

**STATEMENT  
BY  
AMBASSADOR ATTA EL MANAAN BAKHIT  
ASSISTANT SECRETARY GENERAL  
FOR HUMANITARIAN AFFAIRS  
ORGANISATION OF ISLAMIC COOPERATION  
JEDDAH – KINGDOM OF SAUDI ARABIA**

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Honourable Minister, Excellencies,

Distinguished guests and participants,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

I am greatly honored to participate in this important gathering organized under the auspices of the Norwegian Refugee Council which has been very dynamic in upholding the principles of humanitarian action in its daily activities to alleviate the plight of vulnerable and needy people, be they refugees, displaced, etc.

Please allow me to express on my own behalf and on behalf of the Secretary General of the Organization of Islamic Cooperation, Prof. Ekmeleddin Ihsanoglu, our sincere gratitude to Mrs. Elisabeth Rasmussen and to the NRC for convening this meeting and extending an invitation to the Organization of Islamic Cooperation (OIC), which for those who are not familiar with our Organization, is an international body grouping 57 Member States across the globe.

I sincerely do hope that our one day deliberations on the principles of humanitarian activities will have far reaching positive impact on the work of all humanitarian practitioners who are faced with so many challenges in discharging their complex, dangerous but self rewarding duty which is to mitigate, respond to, and assist people in need in the aftermath of either man-made or natural disasters.

We concur that the cornerstone of humanitarian activity is solely based on various principles, the most salient are humanity, impartiality, independence and neutrality. These are the four cornerstones on which majority of stakeholders relay.

These principles are faced with stark realities and from time to time suffer both from internal and external challenges which end up blurring the vision of beneficiaries or other stakeholders.

How could we uphold the principles of humanity, impartiality, independence and neutrality in testing times? Are these principles in themselves final, all-inclusive or can we add more principles and values to our joint humanitarian endeavors?

How could we blend elements of foreign policy, diplomacy and military with humanitarian aid policy without jeopardizing our own perspective?

Could we still work in harmony with actors who have different aims, agenda and values? Is a clash avoidable?

In the ensuing discourse, I will try to dwell over these questions, and shed light on some genuine perceptions facing the growing humanitarian community in the OIC sphere and taken lessons from the experience of the OIC Humanitarian Coalition for Somalia.

It is indeed true that the contribution of OIC Charities in building the structures of the international humanitarian work, its jargon, terminologies and guiding principles, is still limited. Nevertheless, this community has deep knowledge on the ground, a strong spirit of perseverance, patience and a real determination to develop and sustain.

While adhering to the well-known humanitarian principles, we believe that the list of principles can be longer. Principles are important in guiding a committed humanitarian action. We believe that the questions related to the interpretation and application of humanitarian principles are pertinent, specifically in complex crises. Independence of humanitarian action faces a real challenge when humanitarian actors are obliged to work in adverse environments or in an area where the conflicting parties impose their own agenda which is completely different.

Notwithstanding in such situations which we often encounter, you are obliged to discharge your noble mission of saving lives, sticking to the humanitarian principles, without jeopardizing the security of your personnel or the security of the aid recipients themselves. Other areas that put our principles at stake, is the relationship with donors. This question is pertinent for small-scale NGOs or big ones alike. Sometimes when funding is crucially needed, and donors insist on their own priorities and way of doing things, humanitarian actors are torn between the need for funds to help deprived populations and the need to uphold the humanitarian principles *per se*. In such situations, who has the right to trace the thin red line?

In this context, I believe that one of the great challenges to our humanitarian principles is the relationship between the humanitarian actors themselves. The emerging organizations in the OIC countries believe that the international humanitarian organizations from the developed countries monopolize all the cards of game. They have access to huge funds, qualified personnel, deep knowledge of humanitarian terminologies, often created by them, and therefore, they

impose the rules of the game. The OIC charities on their part, argue that they have full knowledge of the ground, they understand the complications of the local environment, hence, indispensable for any humanitarian activities in their areas.

Consequently, to avoid all these complications and hindrance to our humanitarian work, there is need for a large and all-inclusive dialog between international NGOs and international donors, and OIC Charities, so that together we come to a clear understanding, and bring more order and harmony within our humanitarian community. Of course, this debate will further help us maximize accountable, effective and safe humanitarian aid in the Muslim World.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

As you know, the events of 9/11 have had a huge negative impact on the humanitarian organizations in the OIC sphere. Many of them have been accused of terrorism and mixing cards, these unfounded allegations, unfortunately, had negatively affected all the humanitarian work in the Muslim world and beyond. This has taken us a long time to recover. I, however, note that many Muslim charities managed to overcome these difficulties, they came out more powerful, organized, efficient and determined more than ever to pursue their noble mission to serve humanity.

Notwithstanding the positive developments, however, we are still worried that the ongoing humanitarian crises in Syria may entail another crises for the Muslim charities. Due to the urgent need of millions of Syrian for humanitarian aid and the reluctance of donors, many NGOs from OIC countries are working now across Syria, including in areas where access is impossible or even dangerous, they endeavor to fill the growing gap in provision of relief services. The problem is that in the current context of Syria where situation on the ground is confused, the normal rules of due diligence and receipts for expenditures cannot be applied efficiently, international charities and donors refuse to work with local organizations, leaving them alone to face their destiny. I seize this opportunity to urge the international community, donors and INGOs to help these charities so that they can better serve the suffering Syrians in a principled way. We should think of relaxing the rules in this humanitarian crisis as we did for Somalia in 2011. We need to work together to maximize safe aid and safe access to millions of suffering Syrians. Thus we address the fears of Muslim charities that the legitimate humanitarian action they are doing today for Syria will not result in investigations and censure tomorrow.

On the other hand I am pleased to announce that the OIC as an international organization has for the first time exerted real effort to engage the civil society at large, and humanitarian

community in particular, to include them in the structure of the OIC. Recently the council of Foreign Ministers during its Conference held in Djibouti, has adopted the Rules allowing the humanitarian NGOs to get consultative status in the OIC, As per this resolutions The OIC will establish a special office for NGOs within the Headquarters, and elect a bureau for NGOs. This important new development will be very positive for the relations between Member States and NGOs and will help us to bridge the huge gap between the two entities.

Last but not least, I believe that the betterment of the human being is the common objective for both humanitarian and diplomats. That is our end target, but we serve with different tools and principles. Therefore the real test for our humanitarian principles and values is whether they positively change the live of the people or not.

Independence is a prime principle for humanitarian, do we really make the aid recipient independent in the shortest time possible, or we make them eternal aid dependants?

Unfortunately many humanitarian actors think that if recipients became independent their organizations will close up. In places like Somalia, Yemen, Darfur, living in a camp supported by organizations became normal practice, while it was a shame few years ago, is this serving our principles? The practice of making refugees or displaced aid dependent hindered the smooth transition from relief to development.

These are some genuine problems we and many of you encountered in the field, they are real threats to our humanitarian principles, we may not find a final remedy for them today, but knowing the problem is the first step to find out the solutions.

I thank you for your kind attention.