

**AWARD CEREMONY FOR HERITAGE MINUTES SHORT
VIDEOS CONTEST 2020**

30 March 2021, 14:00 Turkey Time

Opening Statement of H.E. Mr. Nebil DABUR

Director General of SESRIC

بِسْمِ اللّٰهِ الرَّحْمٰنِ الرَّحِیْمِ

**H.E. Mr. Taha Ayhan, President of Islamic Cooperation Youth
Forum (ICYF),**

Distinguished Participants, Dear Sisters and Brothers

Very Good Day to All of You **السلام علیکم ورحمة الله وبركاته**

It is a great pleasure for me to join you today. I am delighted that SESRIC is a part of this Award Ceremony of the ICYF's Heritage Minutes Short Videos Contest.

I am thankful to ICYF for inviting me to this celebration of the creativity and enthusiasm that Muslim Youth have shown for their culture and heritage. ICYF, particularly H. E. Mr. Taha Ayhan and his team, have done a great job in organizing this Contest and the Award Ceremony.

I would like also to extend my appreciation to all the young Muslims who participated in this contest. Looking at the breadth and scope of the submissions made for this Contest has reaffirmed my trust in Muslim youth's potential to protect and promote Islamic heritage in the future.

Distinguished Participants, Dear Sisters and Brothers,

Islamic civilization is one of the oldest living civilizations in the world. Bringing together a diverse set of people, our collective history, culture, and heritage spans over centuries and across continents. In its 1400 years, Islamic heritage and culture have had a rich past. A past that introduced innovative methods of governance based on the religious principles of fairness and justice.

A past, which is popular with scientific and medical discoveries that are still relevant today. These are the very discoveries that are the foundation upon which the modern world has made unprecedented progress. In fact Muslim scholars like al-Khwarizmi, al-Farabi, Ibn Hayyan, Ibn Khaldun, Ibn Sina and countless others who laid the foundations for modern science and philosophy.

Islamic heritage also carries with it a lush legacy of urbanism and architecture. For almost a millennium, Islamic cities and cultural sites were some of the most impressive landmarks in the world. Cities such as Baghdad, Bukhara, Cordoba (قرطبة) Esfahan, Gharnata (غرناطة), Istanbul, Samarra, and Samarkand were the centers of civilizations – where language, arts, culture, and trade flourished.

As a matter of fact, many of the capital cities of modern times such Damascus, Cairo, Baghdad – that were all established from scratch by Islamic rulers – are lauded for their urban ingenuity to this day.

Architectural landmarks, such as Mazar-i-Shareef in Afghanistan, Sulemaniye Mosque in Istanbul, the Citadel of Aleppo, the Taj Mahal in Agra, and the Great Mosque of قرطبة are living testaments to the artistic prowess of Muslim architects. These landmarks, till date, exude splendor that symbolizes Islamic culture at its peak. At the same time, they are also an ode to Islamic philosophy, nature, aesthetics, and religious symbolism.

Since the very beginning, our heritage has also emphasized the importance of a scholarly tradition of learning and teaching that is unparalleled. The University of Qarawiynn (القرويين) in Fez, Morocco, which was founded as a mosque by فاطمة الفهرية Fatima Al-Fahriya, is the world's oldest, and continually operational, educational institution.

Yet, even after having made numerous contributions to the advancement of mankind, Islamic heritage is not celebrated for its contributions to the world anymore. Today, Islamic culture and heritage is a victim of a smear campaign based on hatred, misconception, and xenophobia. People equate Islamic religious traditions and culture with violence and extremism – which is entirely misconstrued. And the most affected by this unfair hateful campaign are our youth.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Muslim youth is the key to a prosperous future of the Islamic world. Currently, Muslim youth from ages 15 to 24 make up for 28% of the world's total youth population. Islamic heritage belongs to all of these young Muslims. Yet, across the world, young Muslims – through no fault of their own – are relatively unaware of their rich historical heritage. This is because of multiple factors.

For one, there is a clear lack of visibility (conscious and unconscious) of Islamic heritage; the cultural, artistic, and scientific achievements from the ‘Golden Age of Islam’. If you look closely, there is also an inherent prejudice against Islamic scholars and artists – fuelled by a racial and ethnic bias. But most importantly, modernization – for all of its benefits – is transforming cultural beliefs and practices in the Muslim world, leading to the loss of cultural identity in Muslim youth.

What should we do in the face of such challenges?

My opinion is that we can tackle these challenges by empowering our young people. Muslim youth are agents of change. We know this. Our young people have the ability to be the protectors and the promoters of Islamic heritage.

If we provide our young people with the right opportunities to gain knowledge about their collective heritage and to, openly, celebrate their culture, they can promote tolerance and awareness. Tolerance and awareness are crucial for combatting negative misconceptions about Islam today.

Such opportunities will also enable them to re-introduce Islamic heritage in a positive way to the non-Islamic world, while simultaneously harmonizing modern thought with Islamic heritage so as to limit conflict and promote solidarity amongst civilizations.

Most importantly, empowering young people can enable them to make valuable contributions to their heritage, culture, art, and science. Contributions similar to those made in the ‘Golden Age of Islam’.

Distinguished Participants, Ladies and Gentlemen,

Before concluding, I would like to say that I really hope that this Contest will provide an additional momentum to empowering Muslim youth and re-acquainting them with our plentiful heritage. I hope that SESRIC's contribution to this Award Ceremony can raise awareness on this important subject, especially from the perspective of the OIC.

I would like to assure you that, as SESRIC, we will continue to support the efforts of ICYF towards promoting and enhancing the capacities of young people in OIC countries as well as facilitating intra-OIC cooperation in this important area.

Thank you for your kind attention. والسلام عليكم ورحمة الله