

**SPEECH OF MEHMET METİN EKER,
DIRECTOR GENERAL OF THE COMCEC COORDINATION OFFICE
AT THE OPENING SESSION OF THE WORKSHOP ON INNOVATIVE SOCIAL
ASSISTANCE STRATEGIES IN POVERTY ALLEVIATION
(Ankara, December 12, 2011)**

Distinguished Advisor,

Distinguished Representative of Islamic Research and Training Institute,

Distinguished Director of SESRIC,

Honourable Delegates,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Assalamu Alaikum wa Rahmatullahi wa Barakatuhu,

I feel greatly honoured to speak, at this very important meeting, on behalf of my institution, the COMCEC Coordination Office. First, I would like to express thanks and appreciation to Director General of SESRIC, Dr Savaş ALPAY, for his kind invitation and organizing this important event.

I would also like to express gratitude and appreciation to the Ministry of Family and Social Policies of the Republic of Turkey for its leading role in various technical cooperation projects and partnership in social activities towards the OIC member countries.

Distinguished Participants,

The world is undergoing a rapid transformation, and thus, solidarity between our countries is needed more than ever for overcoming the ensuing problems. In this vein, I would like to underline some of the social problems in the Islamic World. First of all, I would like to emphasize that the level of social development of our countries is way below our potential. Our countries, home to vast natural resources, are not getting the share they deserve from global welfare. Islamic countries which make up 22% of the world population, have unfortunately only received around 7% of the global economic output in 2010. Second, the average per capita

income in the Islamic countries appears to be below the average of developing countries. And finally, poverty in Islamic countries tops the list of most serious problems that require a solution. Twenty one of the member countries are among the least developed countries. Wars, refugee problems and natural disasters taking place in the Islamic territory have further aggravated poverty in the last decades.

Dear Participants,

I would like to draw your attention to the basic poverty figures of the OIC member countries. In 1990, 37 per cent of the population of the OIC member countries was extremely poor - below the poverty line of \$1.25 a day- which translates to 348 million poor people. In 2010, about 350 million people making up 28% of the total population lived on \$1.25 a day in member countries, with Sub-Saharan Africa member countries accounting for about 60 per cent of the population. The poverty rate and number of poor of the OIC member countries while being quite high by world standard have shown more or less stability between 1990 and 2010 period.

Moreover, we are also behind the world standards in social realms of development, namely education, health and other living conditions and the rate of literacy in our countries is below the global average. In recent period, the situation in our countries is quite promising but we have still a multitude of shortcomings in providing health services to our people in modern standards. In this respect, The Human Development Index demonstrates that most OIC Countries have a mid and low level of human development.

Additionally, in the context of Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), we are far away from attaining the MDGs by the expected time period. The challenges faced by the member countries to attain MDGs are; slow growth prospects; resource constraints; lack of institutional reforms; inadequate capacity development; uneven income distribution; lack of political will and commitment to the MDGs; lack of an enabling environment to attract investment and encourage private sector development; and the lack of inclusive growth.

On the other hand, despite being located in different territories and displaying a wide variety political, economic and social spectrum, Muslim communities hold a massive potential as they share the same religion and sacred values. This potential feeds off our shared values which

constitute a common denominator as well as our social heritage and the enterprising spirit of our young population in search of growth and welfare. The global community of Islam should be well aware that world problems call for common sense and concerted action at the global scale. Therefore boundaries between our countries should not distance us from each other or hinder cooperation particularly in humanitarian efforts.

Honourable Delegates,

Under the light of the OIC-Ten Year Program of Action, social agenda such as poverty alleviation, gender equality, education and health related issues are studied in different platforms in order to prepare the resolutions on economic assistance to some Member Countries and to implement poverty projects.

In order to further advance our member countries' fight against poverty and strengthen social infrastructure in our developing member countries, various programs have been launched under the COMCEC. One of these programs, OIC Cotton Action Plan recently gained a momentum with the realization of some concrete projects. As we are starting the second term of Cotton Action Plan for 2011-2016 period, we need to revise the program and settle funding issues to ensure success of this program which will enable us to particularly increase the trade potential of African cotton producing countries and contribute to their poverty-fighting efforts. We also consider collaboration with the member countries on "Agriculture and Rural Development", a topic that could be addressed within the framework of the poverty alleviation program.

Additionally, Islamic Solidarity Fund for Development and Special Program for Development of Africa were launched in 2005 in 3rd Extraordinary Summit in Makkah Al-Mukarrama in order to eradicate poverty, to finance poverty programs and to coordinate regional poverty programs effectively in various sectors such as agriculture and education. Under the OIC-VET program, SESRIC, in collaboration with the relevant OIC Institutions and national authorities, has initiated very important vocational programs and some of them have brought concrete results, such as Vocational and Art Training Courses of Istanbul Metropolitan Municipality (ISMEK), Occupational Health and Safety Capacity Building Program (OSHCaB) and OIC International Students Internship Program (OIC-ISIP). All these efforts mentioned above should be recorded as very important initiatives for improving the life quality of our people.

Dear Participants,

To conclude, I would like to state that poverty alleviation will continue to be an important item on the COMCEC agenda in the coming period. Finally, I would like to reiterate my sincere thanks to the SESRIC for its outstanding work to enhance cooperation among the OIC Member States. I wish you successful deliberations during this workshop and safe journey back to your home.

Wassalam Alaykum Wa ramatullah Wa baarakatuh.