

New era of solidarity and cooperation

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Turkey hosted the 13th Organisation of Islamic Cooperation (OIC) Summit from April 10 to 15. The OIC has 57 member states, the second biggest international entity after the United Nations (UN).

This time around, only 50 states sent their representatives (in some cases, their heads of state and/or heads of government). Founded in 1969 in the wake of several incidents in Jerusalem, in particular affecting the al-Aqsa Mosque, OIC has permanent delegations at the UN and European Union. Before June 28, 2011, it was known as the Organisation of Islamic Conference.

The summit was preceded by a foreign ministers' meeting and before that a senior officials' preparatory meeting, where the draft of a final communiqué and the Istanbul Declaration was being worked out. In his closing speech, Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan said Muslims should be able to solve their own problems without resorting to outside assistance.

"Why are we expecting others to solve the problems of Muslims? We should be able to solve our own problems."

On terrorism, Erdogan said: "Why do Muslim nations suffer from terrorism the most? Who is behind this terror? Which countries stand behind this issue? This needs to be addressed." O

n sectarian conflicts in the region, Erdogan said there were provocations that Muslims should avoid: "We are not Shia or Sunni or something else. We have only one religion."

Repeating that Islam is a religion of peace, Erdogan condemned Daesh's (Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant) expansion in the region.

"Daesh develops its attacks continuously in the region and they lead to destruction with the claim of doing it in the name of Islam. They have nothing to do with Islam."

He said OIC member states needed to reaffirm their solidarity and work together in resolving the conflicts facing them.

Many Muslim countries were in crisis because their natural resources continued to be exploited by others.

"Eighty per cent of Iraqi oil reserves are shared by non-Iraqis who invaded Iraq," he said, and the same thing could be said also for Libya. Earlier on, in his message to the summit (read by Moroccan Minister of Foreign Affairs and Cooperation Salaheddine Mezouar), King Mohammed VI of Morocco said, inter alia, he supported the call by Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas for the convening of an

international peace conference to end Israeli occupation, as a major step to finding a just and comprehensive peace settlement, based on the two-state solution.

The king supported the French initiative aimed at bringing the Palestinian and Israeli parties back to the negotiating table, in order to put an end to the Israeli occupation of Palestinian land, following a clear timetable.

He said OIC members should take every effort necessary “to support our Palestinian brothers, to enable them to establish a Palestinian state, within the June 4, 1967 borders”.

The theme of this year’s summit is “Unity and Solidarity for Justice and Peace”.

At the conclusion of the summit, the inevitable question was: “What has been achieved this time around?” In tangible terms, three important documents were issued — the 27-page OIC Programme of Action 2016-2025, the five-page Istanbul Declaration and the 33-page final communiqué. These official documents are available online.

Some observers feel the only significant outcome of the summit was the decision to create an Istanbul-based counterterrorism centre (the Islamic Interpol), a significant move because counterterrorism efforts by western countries have become unpopular. A fight against terrorism and extremism led by Islamic countries will have greater legitimacy. Cooperation between this new centre and other international institutions will be more effective than the efforts of individual countries.

On the actual outcome of the summit, differing views were expressed by political analysts in the region.

For Burhanettin Duran, a political scientist at an Ankara-based foundation, the Istanbul summit “has reinvigorated expectations for opening a new era of cooperation and solidarity in the Middle East”.

However, others were not so enthusiastic. For Gokhan Bacik, professor of international relations at Ipek University, Ankara, it was just another typical OIC summit: “Big words. No concrete outcome... a pattern for almost 40 years.”

For Kemal Ozturk, another Turkish analyst, there has not been any serious development.

“Without an agreement among Turkey, Saudi Arabia, Iran, Egypt and Indonesia, nothing will come out of OIC.”

Ozturk said everybody was aware of problems among these “heavyweight countries” in the OIC. There are also other (and more serious) problems.

Although both Saudi King Salman bin Abdulaziz Al Saud and Iranian President Hassan Rouhani were present, the two countries have opposing views on regional issues, especially in Syria and Yemen. Attempts by Erdogan to mediate between the two countries at the summit failed.

Differences between Turkey (the host country) and Egypt (the holder of previous term presidency) have also complicated efforts at the summit.

Egyptian President Abdel Fattah el-Sisi skipped the summit and, instead, sent his Foreign Minister Sameh Shoukry to the event for the handover ceremony of the chairmanship to Turkey. After delivering his speech, Shoukry immediately left the venue, without waiting to hear the address by Erdogan.

I have read all three documents produced at the conclusion of the summit. They seem to be an impressive road map for OIC's future. The question is whether the 57 member states can all pull together to see these future plans become reality.

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