

## Introduction

The Islamic Conference of Environment Ministers represents a significant landmark in the history of Islamic environmental action. It has made a crucial step forward in the coordination of the Muslim countries' efforts aimed at ensuring a better future for the Muslim Ummah and unifying stances of the Muslim countries concerning the rapid developments taking place at all levels in today's globalized world, particularly in areas related to the environment and sustainable development. Actually, the Conference has managed, throughout its previous sessions, to rally the Islamic world to such highly important causes, through raising public awareness about the importance of achieving sustainable development goals and preserving natural resources.

Indeed, for the first time in the history of Islamic environmental action, the Conference has developed an Islamic approach in this connection; one that highlights the specificities of the Islamic world which originate in the Islamic values and concepts and in the Muslim Ummah's heritage, and builds on the lofty ideals advocated by the Islamic teachings where the protection of the environment is awarded a status as elevated as "care" since care is a more inclusive and broader concept compared with the concept of "protection".

Throughout the three sessions of the Islamic Conference of Environment Ministers, programmes and activities dedicated to sustainable development in the Islamic countries, and many reference documents were adopted to serve as a roadmap for environmental action in the Member States of the Organization of the Islamic Conference (OIC).

In the same vein, the Conference has, in a short time, managed to structure its action and set the ground for a stronger joint Islamic action. This helped the Muslim bloc secure a leading regional role, mainly through its contribution to the Johannesburg Summit with a coherent vision of the challenges facing the Islamic countries and their positions with regard to the promotion of global solidarity to achieve sustainable development in the developing countries, particularly in the Islamic world.

## I. Milestones in the Process of Materializing Joint Islamic Action Dedicated to the Environment and Sustainable Development

### 1. First World Forum on Environment from an Islamic perspective (2000)

At the initiative of the Custodian of the Two Holy Mosques, officials and experts convened in Jeddah to consider ways to create an Islamic space of cooperation, and unite stances on the issues of environment protection and sustainable development. The Forum triggered the interest of the political class in Islamic cooperation on issues relating to the environment and sustainable development. The participants in the Forum recommended the adoption of the Jeddah Commitments for Sustainable Development as a framework for environmental action in the Islamic countries, and called for coordination with

the regional and international institutions and organizations with a view to devising a programme of action highlighting the Islamic countries' view to the environment and suitable development, and submitting it to the Johannesburg Earth Summit.

## **2- The First Islamic Conference of Environment Ministers: institutionalization and securing an active role on the international arena**

The First Islamic Conference of Environment Ministers highlighted the involvement of the Islamic world in the international efforts addressing environmental concerns, and proposed solutions inspired by the cultural and civilizational heritage of the Muslim Ummah. Indeed, the Johannesburg Summit (2002) provided an opportunity for the Islamic Conference of Environment Ministers to present the international community with a comprehensive, balanced and insightful vision of today's multifaceted environmental concerns - a vision emanating from the rich Islamic value system which complements the contemporary international conceptions of the environment and sustainable development.

The Islamic Conference of Environment Ministers highlighted the efforts the Islamic countries had devoted to sustainable development, together with the challenges facing them in this respect. In fact, the different documents and resolutions issued by the previous sessions of the Conference brought to light the active involvement of the Muslim world countries in the global action aimed at achieving sustainable development and preserving the planet. In the same vein, the Conference urged States that have not then ratified the international conventions issued to this end to do so.

The Conference's first session (Jeddah, Kingdom of Saudi Arabia: June 2002) was marked by such important recommendations and documents it issued as **the General Framework for Sustainable Development in the Islamic World, the Islamic Declaration on Sustainable Development, and the Environment Challenges in the Muslim World**, in addition to the Final Communiqué of the conference.

The **General framework of the Islamic Agenda for Sustainable Development** and the **Islamic Declaration on Sustainable Development** were accepted as background documents of the World Summit on Sustainable Development (WSSD) in Johannesburg 2002. The document on sustainable development from the Islamic perspective, which was issued by the conference, stressed the following:

- Calling for a fair world order;
- Fostering the role of the UN agencies and providing an environment conducive to concrete partnerships;
- Establishing a fair world trade system to supersede the existing loan system which has exhausted the resources of peoples across the world;
- Urging the international community to deter practices and policies harmful to the environment and man.

These recommendations and commitments provided operational guidelines for the Islamic bloc to follow in international and regional forums on the environment.

### **3- The Second Islamic Conference of Environment Ministers: laying the ground for inter-Islamic cooperation on issues pertaining to the environment and sustainable development**

The Second Islamic Conference of Environment Ministers (Jeddah, Kingdom of Saudi Arabia: December 2006), held on the theme "**Environment Protection and Sustainable Development towards Building a Secure Future**", under the high patronage of the Custodian of the Two Holy Mosques, King Abdullah Bin Abdulaziz, issued several resolutions and recommendations which provided the ground for inter-Islamic cooperation and set appropriate mechanisms for materializing it.

The second session of the Conference was marked by the launching of the preparation of a set of strategies, programmes and executive action plans. ISESCO was commissioned to supervise the devising of those documents and see to their implementation, in cooperation with the Member States and relevant regional and international organizations. **ISESCO's activities** in this regard covered the following areas:

#### **- Water Resources Management:**

In this regard, the Conference invited the Member States to further cooperate with the Organization so as to develop water resources management mechanisms and improve the action of the relevant institutions and bodies, taking into account Members States' needs, priorities and general policies.

#### **- Environment Protection, Health and Population Education:**

With respect to those issues, the Conference called upon the General Directorate to double efforts in the fields of environment protection, health and population education, in coordination and consultation with the competent national, regional and international bodies.

#### **- Renewable Energy:**

In this context, the Conference stressed the need to devote further attention to the issues of renewable energies, and to foster their utilization in the Member States in the vital fields and for development purposes.

#### **- Broad Lines of the Draft Strategy for Sustainable Development in the Islamic World:**

In this area, the Conference invited the Director General to draw up a draft strategy for sustainable development in the Islamic world together with its implementation mechanisms, and to refer it to the third session of the Islamic Conference of Environment Ministers. It also called upon the Member States to provide ISESCO with their national plans and reference strategies in this connection.

**- General Framework on the Programme on Natural Disasters Management:**

The Conference adopted this document prepared by ISESCO, and called upon it to draw up field programmes and activities for the benefit of Members States concerned by the dangers of natural disasters, and to provide technical assistance to them to address those dangers, within the framework of ISESCO's action plan and within the limits of the resources available, in cooperation with the relevant regional and international institutions.

**- The Islamic Environment Network:**

The participants adopted the document on the Project of Establishing the Islamic Environment Network, which was submitted by the General Presidency of Meteorology and Environment in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, and invited the Member States and national, regional and international bodies to materially and technically support the Network's programmes and activities, and to provide facilitations for the Network to help it discharge its mission.

**- Establishing a Specialized Islamic Body for the Environment:**

Given the importance of the Project and its related formalities and studies and pending all that, the Conference decided to establish an executive bureau for the environment.

The second session of the Conference closed with the announcement of the **Jeddah Commitments for Sustainable Development**.

**4- The third Islamic Conference of Environment Ministers: completion of the organizational structure and materialization of the strategy into programmes of action and leading projects**

The Islamic Conference of Environment Ministers completed its organizational structure on the occasion of its third session held in Rabat, Kingdom of Morocco, in October 2008, under the high patronage of His Majesty King Mohamed VI. In this connection, the Conference elected an Executive Bureau entrusted with the reinforcement and follow-up of the resolutions of the previous sessions of the Conference, as well as standing for the Muslim world's causes in the regional and international forums and conferences dedicated to sustainable development. The Bureau's mission also includes enhancing inter-Islamic solidarity to help Islamic countries address environment protection and rise to such enormous challenges facing many of them as climate change, depletion of natural resources, poverty and other relevant concerns.

**- Mission of the Islamic Executive Bureau for Environment:**

The Conference set up the Islamic Executive Bureau for Environment to coordinate environmental policies and strategies, and to follow up the actions, initiatives and resolutions adopted by the Islamic Conference of Environment Ministers. The Conference placed the Bureau under the presidency of His Royal Highness Prince Turki bin Nasser bin Abdulaziz, President of the first and second sessions of the Conference, and

General President of Meteorology and Environment in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia. It also entrusted ISESCO with ensuring the General Secretariat of the Bureau in its Permanent Headquarters in Rabat. In the same vein, the Islamic Development Bank and the Arab, Islamic and international donors were called upon to provide adequate support to the Bureau, and invited ISESCO Director General to have the statutes and internal regulations of the Bureau drawn up.

#### **- Establishment of the Islamic Environment Information Centre:**

The Conference adopted the document prepared in this connection by the General Presidency of Meteorology and Environment in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia. It also called on relevant institutions to cooperate with the Centre (Kingdom of Saudi Arabia) and provide it with the necessary information, data and statistics in order to facilitate exchange of expertise and experience in this field.

In a bid to ensure continuity and efficiency of the Islamic Conference of Environment Ministers, the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia allocated a generous budget of US\$ 1,000,000 (one million US dollars) for the convening of each of the sessions of the conference and the Islamic Executive Bureau for Environment. In addition, the conference was a suitable opportunity for the experts in the Islamic world to examine climate change issues that adversely affect sustainable development in Muslim countries.

## **II. Major achievements of the Islamic Conference of Environment throughout its three sessions:**

### **1. Environment and sustainable development strategies:**

The following documents are the major achievements of the Conference in the field of environment and sustainable development:

- **Islamic World and Sustainable Development: Specificities and Challenges:**

This document, which was contributed to the Second World Summit on Sustainable Development held in Johannesburg, in August 2002, features a number of cooperation fields and reviews environment issues in Islamic countries based on economic, environmental and social pointers. It also floats proposals to activate them as part of joint Islamic action.

- **Jeddah Commitments for Sustainable Development:**

The second Islamic Conference of Environment Ministers which was held under the high patronage of the Custodian of the Two Holy Mosques, King Abdullah bin Abdulaziz Al-Saud, in Jeddah, Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, in December 2006, adopted the Jeddah Commitments for Sustainable Development which set forth the sustainable development goals of the Islamic world and the means to achieve them at the various human, economic and environmental levels.

• **General Framework for Sustainable Development in the Islamic World:**

The Third Islamic Conference of Environment Ministers, which was held at ISESCO headquarters, in Rabat, adopted the revised version of the General Framework for Sustainable Development in the Islamic World. It also invited international and regional specialized institutions to cooperate with ISESCO in implementing the General Framework of Sustainable Development in the Islamic World. This document focused on the following:

\* Formulating a common, integrated Islamic strategy for sustainable development through:

- Fostering the efforts dedicated to the promotion of peace and security;
- Combating illiteracy, poverty and unemployment and improving the quality of life for Muslim peoples;
- Improving and expanding the scope of health services;
- Developing educational services and supporting capacities in the field of education and technology transfer;
- Supporting the contribution of women, the youth and civil society to sustainable development;
- Broadening the base of democracy and participation in decision-making;
- Preserving and rationalizing the use of water resources;
- Preserving soil, land and biodiversity;
- Protecting oceans, seas and coastal environment;
- Preserving ecosystems;
- Adhering to international conventions on combating desertification and on biodiversity;
- Taking interest in the quality of air;
- Encouraging production and sustainable consumption;
- Updating and enforcing special legislation.

The programme seeks to achieve a set of objectives through national- or joint Islamic action-oriented activities and projects, namely:

- Building capacities to achieve sustainable development in the Islamic world;
- Fostering technical and institutional cooperation among Muslim countries in order to provide an open and suitable economic system;
- Transferring debts and their ensuing interests towards funding sustainable development projects;
- Providing a favourable Islamic environment for investment;
- Developing educational curricula that accommodate the objectives of sustainable development and the requirements of the labour market;
- Promoting Islamic cooperation for optimum utilization of shared waters;

- Developing and implementing joint projects on agricultural production and food security;
- Supporting the promotion of sustainable consumption patterns.

## 2. Thematic programmes:

### • Programme on the Promotion of Renewable Energy in the Islamic Countries and its implementation mechanisms

Energy is a key and determining factor for any economic and social development. It is also an urgent necessity for vital services. However, the dependence and greater reliance on fossil energy in the last century might have adverse effects on the future of the planet. Climate change and global warming during the last years and their devastating impact are but manifestations of the excessive and irrational use of traditional energy sources. This, added to the soaring prices of this energy in the international markets and its increasingly shrinking world stock, has led the international community to promote the use of new and renewable energy.

Being aware of the vital importance of renewable energy sources, the Third Islamic Conference of Environment Ministers held in Rabat, in October 2008, adopted the "Action Programme on the Promotion of Renewable Energy in the Islamic Countries", with focus on the following:

- Promoting education, capacity building and technical and scientific training in the field of renewable energy in the Islamic world countries;
- Establishing centres in the Islamic world to exchange information and expertise in this field among Member States;
- Developing markets, improving infrastructure and promoting investment in renewable energy in Member States;
- Facilitating procedures for funding renewable energy projects and providing incentives to reduce capital costs and settlement durations;
- Benefiting from funding mechanisms such as the "clean development mechanism" (CDM) and the "carbon market".

### • General Framework of the Programme on Natural Disasters Management:

This programme has been devised to address extreme natural catastrophes and climate phenomena which the Islamic countries are suffering from. These natural phenomena cause heavy material and human losses, thus thwarting the sustainable development efforts made in these countries. The action programme came to put forward a practical and concrete plan for promotion of cooperation between Islamic countries with the view to mitigate the risks of these disasters and devise a general framework to counter them and reduce their impact. The major axes of this programme include:

- To detect and assess risks;
- To effect protection, reduce exposition to risks, mitigate the repercussions, develop management systems and draw up emergency plans;



- To support training in the fields of intervention, detection, protection, awareness-raising and communication;
- To intervene through organizing rescue operations and finding forms for Islamic cooperation and solidarity.

The programme put forward a number of practical activities aimed to enhance joint Islamic action namely:

- Strengthening the legislative aspect through setting an appropriate legal framework at the level of OIC Member States;
- Strengthening the financial aspect through setting up a fund for implementing the Strategy for Reducing Natural and Man-made Disaster Risks;
- Strengthening the scientific aspect through creating an observatory at the regional level for monitoring natural and technological disaster risks;
- Carrying out awareness-raising and communication activities;
- Providing mechanisms for detection, control and early warning;
- Strengthening international and regional cooperation.

#### • **Climate Change**

The Third conference devoted a special attention to climate change as it was held under the theme "**Towards Mitigating the Impact of Climate Change in Islamic States**". On the sidelines of the conference, a round-table was organized on the same topic and saw the participation of experts from the Member States. A number of recommendations and approaches were approved to adapt to this phenomenon and work towards mitigating its impact on the Islamic world.

### **3. Leading projects**

#### • **Islamic Environmental Information Centre**

The Second Islamic Conference of Environment Ministers (Jeddah, Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, 13-15 December 2006) adopted the project on the establishment of the Islamic Environmental Information Centre in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia. The centre is aimed to:

- Provide environmental information;
- Establish scientific bases to assist decision makers in developing strategies to reduce adverse effects on the environment;
- Safeguard natural resources;
- Firmly entrench the principle of sustainable environment in the Islamic countries.

In this sense, the General Presidency of Meteorology and Environment in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, jointly with a number of leading international expertise houses, conducted a study to identify the means to collect, process, store, retrieve and present environmental information and data. The Islamic Environment Information Centre will have as a core mission to:



- Fulfill local, regional and international environmental requirements (through contribution toward introducing, discussing, carrying out and testing environmental policies and relevant international conventions).
- Shore up sustainable development principles and orientations, integrate the concept of the environment into the national and regional policies, provide information services, and enforce the environmental management system.
- Contribute to entrenching environmental safety rules at the national, regional and international levels, through providing relevant data for decision-makers as well as scientific research centres, universities, and other executive and operating bodies.

#### • Islamic Academy for Environment and Sustainable Development

The Third Islamic Conference of Environment Ministers was marked by a royal speech in which His Majesty King Mohammed VI of Morocco asked the Conference to consider setting up **an Islamic Academy for the Environment and Sustainable Development**. The underlying purpose, His Majesty stressed, would be to help increase research works, promote experience sharing, and upgrade skills via training programmes.

The Conference's members welcomed His Majesty's speech as a key document. They also stressed that ISESCO will undertake to examine means to translate into action the royal proposal concerning the establishment of an Islamic Academy for the Environment and Sustainable Development, and refer it to the conference in its subsequent session.

## 4. ISESCO's achievements

### • Renewable energies

The Islamic Conference of Environment Ministers, being concerned with renewable energies, has commissioned ISESCO to dedicate, under its short and long term plans, a programme to encourage and promote renewable energy use.

Accordingly, ISESCO has been working in earnest to introduce and encourage renewable energy applications. Several programmes have been devised and implemented to this end.

In the same vein, ISESCO held various conferences, symposia, seminars, and training sessions at the national, regional and international levels. It has also implemented countless programmes in association with such regional and international stakeholders as the Arab League Environment and Population Department, UNESCO, UNEP, World Renewable Energy Network (WREN), ALECSO, the Intergovernmental Agency of La Francophonie, and the World Islamic Call Society (WICS).

These activities include:

- World Congresses on Renewable Energy in collaboration with WREN.
- International Conference on Renewable Energy and Climate Change Challenges (Tripoli, Libya, May 2008).

- International Symposium on the Use of Photovoltaic Systems in Buildings (Jakarta, Indonesia, 2007).
- Regional Experts' Meeting on Renewable Energy Strategy and Energy Conditions in Arab Countries (Jeddah, Saudi Arabia, June 2008).

Such international and regional events have provided the opportunity to develop new relevant policies, increase energy use in the Muslim world, and discuss future trends and plans in this connection. They also allowed for learning about new scientific and technological developments, and exchanging expertise and best practices in relation to the use of renewable energies. Also significant, these events brought together a host of scientists from all parts of the world, along with heads of state, energy ministers, heads of a number of specialized organizations, and major renewable energy companies. In addition, several awards, such the prestigious International Leadership Award, were given to prominent scientists, in recognition of their outstanding efforts in this area. ISESCO also issued and widely circulated several books and materials dealing with various issues relating to renewable energy.

As part of its anti-poverty efforts, particularly in rural and remote areas, ISESCO supported renewable energy projects aimed at encouraging and promoting the use of low-cost energies (solar energy, biomass energy and wind energy).

ISESCO continues promoting renewable energy use through launching programmes to assess and meet rural and remote populations' needs in terms of renewable energy use, and conducts small income-generating projects in rural and remote areas, thus contributing towards improving living conditions, reducing poverty, and curbing rural migration.

Being aware of the challenges of energy security in Muslim countries, ISESCO continues enlarging scope for its renewable energy programmes. Special emphasis has been laid on developing educational programmes, raising public awareness about the importance and vital necessity of energy sources for the future of the Muslim world, holding international and regional meetings on renewable energy and sustainable development. In this regard, it also supports international efforts devoted to this end, and promotes cooperation among Member States.

#### • **Water resources management**

Water is vital to the stability and progress of Muslim countries. It is essential for food security and almost all human activities, the more so since excessive consumption and pollution of water resources only impact on water supplies. The alteration, in number and quality, of water supplies has been aggravated by climate change, as well as by prolonged and recurrent drought in many countries.

Realizing the cardinal importance of this issue for Muslim countries, and subscribing to the Jeddah Commitments and the Islamic Declaration on Sustainable Development, ISESCO has, under its second medium-term plan (2001-2009), laid special focus on water resources. In this connection, it has expanded its programmes and activities regarding water resources management and enhanced community education on water safety and conservation. Moreover,

ISESCO developed mechanisms for the implementation of the Strategy on the Management of Water Resources in the Islamic Countries, which was adopted by the Tenth Islamic Summit Conference. These mechanisms were approved by the Second Islamic Conference of Environment Ministers.

Two important conferences carried out in this respect were following:

- International Conference on Integrated Water Management and Sustainable Development (Marrakech, Morocco, May 2006). The Conference discussed climate change effects on water resources and the role of new technologies (such as remote sensing) in water resources management.
- International Workshop on Water Resources Management (Cairo, Egypt, May 2006). The workshop aimed to provide training in water preservation and management techniques to reduce water loss.

#### • Environment Protection

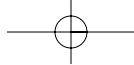
The environment, health and population education are major concerns in today's world, and a main component of sustainable development. Muslim countries, like the rest of the world, have accorded utmost importance to the issues of environment, health and population, based on the Islamic precepts. In this regard, and in accordance with the resolutions and recommendations of the Islamic Conference of Environment Ministers, most notably as regards the **General Framework on Sustainable Development in the Muslim World** and the **Islamic Declaration on Sustainable Development**, ISESCO worked out a set of projects and programmes in these fields under its medium-term plan for 2001-2009.

Such projects and programmes are aimed to:

- Increase awareness about environmental, health and population issues.
- Enhance environmental, health and population education in formal and non-formal education institutions.
- Highlight the Islamic perspective on environmental, health and population issues.
- Promote international cooperation and partnership between Member States to increase expertise sharing and encourage pioneering initiatives in this area.
- Foster field knowledge and skills, and channel new technologies into environment preservation as well as health and population sensitization.

The report gives a brief account of the strenuous, continuous efforts made over seven years to raise the Muslim world high among nations and steer it towards achieving a better future for our planet earth, based on the immaculate teachings of Islam.

Completing the formative structure of the Islamic Conference of Environment Ministers with such relevant implementation mechanisms as the Islamic Environment Information Centre and the Islamic Academy for the Environment and Sustainable Development will certainly provide necessary tools to better rise to today's world challenges in the fields of environment and sustainable



development. No less important in this regard are the implementation of programmes and activities adopted as part of the General Framework for Sustainable Development in the Islamic World, the mission assigned to the Islamic Executive Bureau for Environment, the convening of the Islamic Environment Ministers' Conference on a regular basis, and the support pledged by the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia for the Conference.

