a global scale, the pressure on the workforce to improve and update their knowledge and skills according to the changing demands and priorities of the market has been increasing as well.

According to the results of Executive Opinion Survey of World Economic Forum which comprises the perceptions of businessmen regarding the state of vocational education in their countries, on-the-job training and vocational education is neglected by many OIC Member Countries. Out of the 39 member countries with available data, 5 of them have higher scores than the average of developed countries, 4.7, which are UAE (4.7), Qatar (4.8), Tunisia (4.8), Bahrain (4.9) and Malaysia (5.0). Although the OIC average, 3.6, is well below that of the world, 4.0, and of the developed countries, 4.7, 14 member countries have higher scores than world average which is promising as well.

Stating the importance of life-long learning hundreds of years ago, The Prophet Muhammad (peace and blessings be upon him), said that “Seeking knowledge is a religious obligation for every Muslim (male or female)” and advised to humanity “seek knowledge from the cradle to the grave”. Especially, in the era of rapid technological transformation, life-long learning is in front-page on the agenda of many countries; governments in the developing world have now been trying to reform their technical and vocational education system. These reforms include the attempts to make the importance of life-long learning known by individuals, to improve the image of the vocational education and training (VET) and to increase the public awareness about the leading role of VET in socio-economic development of the countries.

In this regard, OIC-VET Programme targets to enhance the understanding of VET both by people and industry, besides building the skills and competencies of the workforce through strengthening the VET systems of the Member Countries by employing collaborative projects and designs. In other words, the OIC-VET Programme not only aims to improve the capacity of the VET systems of the Member Countries but also establishes bridges among the members of OIC Community by identifying potential collaboration areas and turning them into real cooperative actions.

In fact, OIC-VET Programme is envisaged to establish closer cooperation among Member Countries in meeting today's developmental challenges by providing opportunities for organisations involved in vocational education and training to build OIC partnerships, to exchange best practices, experiences and knowledge, to increase the expertise of their staff and to develop the skills and competencies of the participants. Our ultimate desire is that all OIC Member Countries would share this vision and benefit from this significant Programme.

Distinguished Delegates,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

As you may recall the OIC-VET Programme was launched by Abdullah Gül, President of the Republic of Turkey and Chairman of COMCEC during the COMCEC Economic Summit held in Istanbul on 9 November 2009, with the participation of the heads of states and governments. The İstanbul Declaration, adopted at that Economic Summit, stated the importance of vocational education and training in socio-economic development of the OIC member countries, welcomed the launch of OIC-VET and also requested Member Countries to facilitate the implementation of the programme. Marked by this event, SESRIC undertook the role of Executive OIC Organ of the OIC-VET Programme, responsible to develop and coordinate cooperation programmes among Member Countries and also follow up the implementation of these programmes. With the guidance of Monitoring and Advisory Committee and continuing support and involvement of the National Focal Points, since then, SESRIC has worked towards the successful implementation of the various projects under the framework of OIC-VET Programme. To this end, I am very proud to say that, successful projects have already been accomplished and have become full-fledged programmes under the umbrella of OIC-VET.

In the last quarter of the 2011, the Centre organized a workshop on 'Innovative Social Assistance Strategies in Poverty Alleviation' in collaboration with the Islamic Research and Training Institute (IRTI) of the Islamic Development Bank (IDB) and the Ministry of Family and Social Policy of the Republic of Turkey. Representatives of 15 member countries have participated in the workshop to exchange their best practices and to share their experiences and projects in the field so that OIC Member Countries would enhance their capacities in this important area.

In the upcoming period, SESRIC will organize various study visits to Tunisia, Ministry of Social Affairs and Egypt, Ministry of Insurance and Social Affairs jointly with the Ministry of Family and Social Policy of the Republic of Turkey to share the experiences of developmental housing and to explore the possibilities of further cooperation in the field of social assistance and poverty alleviation.

SESRIC has initiated a project titled Skill Development for Youth Employment (SDYE) in collaboration with IDB. As an initial phase for the implementation of this Programme, the Centre organized a study visit in Ankara, with the partnership of the Union of Chambers and Commodity Exchanges of Turkey (TOBB), the Ministry of National Education and the Ministry of Labour and Social Security of the Republic of Turkey. 33 representatives from 9 pilot Member Countries participated in the study visit which aimed at sharing the experience of Turkey in fighting youth unemployment through the Skill 10 Project as best practice.

As a second phase of the project, a study visit is being organized in Cameroon on 30 November- 3 December 2012, following the MAC4 Meeting and another will be held in Tunisia in up-coming months. Experts from partner institutions will review the regional dynamics and strategies to reduce unemployment, economic development plans and employment incentives in order to better identify the parameters and characteristics of the gap between labour market supply and demand, analyse the opportunities and threats and develop a road map for further actions.

Moreover, within the framework of the OIC-VET Programme, the Centre has very recently initiated five new capacity building programmes namely: 1- Capacity Building Programme for Poverty Reduction; 2- OIC Agriculture Capacity Building Programme; 3- Information and Communications Technology Capacity Building Programme; 4- Capacity Building Programme for Competition Authorities; and Peace and Security Capacity Building Programme.

On the other hand, within the framework of the OIC Agriculture Capacity Building Programme, SESRIC and IDB will jointly organise a training of trainers programme for agricultural extension workers in OIC Member Countries in the first quarter of 2013. Representatives of the 20 member countries will participate field visits and have discussions on regarding their experiences and learn new techniques and practices like agricultural mechanisation in cotton breeding, theoretical assessments and feeding practices in dairy farming and innovative practices, project management and consulting services in agricultural extension.

These are some of the accomplishments that were realized under the OIC-VET Programme since our last meeting. I would like to express that this Fourth Monitoring and Advisory Committee Meeting would present us with an invaluable platform to discuss further how to improve our existing programmes under OIC-VET, besides identifying new potential areas for further collaboration. We will share our experiences and our recommendations for reaching the better. Vocational training is a precious tool for promoting new opportunities for individuals in all sectors of the economy. We believe that through close cooperation and networking among member countries, the OIC-VET Programme has already started to establish a larger community of beneficiaries since its launch, in a short period of time.

It is my belief that as the owners of the OIC-VET Programme, support of the Member Countries and support of the OIC Institutions are the two main assets of this Programme. And it is my hope that open and inclusive dialogue will be the hallmark of this meeting and its concrete outcome will pave the way for future collaborations. I am confident that the work you are about to accomplish would, ultimately, approximate and contribute significantly to the collective welfare for the Ummah. As we all look forward to the successful outcome of this meeting, I wish you all the success in your deliberations.

Thank you for your kind attention.

Wassalamu Alaykum we Rahmatullahi we Barakatuhu