

**The First Islamic Conference of Ministers
of Higher Education and Scientific Research:
Towards Mechanisms for Implementation of the Strategy
for Development of Science and Technology
in the Islamic Countries**

Final Report

Riyadh, Kingdom of Saudi Arabia
(18-21 Rajab 1421 A.H / 15-18 October 2000)



**Final Report of
the First Islamic Conference of the Ministers
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In compliance with the resolutions and recommendations of the Coordination Meeting of the Ministers of Higher Education and Scientific Research (Budapest, 28 June 1999) and of the 27th Session of the Islamic Conference of Foreign Affairs Ministers (Kuala Lumpur, 27-30 June 2000); as part of the leading role played by the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia in the service of the causes of Islam and Muslims and its unflagging will to support joint Islamic action; considering the proclamation of Riyadh as Arab capital for Culture in the year 2000; pursuant to the lofty directives of the Custodian of the Two Holy Mosques, King Fahd Ibn Abdulaziz Al Saud, of His Royal Highness Abdullah Ibn Abdulaziz, Crown Prince, Vice-President of the Council of Ministers, Commander of the National Guard, and of His Royal Highness Prince Sultan Ibn Abdulaziz, Second Vice-President of the Council of Ministers, Minister of Defense and Aviation, General Inspector, may Allah preserve them all, and under the patronage of His Royal Highness Salman Ibn Abdulaziz, Governor of the Riyadh Region, the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, represented by the Ministry of Higher Education, hosted on 18-21 Rajab 1421 A.H. / 15-18 October 2000, in its capital Riyadh, the First Islamic Conference of Higher Education and Scientific Research, held under the title: *“Towards Mechanisms for Implementation of the Strategy for Development of Science and Technology in the Islamic Countries”*, at the invitation of the Islamic Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization -ISESCO, the organization arrangements being ensured by the Ministry of Higher Education in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia.

The Conference was attended by Their Excellencies the Ministers of Higher Education and Scientific Research in the Member States of the Organization of the Islamic Conference, or their representatives, the Secretary General of the Organization of the Islamic Conference, as well as a number of chiefs of similar Arab, Islamic and international organizations.

The Conference was opened with a recitation of verses from the Holy Quran. Afterwards, His Royal Highness Prince Salman Ibn Abdulaziz, Governor of the Riyadh Region, graced the Conference with his presence at the opening ceremony. In the valuable statement he delivered on the occasion, he first welcomed the Conference members on behalf of the Custodian of the Two Holy Mosques, King Fahd Ibn Abdulaziz Al Saud, and his trustworthy Crown Prince His Royal Highness Prince Abdullah Ibn Abdulaziz Al Saud, may Allah protect them both. He conveyed to the guests their sincere greetings and wishes of full success.

In his statement, His Highness underscored the necessity to guarantee a brilliant future of the Muslim Ummah through capitalization on higher education and scientific research, stating that the Muslim world had entered the new century without being fully prepared for taking up the challenges. He called for unifying efforts, adhering to the Islamic faith and abiding by the Quran and the Sunnah.

H.E. Dr. Khaled Ibn Mohamed Al-Ankary, Minister of Higher Education in the government of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, delivered an address in which he welcomed the guests of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia and highlighted the strategic importance of the Conference and the lofty objectives it pursued, in keeping with the aspirations of the Muslim Ummah for fulfilling the conditions of scientific and technological renaissance. He stated that the Muslim Ummah was going through a critical juncture fraught with multifarious, complicated challenges. He called for paving the way ahead for researchers and providing them with the means to undertake innovative work. He also urged the Ummah to spare no effort to harness scientific competencies, particularly that cultural resources and intellectual works had superseded natural resources in deciding the fate of countries and determining their position on the international arena. He underlined the necessity to keep abreast of scientific developments worldwide, open access to research centers throughout the world and

establish linkages with them. He highlighted the early interest taken by the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, ever since the reign of the late King Abdulaziz, in science and culture in response to the first injunction ordained by Almighty Allah to the Seal of Prophets and Messengers, Muhammad (P.B.U.H.). He declared that the Kingdom spared no effort to pave the way ahead and earmark tremendous resources for boosting the educational process on the path of scientific excellence.

H.E. Dr. Azeddine Laraki, Secretary-General of the Organization of the Islamic Conference, took the floor afterwards, and delivered an address in which he stated that the Conference sought to provide the ways and means necessary for preparing the rising generations to enter the new millennium with a firm footing, and providing them with such education as would enable them to produce endogenous technology and harness their science in the service of the Muslim Ummah and the entire mankind.

He then called upon the Muslim countries to expand and consolidate their economic infrastructure to enable it to absorb the thousands of graduates of universities and training institutes, and usher those youth into the private sector by creating auspicious conditions for setting up micro-enterprises and workshops. He likewise called for enforcing the rule of capitalization on services of experts and specialists.

In the address he delivered afterwards, H.E. Dr. Abdulaziz Othman Altwajri, Director General of the Islamic Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization, conveyed his heartfelt thanks and gratitude to the Custodian of the Two Holy Mosques, King Fahd Ibn Abdulaziz Al Saud and to his trustworthy Crown Prince for the unflagging support they extended to the Islamic Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization. He held that the hosting of the Conference by the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia was yet another token of the leading role it was discharging to promote the Islamic causes, strengthen Islamic solidarity and consolidate the joint Islamic action. He declared that it was indispensable for the Islamic world to follow the right path in the realm of science and technology, indicating that the conditions of science and technology in the Islamic countries were marked by low rates to a degree not befitting the Muslim Ummah, which he said was enjoined by the Shariah to seek knowledge from the cradle to the grave.

He further indicated that the top-level scientific and technological executives in the Islamic world totalled 7,600,000, not exceeding a mere 3.7 % of the overall scientific and technological competencies worldwide. He added that the number of scientific researchers active in the field of development of the Islamic world did not exceed 1.18% of the total number of scientific and technological executives in the world.

At the end of the opening ceremony, the Islamic Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization awarded ISESCO's First Order Decoration posthumously to His Royal Highness Prince Faisal Ibn Fahd – may Allah bless him, former President of the Youth Welfare in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, in appreciation for the tremendous services he had rendered to joint Islamic action in the fields of culture and sports. The Islamic Organization likewise presented ISESCO's First Order Prize to Dr. Ahmed Zewail, the Arab Muslim Egyptian scientist, Chemistry Nobel Prize winner for 1999, in consideration of his competence and outstanding scientific excellence and as a token of the pride taken by the Muslim Ummah in the international renown of one of its scientists.

His Royal Highness Prince Salman Ibn Abdulaziz handed over the decoration of ISESCO, presented posthumously to the late Prince Faisal Ibn Fahd, to Dr. Saleh Ibn Ahmed Ibn Nasser, Secretary of the President of Youth Welfare, on behalf of His Highness Prince Prince Nawaf Ibn Faisal Ibn Fahd, Vice-President of Youth Welfare in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, who was on official mission abroad. His Highness Prince Salman Ibn Abdulaziz likewise handed over ISESCO's decoration to Dr. Ahmed Zewail. His Highness received, then, a present from Dr. Abdulaziz Othman Altwaijri, containing a collection of the latest publications of ISESCO.

At the end of the Opening Ceremony and after the break, Dr. Ahmed Zewail delivered a scientific lecture titled “*Future of the Ummah and the Need for a Genuine Scientific Renaissance*”, which was the object of deep appreciation by the Conference members and the entire audience. In his lecture, Dr. Zewail addressed the latest scientific developments, expounding the serious risks they represented for the human species. He highlighted the importance of setting up a sound scientific infrastructure in the Islamic world, emphasizing the fact that there was no inconsistency whatsoever

between the Islamic religion and scientific advancement. He then made a concise presentation on the conditions of scientific research in Islamic countries, indicating in this context that the weakness of scientific capacities was not ascribed to an innate backwardness of Islamic countries, but rather to inadequate support of research in the Islamic world. He concluded that slogans and conferences could not create any progress, nor trigger any significant change. He emphasized that we had to produce technology, for indeed the purchase of turnkey technology was not befitting for a nation that built such a glorious civilization.

At the beginning of the first session, the Conference set up its bureau as follows:

- Kingdom of Saudi Arabia *-President*

- Republic of Senegal (for the African group), Islamic Republic of Pakistan (for the Asian group), and Kingdom of Morocco (for the Arab group) *- Vice-Presidents*

- Republic of Yemen *- Rapporteur*

Their Excellencies the heads of delegation of the Member States and guest organizations delivered speeches during this session as well as the following sessions, in which they extolled the assistance extended by the Government of the Custodian of the Two Holy Mosques to the Conference, and emphasized the necessity to strengthen Islamic solidarity and translate it into reality through joint cooperation in the implementation of the Strategy for Development of Science and Technology in the Islamic Countries. They also spoke about the educational, scientific and technological conditions prevailing in the Islamic countries, and addressed the problems and issues related to the Conference's theme. They put forward valuable proposals for improving scientific and technological performance and boosting the role of science and technology in the development of Islamic societies.

Three exhaustive reports prepared by the Islamic Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization on “*Status of Higher Education in the Islamic world*”, “*Status of the Scientific Research, its Centers and Future Prospects in the Islamic World*” and “*Activities of the Federation of the Universities of the Islamic World*”, were presented

during the second, third and fourth working sessions of the Conference. In a climate of brotherhood and cooperation, to the best interest of the Muslim Ummah, the Conference members expressed, during discussion of the reports, their appreciation for the distinct efforts that the Islamic Organization had exerted to survey the conditions of higher education and scientific research, and to study and analyse the results arrived at. The participants also held in high esteem the accuracy, objectivity and comprehensiveness characterizing the Organization's reports and working papers submitted to the Conference.

Accordingly, the Conference passed relevant decisions whereby it adopted these reports.

During its fifth working session, the Conference examined thoroughly the *Implementation Mechanisms of the Strategy for Development of Science and Technology in the Islamic Countries*. After analysis of the topics raised by the relevant document on implementation mechanisms, the participants adopted the *Implementation Mechanisms of the Strategy for Development of Science and Technology in the Islamic Countries*, and requested the Islamic Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization to follow up the different implementation stages of the Strategy in cooperation with the Member States, the General Secretariat of the Organization of the Islamic Conference and COMSTECH. In this connection, the Conference commended the efforts of all scientists and technologists who contributed towards the preparation of the *Strategy for the Development of Science and Technology in the Islamic Countries* and the Scientific Committee set up to revise the Implementation Mechanisms of the Strategy.

The debates that took place highlighted the importance of the trilogy of Science, Technology and Development as a basis for any progress in economic, scientific or social fields. The statements and papers presented to the Conference underscored the pressing need to ensure three basic elements indispensable for achieving scientific and technological renaissance, namely : highest political will, appropriate planning and financial resources.

The proceedings of the Conference focused, especially, on exploring the future prospects, urging for a close linkage between national policy planning in the field of

science and technology at country level and cooperation in the implementation of the *Strategy for Development of Science and Technology in the Islamic Countries*, within the framework of joint Islamic action, the aim being to promote mutual cooperation and complementarity among the Member States of the Organization of the Islamic Conference and to foster the principle of Islamic solidarity which constitutes the linchpin of joint Islamic action.

The Conference affirmed the paramount importance of the Strategy for Development of Science and Technology in the Islamic Countries, which stemmed from its response to the requirements of social and economic development in the Islamic world and the need for civilizational edification on scientific and technological bases which pave the way before comprehensive development in the Islamic countries through steady scientific advancement in all walks of life.

Alongside the Conference, a scientific roundtable was organized on: “*Science and Technology in the Islamic Countries: Present Status and Future Prospects*”. It was chaired by H.E. Dr. Khaled Ibn Muhammad Al-Ankary, Minister of Higher Education in the government of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, President of the Conference, and attended by a constellation of eminent scientists of high caliber and international renown, such as Dr. Saleh Al-AzI, Dr. Farouq El-Baz, Dr. Cheik Modibo Diarra, Dr. Ali Sayigh and Dr. Ahmed Taser Pihie. The roundtable was marked by in-depth analysis of the conditions of science and technology in the Islamic world, in addition to the ideas and proposals formulated with a view to promoting science and technology and boosting their role in comprehensive development.

At the end of its proceedings, the First Islamic Conference of Higher Education and Scientific Research addressed messages of thanks and gratitude to the Custodian of the Two Holy Mosques, King Fahd Ibn Abdulaziz Al Saud, to his trustworthy Crown Prince His Royal Highness Abdullah Ibn Abdulaziz, to His Royal Highness Prince Sultan Ibn Abdulaziz, Second Vice-President of the Council of Ministers, and to His Royal Highness Prince Salman Ibn Abdulaziz, Governor of Riyadh Region, for the generous hosting and lavish support extended by the government of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia to the Conference. The Conference expressed appreciation for H.E. the Minister of Higher Education in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia and President of the

Conference, Dr. Khaled Ibn Muhammad Al-Ankary, for the valuable assistance and tremendous facilities extended by his ministry and his support team to make of the Conference a success. The Conference also extended thanks to the Islamic Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization - ISESCO, to its Director General and to its staff members for the distinct efforts exerted with a view to holding the Conference in optimal conditions.

The Conference followed, with keen interest, the presentation made by H.E. Dr. Munthir Salah, Minister of Higher Education in the State of Palestine, on the difficult conditions undergone by Palestinian educational institutions, including schools, institutes, universities, faculties, and scientific research centers, as a result of the practices repression and ruthless oppression, compounded with the blatant military aggression perpetrated by the Israeli occupation authorities against the Palestinian people. H.E. the Palestinian Minister appealed to the Conference members to provide support to the Palestinian universities and scientific institutions. In this connection, the Conference condemned strongly the criminal aggressions perpetrated by the Israeli occupation authorities against the Palestinian people, denouncing the violation and desecration of the sanctity of Al-Quds Al-Sharif. The Conference affirmed the importance of Al-Quds Al-Sharif for all Muslims as a religious and cultural symbol that could never be relinquished. The Conference then called for providing the necessary assistance to educational institutions, universities and scientific research centers in Palestine.

In the light of the opinions and proposals put forward, the Conference issued the following recommendations :

- Set up a consultative council for implementation of the Strategy for Development of Science and Technology in the Islamic Countries, within the framework of the Islamic Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization and the First Islamic Conference of Ministers of Higher Education and Scientific Research. The Council shall be made up of nine Member States whose membership shall be rotational on a three-year basis. It shall examine and study the projects proposed for

implementation of the Strategy and shall coordinate action with the Islamic Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization -ISESCO. Its meetings shall be attended by the General Secretariat of the Organization of the Islamic Conference and the Standing Committee for Scientific and Technological Cooperation –COMSTECH. The members of the Council shall be :

- 1) Kingdom of Saudi Arabia
- 2) Kingdom of Morocco
- 3) Arab Republic of Egypt
- 4) Islamic Republic of Pakistan
- 5) Islamic Republic of Iran
- 6) Malaysia
- 7) Republic of Senegal
- 8) Republic of Gabon
- 9) Republic of Uganda

- Gear the science sector towards production and industrial development, and benefit from the technological progress to promote the vital economic, educational and agricultural sectors, in keeping with the principle of knowledge transfer from laboratories to production sites.
- Enhance coordination and cooperation among universities and higher education institutions in the Islamic world and work out common action plans and strategies which, although slightly different in terms of details from one state to another, are complementary and mutually supportive within the framework of the Federation of the Universities of the Islamic World.
- Set up a data network across the Islamic world to help speed up the flow of scientific information among universities and research centers, and promote mutual scientific and technological cooperation.
- Take advantage of satellite technology to establish an Islamic distance learning satellite channel in order to expand the scope of this type of advanced education.

- Attach importance to open education as a novel field that offers additional opportunities for higher education, helps boost its development, and enhances its performance.
- Upgrade all educational systems from basic education level up to higher and more specialized technical education, and promote scientific and technological literacy by keeping pace with the scientific developments occurring worldwide and laying a scientific groundwork shared by all Member States.
- Raise the status of scholars and scientific and technological innovators in the Islamic world, and spare no effort to encourage their achievements and adopt their works, the aim being to induce the rising generations to work actively for improving the status of their Ummah amidst the other nations.
- Pledge to raise the assistance geared to higher education, consolidate higher studies, buttress scientific research to build technological capacities, develop the research infrastructure of research institutions, and lay an auspicious groundwork for developing science.
- Calls for setting up a centre for scientific research within ISESCO's General Directorate, entrusted with coordination among research centres and institutions in the Islamic world, to serve as a focal point for attracting research scientists from Muslim countries, an observatory of scientific research in all fields, and a meeting point for creative scientists and technologists ;
- Encourage the sponsoring of joint research involving more than one scientist or country in such a way as to foster coordination, consultation and exchange of opinions and information, and help pool ideas

worldwide in order to find suitable solutions; and to devise for this purpose a mechanism of implementation through COMSTECH.

- Include some projects concerned with awareness-raising, training and workshops in the field of information production to ensure the training of executives and the building of their capacities in the areas of information production at all levels.
- Take advantage of high-caliber expatriate scientists to support the scientific and technological activities undertaken by Islamic countries, on the basis of the Plan laid down by the Islamic Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization in this regard.
- Convene regularly the Islamic Conference of Higher Education Ministers once every three years.
- Support universities and higher institutes in Member States, and enable them to discharge their duties for the achievement of comprehensive development in Member States.
- Encourage the participation of women in the fields of science and technology, and open access to their contribution in supporting comprehensive development projects in the Member States.
- Call upon the Member States to set up national steering committees in charge of following up the implementation of the *Strategy for the Development of Science and Technology in the Islamic Countries* adopted by this Conference and coordinating with the Consultative Council entrusted with giving substance to this Strategy through the Islamic Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization.

