

**Welcoming Statement by Prof. Savaş Alpay**  
**Director General of SESRIC**  
**At the Workshop on**  
**“Innovative Solutions to Poverty Reduction and Empowerment of the Poor”**  
**Ankara, Turkey, 26-28 June 2013**

بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمَنِ الرَّحِيمِ

**Distinguished participants,**

**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 workshop on “Innovative Solutions to Poverty Reduction and Empowerment of the Poor”, which we have the honor, at SESRIC, to organize it in collaboration with the Islamic Development Bank (IDB) Group through its Islamic Solidarity Fund for Development (ISFD) and the Turkish Cooperation and Coordination Agency (TIKA).

At the outset, I would like to welcome and thank you all for accepting our invitation and designating these three days from your valuable time to attend and participate in the deliberations of this important workshop. Our thanks and appreciations are also extended to the Islamic Solidarity Fund for Development of the Islamic Development Bank Group and the Turkish Cooperation and Coordination Agency for their support and contribution to the organization of the Workshop.

**Distinguished participants,**

**Ladies and Gentlemen,**

As we are all aware, poverty is still considered as one of the most serious challenges facing the humanity today. It is a multi-dimensional phenomena and a result of a complex socio-economic

and political structure of a particular country. Poverty is more than poor people; it is associated with poor economies, poor human resources, poor social services provision, and poor policies to tackle the challenges facing human and socio-economic development. Therefore, the status, the determinants, and the policy measures required to eradicate poverty would, by definition, vary from one country to another.

Over the past two decades, many initiatives have been taken at both national and international levels to eradicate poverty and hunger at global level. In this respect, the international community agreed at the World Summit for Social Development in 1995 on the need for time-bound goals and quantitative targets for reducing poverty, and put a special emphasis on elaborating definitions, indicators and measurements of poverty. In 2000, eradicating poverty and elimination of hunger and under-nourishment has been identified in the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) as one of the most important objectives to be achieved at both national and global levels.

However, despite all efforts, the number of poor and undernourished people is still on rise worldwide. The recent estimates indicate that one billion people worldwide are undernourished; the majority of them are in the developing regions of Africa, Asia and Latin America. Considering the fact that the majority of the OIC member countries is located in these regions and constitutes a substantial part of the developing countries, it is quite evident that a significant portion of those poor and undernourished people resides in OIC countries, particularly in the Least-developed and low-income members.

In this context, it is worth mentioning that, currently, 21 out of the world 48 LDCs are OIC members. 18 OIC member countries are classified as low-income countries and 22 as Heavily Indebted Poor Countries (HIPCs). According to FAO, 33 OIC member countries are also classified as LIFDCs, and according to the UNDP HDI, 25 OIC member countries are placed in the category of low HD countries. Five years ago, it has been estimated that there were 187 million undernourished people in the OIC Countries, corresponding to 21% of the world total undernourished people. It was also estimated that there were almost 400 million people (23% of OIC total population) living below the income poverty threshold of 1.25\$ a day and 583 million people (39% of OIC total population) below the poverty threshold of 2\$ a day. Considering the negative impact of the global economic and food crises, it is evident that this situation has been worsened since then, particularly among the poor people in these countries.

In this context, I would also like to indicate that in addition to usual natural disasters such as droughts, floods and earthquakes, the world is facing today a new kind of phenomenon which I call financial disasters. Regional or global financial disasters have become almost periodic, occurring once in nearly every 5 years and adversely affecting the lives of many people. As members of the international community, we are now also obliged to cope with these kinds of disasters as well, when addressing poverty issues.

**Distinguished participants,**

**Ladies and Gentlemen,**

These figures and estimates indicate that poverty is still a significant issue that needs to be addressed in many OIC countries, particularly in the least-developed and low-income members. Let me also remind all of us that we are going through a very delicate period in human history: Technological advances especially in the fields of transportation and communication have made far distances near but it did not help people to become closer. People are becoming more distant from each other and do not get involved in each other's problems. Excessive consumption is becoming normal. For the first time in human history, the number of people dying of obesity is now exceeding those dying of hunger.

We have all the tools and technologies to solve the problems, but I believe that we lost some important humanitarian values and do not care for each other. This is one of the biggest challenges that we have today. In this context, I would like to remind all of us the critical advices that Prophet Mohammad (Peace Be Upon Him) has given: We are not supposed to feel content and sleep happily when our neighbors face trouble. He (Peace Be Upon Him) said *"He who sleeps stomach full when his neighbor is hungry is not from among us"* and *"The best among you is the one who benefits others the most"*.

We should not forget that wide-spread poverty does not distort the quality of life for only the poor but also for the entire country. We may have natural resources that bring wealth, but the most fundamental asset of any society is the amount and quality of its human resources. There will be an enormous loss in human capital especially in societies who cannot make use of the talents of a significant portion of its members because of poverty. In fact, this is a more delicate concern particularly for OIC Member Countries. When we talk about the OIC Member Countries, people immediately think that oil and gas

are the most important assets. This is true to an extent, as OIC Member Countries have around 70% of all oil and around 60% of all natural gas reserves of the world. However, one of our recent analyses shows that the most important asset that OIC Member Countries have is their population structure. OIC Member Countries have the youngest population in the world where the share of population aged 0-24 is around 53%. This is almost twice as that of the developed countries. Having a very young population is a very important asset but it requires effective provision of critical services such as access to quality education, health and other relevant services which will unleash their potential and increase their contribution to their societies.

If our member countries are to reduce poverty or to judge how their national socio-economic policies affect it, they need to know a lot about their poor. It is important to know who the poor are; where they live; what assets they command; what their education, health and housing conditions are; and what economic opportunities are available to them. It is not possible to imagine sustainable socio-economic development in these countries without a significant rise in the standard of living of the neediest segments of the population in terms of consumption, health, housing, and education. Investing in people must, therefore, be the highest priority for these countries as long as human capital limitations restrain growth or keep people in absolute poverty.

**Distinguished participants,**

**Ladies and Gentlemen,**

Though the problem of poverty in our member countries is essentially a national one, however, since economic cooperation is a main pillar of the OIC as an organization, and the ultimate aim of this cooperation is the wellbeing of the people in the member countries, the widespread poverty in the least-developed and low-income member countries seems to be inconsistent with this objective. The problem of poverty in the OIC community and the strategies for its alleviation should be considered with a new vision at both the individual country and OIC cooperation levels.

The objectives for and the efforts to address poverty alleviation in our member countries should

be outlined specifically in the national poverty alleviation strategies, but through a process of creating a supportive OIC environment.

In this spirit, SESRIC, IDB – ISFD and TIKA organized this workshop together to deliberate and exchange our views and expertise in partnership with you on this critical issue. All three organizers have the intention of reaching the people in need and making positive changes in their lives. Therefore your active involvement in the design of implementable projects will be very valuable for us. I am confident that the deliberations you will have especially during the break-out sessions and the recommendations and proposals you will make, will contribute significantly to the efforts of OIC institutions and Member Countries towards eradicating poverty in our societies. As we all look forward to the successful outcome of this workshop, I wish you all the success.

Thank you for your kind attention.

Wassalamu Alaykum we Rahmatullahi we Barakatuhu