

Statement of H.E. Dr. Savaş Alpay, Director General of the SESRIC at the Congress of Vocational and Technical Education in Islamic Countries organised by Turkish-Asian Centre for Strategic Studies (TASAM)

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بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمَنِ الرَّحِيمِ

**Distinguished Participants,
Ladies and Gentlemen,**

It is an honour and pleasure for me to address the Congress of Vocational and Technical Education in Islamic Countries. At the outset I would like to thank to the Turkish, Asian Centre for Strategic Studies (TASAM) for the excellent arrangements for this significant event. It is considerable that this meeting is bringing together experts on vocational and technical education and training in OIC Member States. Especially in today's world, where the economies are changing into knowledge based economies, the opportunity presented by this Meeting for exchange and networking between the experts from all over the Muslim World is of utmost importance. This is indeed a welcome opportunity to underscore the pre-eminent place of cooperation in vocational and technical education and training as it addresses a very important priority issue within the OIC family.

It is universally accepted and advocated that vocational and technical education and training in general and skills development in particular play a vital role in individual, organisational and overall national economic growth in every individual country. Many empirical studies show that the level of socio-economic development of a country corresponds to certain levels of education and training in that country, and vice versa. The importance of investment in education and training in human capital to a society's welfare and prosperity is now taken for granted. Thus, for the last decades vocational and technical education and training has become priority for developing countries.

Today, the phenomena of globalisation, food and water scarcity, global warming, and climate changing requires new types of graduates and adoption of our education and training systems for all programmes. The emergence of knowledge society and prevalence of economic uncertainties have tremendously increased the complexity between education and the diversified skills that labour market needs. The biggest challenge of our time and future will be to establish a sound match between vocational and technical education and training and employment. Given the fact that in most OIC Member Country there are imbalances that have developed in our education and training systems the challenge still remains as to tailor our education and training system to the needs of the economy and the labour market's capacity. To face these challenges and to overcome the difficulties before our socio-economic efforts we need to take precautionary measures in order to generate more wealth and prosperity in our countries.

It is a well established fact that the rapidly changing environment, new ways and means of ensuring that working people possess the necessary knowledge, skills and attitudes are critical for seizing the opportunities inherent in globalization and technological progress while reducing their adverse consequences. Many OIC Member States have a huge shortage of skilled people and this talent deficit is already hampering the manufacturing and services sectors' growth prospects. Education system has been unable to support the rising demand for skill sets. There is also a big question mark regarding the compatibility of skills acquired by students who receive higher education, and the demand by the firms.

Having considered this, the main task before the Member States is to transform the education system at the early childhood, basic, and secondary levels to produce graduates with the skills needed for the knowledge economy. This requires a comprehensive integrated national vocational and technical education and training strategy, as well as developed governance and decision-making mechanisms to achieve a sound vocational and technical education and training system that delivers basic skills and essential learning for the knowledge economy. Obviously, this must be supported in turn by a coordinated research, policy analysis, and monitoring and evaluation activities in the field of vocational and technical education and training accompanied by efficient and effective coordination of investments directed towards transformation efforts.

There are indeed considerable steps that we have to take in order to change the direction of our policies and strategies towards transforming our education and training systems so as to fit with the needs and demands of our economies. To realise this, I think that entrepreneurial education from the very early ages is crucially important in order to cultivate an environment where our children can acquire basic talents of creativity, innovation and risk taking. This education will facilitate the formalised teaching that informs, trains and educates anyone interested in business creation or development, as well as creativity and innovation in social and governmental arena.

What we need is to establish a sound linkage between the education and training system and labour market mainly the industry. Institutions need to increasingly involve in the continuous development of professionals in order to build a long standing expertise in advanced education and training and increase their capacity to compete with others. I believe that as a good starting point the institutions at higher level can establish research facilities that can be used to develop solutions to meet the industry's needs. Mechanisms for involving the industry in designing and updating the curriculum, participating in teaching functions as well as sitting on the board of trustees to advise improving linkage between vocational and technical education and training and labour market could be established. An information system of education and labour market that monitor and evaluates the linkage between education and training, and labour market is also needed.

In addition to this, to establish closer and stronger partnerships among OIC Member States in our efforts in vocational and technical education and training is of utmost importance. In this context the Vocational Education and Training Programme for OIC Member Countries

(OIC-VET), that was originally proposed by the SESRIC and adopted by the OIC Member States in the 24th Session of COMCEC, held in Istanbul in October 2008, is an outcome of the idea of fostering 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.

While respecting the responsibility of the Member States for the content and implementation of vocational training, the OIC-VET Programme supports and supplements the activities of the OIC Member States. It aims at improving the competencies and skills of the people according to the needs and priorities of labour markets through intra-OIC partnerships at institutional level. The Programme focuses on increasing accessibility and raising the quality of vocational education and training, and provides an opportunity for organizations involved in vocational education and training to build OIC partnerships, exchange best practices, increase the expertise of their staff and develop the skills and competencies of the participants. These objectives, which are at the very core of vocational education and training efforts in Member States, call for more effective and coherent training cooperation.

Moreover, I believe that this meeting will be an opportunity towards serving our coordination and cooperation prospects. We would be able to discuss effective ways of improving the quality and capacity of vocational and technical education and training systems, networking of the initiatives in the Member States, particularly for vocational guidance and promotion and use of information and communication technologies in vocational training, as well as enhancing innovative vocational training approaches. The meeting can help bring greater coherence to our collective efforts and can gear those efforts towards the realisation of the partnership for training, as set out by the OIC-VET Programme. It is my hope that open and inclusive dialogue will be the hallmark of this meeting and its concrete outcome will provide guidance for more coordinated action.

In that spirit, I wish you most fruitful and successful meeting and deliberations.

Thank you for your kind attention.

Wassalamu alaikum wa rahmatullahi wa barakatuh.