

**Welcoming Statement by Ambassador Musa Kulaklıkaya, Director General of SESRIC,
at the Conference on Employment of Persons with Disabilities in OIC Member
Countries
Istanbul, Turkey, 26-28 October 2016**

**Your Excellency, Minister of Family and Social Policies of the Republic of Turkey,
Distinguished Delegates of OIC Member States,
Ladies and Gentlemen,**

Assalamu Alaikum wa Rahmatullahi wa Barakatuhu,

It is a great pleasure for me to address this august gathering on the occasion of the “Conference on Employment of Persons with Disabilities in OIC Member Countries”, which we have the pleasure to organize it in collaboration with the Ministry of Family and Social Policies of the Republic of Turkey.

At the outset, I would like to welcome and thank you all for accepting our invitation and designating your valuable time to attend this important gathering. Our thanks and appreciations are also extended to the Ministry of Family and Social Policies of the Republic of Turkey for their hospitality and contribution to the successful organization of the Conference.

Your Excellencies, distinguished participants, ladies and gentlemen

As we are all aware, majority of the people with disabilities around the world do not have equal access to health care, education, and employment opportunities and do not get the needed disability services, and experience exclusion from everyday life activities. Even with the degree of the issue, awareness and the technical information on disability matters are lacking enormously.

‘Special needs’ term is used to describe individuals who require assistance for disabilities that may be physical, psychological or mental. According to World Health Organisation estimates, there are around 600 million persons with disabilities of various types and degrees, and everyday, around 25 percent of the world’s population is affected by disability. In other words, 1 out of 7 people has a disability worldwide. Due to aging population and widespread chronic diseases, the global prevalence rate of disability increased from 10 percent in 1970 to

15 percent in 2011 and additionally, 80 percent of persons with disabilities live in developing countries. OIC Member Countries are not free from the consequences of disabilities. According to SESRIC estimates, on average, OIC Member Countries lost 10.4 years healthy life years (per 100 people) where the world average was recorded at 9.3 in 2011. Non-OIC developing countries, on average, lost 9.6 healthy life years (per 100 people) due to disability that was being relatively lower average when compared to the OIC average. On the other hand, the developed countries group was a relatively less affected country group from disabilities.

Persons with disabilities, as a group, are more likely to experience adverse socioeconomic outcomes than persons without disabilities, such as less education, worse health outcomes, less employment, and higher poverty rates. Analysis of the World Health Survey undertaken by World Health Organisation and World Bank in 2011, shows that, compared with people without disability, men and women with disabilities are twice as likely to find that health care facilities and providers' skills are inadequate, three times more likely to be denied health care and four times more likely to be treated badly in the health care system. Moreover, of all persons with disabilities, half cannot afford required health care; people with disabilities are also 50% more likely than those without disability to suffer catastrophic health expenditures.

Your Excellencies, distinguished participants, ladies and gentlemen

Unemployment remains as one of the most challenging matters across the world and compared to the non-disabled, people with disabilities are disadvantaged in the labour market. For instance, their lack of access to education and training and the nature of the workplace or employers' perceptions of disability and disabled people. Social protection schemes may build encouragements for people with disabilities to exit employment onto disability benefits. Unemployment occurs due to inadequate number of job creation or skills mismatch in the economy and high unemployment is generally associated with low participation rates mainly due to the same reasons, but also due to low level of qualifications, discrimination against people with disabilities in employment and low wages. According to the ILO World Employment and Social Outlook 2015 report, almost 202 million people were unemployed in 2014 around the world, with 1.2 million additional unemployed compared with the previous year and about 31 million more compared with 2007. This reflects the fact that employment is not expanding adequately fast to keep up with the growing labour force.

People with disabilities are seen in every work environment like, they are workers, entrepreneurs, doctors, teachers, artists, writers and drivers. Through giving the right environment most people with disabilities can perform just about any profession. Nevertheless, the literature on disability unemployment issue reveals that regardless of being developed or not, working population with disabilities experience considerably lower employment rates and much higher unemployment rates than working population without disabilities. This issue of lower rates of labour market participation would directly lead to poverty as well as lack of education opportunities, lower wages, and increased cost of living. According to the UN Factsheet on Disability of 2015, having disability increases the cost of living by about a third of average income. On the other hand, poverty may increase the risk of disability through malnutrition, inadequate access to education and health care, unsafe working conditions, polluted environment, and lack of access to safe water and sanitation.

Your Excellencies, distinguished participants, ladies and gentlemen

In response to the aforementioned problems, we convene the first meeting with the respected representatives of social policies and welfare and employment officials from the relevant authorities in OIC Member Countries, as well as international organisations and civil society in order to develop solutions for common problems and explore collaboration opportunities to overcome shared challenges in employment of persons with disabilities. The Conference was inspired by the Jakarta Declaration adopted by the Third Islamic Conference of Labour Ministers held in Jakarta, Republic of Indonesia in October last year, which “urges member states to improve conditions environ and reduce obstacles faced by the youth, women and people with disabilities in finding and maintaining decent work”.

I believe this conference will lead to continuous and systematic sharing of knowledge and experience among the relevant respective institutions of the OIC Member Countries in order to provide the right environment for people with disabilities in the labour market through various types of activities, initiative, projects and programmes. I would like to take this opportunity to brief you about some selected initiatives undertaken by SESRIC with regards to skill development and employment in its three mandated area, namely, statistics, research and training and technical cooperation.

In order to develop solutions for common problems and explore collaboration opportunities to overcome shared challenges in the labour market, SESRIC initiated the OIC Public Employment Services Network (OIC-PESNET) in 2014, and so far organised two network meetings in Ankara, Turkey. Pursuing the decisions taken at the network meetings, SESRIC prepared the OIC Labour Market Report, and launched it during the Third Islamic Conference of Labour Ministers, which was held in Jakarta, Indonesia in October 2015. This report analyses the current state of labour market in OIC countries and addresses some of the key related issues which still constitute major challenges for them in this important area. These include skills development and employability, job creation and youth employment, social protection and safety, and participation and migration.

In the same direction, SESRIC also runs the OIC Capacity Building Programme for Public Employment Services (OIC-PESCaB), as a long-term and large scale capacity development programme that aims at matching the needs and capacities of relevant institutions through organizing short term training courses or workshops. The OIC-PESCaB would also be the arena of serving the needs of people with disabilities in order to effectively plan and implement training activities which will, no doubt, add to the specialisation efforts of experts in general and play an important role in the improvement of the public employment services in the member countries.

Considering that vocational education and training (VET) is one of the powerful responses to unemployment problems in OIC Member Countries and enhances employability and employment opportunities, the Vocational Education and Training Programme for the OIC Member Countries (OIC-VET) being executed by SESRIC, could assist member countries and supplement their activities. Overall, the OIC-VET Programme 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 VET, and provides an opportunity for organizations involved in VET to build OIC partnerships, exchange best practices, increase the expertise of their staff and develop the skills and competencies of the participants. Currently, SESRIC collaborates with national excellence centres in selected member countries for improving the VET, through elaboration of curriculum for vocational trainings and organizing training programmes for the trainers in various vocational fields, and promoting the exchange of trainees and trainers among OIC Member Countries.

Your Excellencies, distinguished participants

OIC Member Countries are not protected from the abovementioned facts and host millions of people with special needs who are in need of basic healthcare services, specialized vocational and rehabilitation services and other community services from transport to education. Despite not having standard comparable statistics on available services to people with special needs, an overlook on selected indicators for OIC Member Countries revealed the existence of underinvestment into public services that directly affect people with special needs. In this regard, it is fair to claim that many disabled people living in OIC Member Countries cannot meet their special needs for one reason or another. Hence, OIC Member Countries should urgently address the needs of people with special needs by building mechanisms to receive input from those people to remove barriers and improve access to public services.

Additionally, conducting more research on the needs, barriers, and health outcomes for people with disabilities is also essential. Without having cross-country standardized datasets, it is not possible to find out drawbacks of existing policies, missing components and ineffective initiatives designed for people with special needs. In this regard, OIC Member Countries need to invest more into the research institutions, universities and specialized centres who are carrying out research activities for people with special needs. OIC Member Countries should also increase awareness of the public at large on the importance of the issue of disability and to coordinate efforts of all sectors of society to participate in disability prevention activities. They should also organize training programmes and introduce courses into educational curricula on people with special needs with a view of promoting and protecting their rights and dignity.

In addition to above, OIC Member Countries should promote community-based rehabilitation programmes that would help society members to better understand people with special needs and assist them in their inclusion and integration into social activities and develop new mechanisms and reviewing the existing ones to upscale the access of people with special needs to assistive technology. On the other hand, it is critical for OIC Member Countries to assess existing policies and services, identify priorities to reduce health inequalities and plan improvements for access and inclusion. It is important to make health care services affordable for disabled people to ensure that people with disabilities are fully covered by the social

security systems that they no longer need to think on out-of-pocket payments.

Additional indispensable need is to develop national plans for disabled people with the involvement of different ministries (e.g. health, women, family affairs, labour, transport and communication) to ensure full participation and equality of persons with disabilities in all spheres of life. Last of all, OIC Member Countries should adopt and implement international agreements, conventions and action plans for people with disabilities. As one of the most important universal declarations on people with disabilities, the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD) has still not been signed by 12 OIC member countries. 10 OIC Member countries have not been ratified the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities yet. It is therefore important to encourage OIC Member Countries to sign and ratify this important convention that frames the basic universal rights of disabled people.

The problem of unemployment of persons with disabilities in the OIC community and the strategies for its reduction should be considered with a new vision at both the individual country and OIC cooperation levels. The objectives for and the efforts to address employment of disabled people in our member countries should be outlined specifically in the national employment strategies, but through a process of creating a supportive OIC environment.

Your Excellencies, distinguished participants

In this spirit, we came together today in this gathering to deliberate and exchange our views and expertise on important aspects of cooperation in the field of employment of persons with disabilities. I am confident that through the deliberations you will hold, and the recommendations and proposals, you will contribute significantly to the efforts of the OIC and its Member Countries towards eradicating or reducing unemployment of disabled people in their societies and, ultimately, approximate the collective welfare for the Islamic Ummah. As we all look forward to the successful outcome of the Conference, I wish you all the success.

Thank you for your kind attention.

Wassalamu Alaykum we Rahmatullahi we Barakatuh