



The address of His Highness the Kuwaiti Prime Minister at the 3rd

World Islamic Economic Forum- Kuala Lumpur

28 May 2007

**Mr. Chairman,
Ladies and Gentlemen,**

Assalamu Alaikum Wa Rahmatullahi Wa Barakatuh

I am pleased to be present amongst you today bearing a message of affection from the people of Kuwait, who are grateful to you all for the support it received during the occupation carried out by the former Iraqi regime. It is an unprecedented event between modern Islamic states.

Having left the past behind us, Kuwait has become by the grace of Allah, and the support of our friends, a country where its society is striding towards comprehensive development and international cooperation, and working for peace. Nevertheless, past events have made us emphasise on cooperation between countries and resolve pending problems through dialogue.

The theme we shall be addressing: "Global Challenges-Innovative Partnerships" is a present day theme; it commands various ideological and practical challenges, since we are amid this international Islamic organization.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Without doubt, our peoples and peoples of the world are seeking a favourable deal between an old colonial history which diminished half a century ago and globalization which pervades the world today, spreading to villages and cities of the Islamic world and the third world, immersing them in advantages and disadvantages which seem contradictory. Yet, globalization somehow affects even Western and developing societies, it is a double track; if the Islamic world is unable to evade the West, then the West on the other hand, cannot isolate itself. We must all strike a balance between our joint interests, resulting in mutual benefits and in a healthy manner between both parties on the sidelines.

In this ever changing world, we as Islamic countries are in great need of creative inter-collaboration and constructive coordination with the wider world we inhabit, and which is no longer defined as a small village but rather a large construction, where residents are directly effected by the actions of one another, whether they be good or bad. Environmental global issues and climatic changes that impact us all are stark reminders that we live in one residential building



named the World. This globalized World may not prosper and develop without joint commitment between each country to cooperate and implement peace.

An additional effort is required of us as Muslims following the events of 11th of September 2001. It is an effort focused on refuting actions caused by a minority, who do not resemble the tolerance of Islam in any shape or form, nor the millions of Muslims with their worldwide representation of Islamic interpretations. However, global mass media still confuses the overall peace loving and peace seeking majority with a straying faction, consequently unsettling the global atmosphere and precipitating warm and cold wars even today. This has held back many of our countries from pursuing development aspirations they hoped for, and steered several Islamic countries into a dark tunnel and a despicable internal and external struggle.

Dear gathering,

I perceive five major challenges confronting us in Islamic countries, without downplaying other challenges. Some of our countries may face direct challenges, while others face indirect ones. Confronting these challenges and their consequences requires a conscious leadership which recognizes these challenges and innovative minds to transcend them.

The first challenge is to confront poverty which strikes many Islamic societies resulting in various deep-rooted problems which affect the social core and are difficult to remedy. Poverty is exacerbated either by lack of job opportunities and production, an increase in population, or as a result of rural to urban emigration due to the sparse job opportunities in the country and the desert regions. Reducing poverty levels and subsequently eliminating them is the chief concern of planners for development in the Islamic world. Poverty is also exacerbated by the imbalance in the population pyramid; while the industrialized societies are aging, the numbers of young people entering the work market is on the increase in our societies. Efforts to alleviate poverty in the Islamic world require three dimensional action; local societal efforts, efforts exerted by the state and of intra-cooperation efforts between us as Islamic countries. Combating poverty is amongst three issues that generations of our people who attained independence, dreamed of defeating. These issues are represented in problems of ignorance, diseases and poverty, however, poverty is an obvious antagonist of human dignity, as well as it being an enemy of internal and external security. Eliminating poverty is linked to finding productive job opportunities internally, allocating additional sums for investment in the infrastructure which drives development and widening the scope of economic exchange between Islamic countries. We are all exerting genuine and prompt efforts to facilitate the exchange of goods and services within the vast Islamic market that incorporates more than a billion people, which would ensure alleviating the burden of poverty in Islamic societies. In Kuwait, we are exerting



efforts along with other countries through development funds in order to activate productive work fields and investments in the infrastructure. However these efforts are on state levels which must be backed strongly by a shared partnership with the private sector whether it be in investment or the exchange of goods. Yet, the worse type of poverty is poverty of the mind.

This leads me to the second challenge; the importance of investing in education, training and scientific research. No doubt we all recognize the significance of human capital and how vital it is to invest in. Some Islamic countries have succeeded in this approach, which is evident in the progress and development achieved in Malaysia, it emanated from the fostering of education and training. Still, other Islamic countries have not yet adopted this approach, even though some have concentrated on quantity and missed out on the quality. A great deal of our education in Islamic countries produces two factions which are detached from reality; one in dissent with its society and is completely or partially estranged from it, the other opposes the age resisting all that is modern. Both have fallen by the wayside of true development and thrust their societies into the perils of disunity.

In the Arab world, which constitutes part of the Islamic world, with an estimated population of three hundred million, sixty percent of whom are incapable of reading or writing according to United Nations reports; any available education is in most cases, quantitative not qualitative. The problem of how to best utilize human capital is permanent in our Islamic region. Our countries face real challenges in this area and without confronting them with maximum effort; we shall miss out on great opportunities in today's world. Education is linked to the utilization of modern technology, and the means of communication and scientific research, the latter is either neglected or not recognized as a generator for development in a number of our countries. We must acknowledge that reconditioning the Muslim intellect is a huge challenge we all face, it is no longer a purely cultural requirement but rather a priority to rehabilitate Muslim societies so that they may enter the modern era of technology. With a good, modern and contemporary education, it is possible to compete in all economic fields, thereby alleviating the burdens of deep-rooted poverty in some of our societies and verging on the righteous State incited by our tolerant faith. In some of our societies as is the case in the Gulf, we suffer from dependence on a single depleting source for national income illustrated in oil. With a good and modern education, we are able to diversify our sources of income in the long term and create better stability for our future generations.

The third challenge is political; in 1950, 25% of countries around the world could be identified as (democratic), rising to 40% in 1970. Today, statistics reveal that 62% of countries are (democratic). In spite of the different definitions of the concept of Democracy, it denotes in some form, the participation of people in determining their future and resolving their problems. Nevertheless, the third American president James Madison alluded to the notorious phrase: " Had every Athenian citizen been Socrates; every Athenian assembly would still have been a



mob", It is a phrase that reveals the difficulty of applying democracy in its representational sense which many Islamic countries face today. Yet the notion of integrity of rule and keeping a distance from corruption in ruling regimes has become a prerequisite for any sustainable development that achieves the aspirations of the people. The challenge we confront is how to apply democracy without stalling the surge of development and without exploiting it in the interest of a minority on the one hand, or subjecting the practice to overbidding on the other.

The fourth challenge is our relations as Muslims with the rest of the world, as previously mentioned; today's world is small and is becoming smaller by the day. An excellent idea has been presented by Muslim leaders which is the (Dialogue of Civilizations) instead of the (Clash of Civilizations), although most of the time we are faced with a media that projects some of us as being intent on conflict rather than on dialogue. Emphasizing the exchange of ideas and dialogue is a feature of all civilizations and the cost is much lower in dialogue than in conflict. Unfortunately, to this day no effort has been achieved in amending the Universal Declaration of Human Rights to include (duties) besides (rights). Hence, from this podium, and before this distinguished international gathering, I call on you to consider a universal declaration of human duties towards mankind. This could instigate international cooperation to resolve pending problems and participate in the fruits of development. In recent years Muslims have been linked to various accusations and have had the noose tightened around them for merely being Muslims, and while we understand the importance of national security for every country, we must caution against over generalization incriminating individuals without evidence, on the basis of race, colour and faith. This is not only irrational, but also impractical. The decisive factor here is to propagate the values of tolerance and acceptance. Confusion transpired following the events of September eleventh 2001, confusing the safety of the State with the rights of individuals. It is a matter that we hope will be redressed in the near future for the sake of alliance and cooperation of cultures. We also call on the world media to clarify this disparity to achieve collective prosperity.

Perhaps the fifth and final challenge that I find disconcerting is the challenge of modern administration; although it is directly linked with rehabilitation of human capital, yet it is more profound. Besides its concern with rehabilitating human capital, and its commitment to a distinguished and qualitative education, it denotes the administration of available resources amongst and between nations.

An insight into the Islamic World had pervaded that we do not lack capital, whether it is from local production of diverse sources or foreign investments. We lack the ability to preserve wealth in a positive manner; that is employing the wealth in production and facilitating its benefits. Studies have shown that most of us retain wealth in a shameful way, and that unproductive bureaucratic obstacles impede its investment; for example, to operate a shirts production



factory in some of our countries requires a licence, signatures and approvals, while in modern economies all these stumbling blocks are eliminated making procedures easier, simpler and processed in minimum time. Bureaucracy also hinders interaction of market forces between and amongst Islamic countries, disrupting the launch of private sector dealings. If some bureaucratic obstacles which obstruct inter-exchange of capital, labour and goods amongst this vast market can be eliminated, then the economic drive would diminish, sparing a great deal of suffering which nations complain from.

Before I conclude, there remains a final point I wish to raise, which is the leadership. Extraordinarily, the Arabic language draws together the (leadership) and the (will). In spite of the availability of development potentials, the shortcomings in employing these potentials stems from the leadership and the will. Leadership is not in the attainability of traditional requirements known only to the leadership, but rather with the ability to envision, innovate and link what is beneficial here and what is possible there, and between what is required and what is commended. It is also acquiring notions internally and externally, innovating in creating opportunities and searching for the appropriate remedy for the wound, not using prescriptions for various wounds. As well as having the will to accomplish amongst the leading personalities and the people.

Leadership is, as the military say, the decisive factor, between victory and defeat. It recognizes the precise needs of its society and the appropriate timing to proceed in social and economic projects. The leadership understands that development is an economic outcome and not a fixed principal, with instruments for every society and every environment.

Nevertheless, I conclude, brothers and sisters, by stating that we all need to exchange experiences, particularly successful developmental experiences first between us, then between us and the wider world. We, thanks be to Allah, have successful experiences whether in fighting hunger, raising modern education, human investment, political reform, our relations with others, democratic experiences or overcoming bureaucratic obstacles. The Muslim intellect has produced creativity in all this and more. We must all exchange these experiences and technology easily permits this. We confirm our belief in resolving pending global issues peacefully, whatever effort we exert, it is less costly than wars and destruction; distancing our countries and peoples and peoples of the world as much as possible from conflict.

This is my view which I wished to share with you briefly, hoping that we are able to implement points of agreement at this historic meeting.

It is a personal pleasure and the pleasure of the State of Kuwait to extend an invitation by His Highness the Amir Sheikh Sabah Al-Ahmed Al-Jaber Al-Sabah to hold the 2008 forum in Kuwait. The government of Kuwait will exert all efforts (Insha Allah) in order to make this prospective meeting a success, in



cooperation with the forum's secretariat. I am hopeful that this invitation will be accepted.

Wassalamu Alikum Wa Rahmatullahi Wa Barakatuh.