

Dear distinguished guests,

I will congratulate the representatives of the Organization of Islamic Cooperation, especially SESRIC to organize a workshop on “Exploring Tourism Potential of Al-Quds Al-Sherif City”. I congratulate them because, to talk about the tourism potential of Al Quds, where all three monotheistic religions come together is a very important matter.

Palestinians living in their own land, Palestinian refugees in the West Bank, Palestinian refugees who are living abroad and especially Palestinians who are living in the Gazastrip under severe embargos are facing extreme difficulties visiting the city of Al Quds. Maybe this workshop will be a starting point for the removal of these difficulties.

Personally, I hope that this workshop will be a platform to show the suffering tragedy of the Palestinian people to the State of Israel and to the international community.

The Israeli authorities should realize that their country becomes a “transit” country because of the situation in Syria and Iraq. This realization could initiate their effort to create a corridor between the Gulf States and Turkey and open the door for tourism in Al Quds.

I am convinced that this workshop will have a positive effect on Al Quds could being added to the visiting programs, such as Hajj and Umrah of the Turkish Directorate of Religious Affairs. Furthermore it can contribute to the goal of Israel to become a “transit” country.

### **Need of international regulation**

As a former minister and Turkey’s Coordinator for Economic and Social Affairs with Palestine for several years I would like to share some thoughts with you.

As is known, Palestine and Al Quds are one of the most problematic occupied territories in the world. But there are also a number of other countries such as the occupied territories of Azerbaijan.

I looked through a number of documents and asked people, who are responsible for the tourism in occupied territories, if there are any international supporting agreements about this particular branch. But i could not find anything.

I saw that the occupied territories need development of investment, facilitation, something which is protecting and supporting the rights of tourists in occupied

territories, a guideline of international regulation how occupying countries can offer facilitation.

Indeed, if thousands of Palestinians are in prison without being brought to court for years, there is no answer what a tourist, who is merely visiting Al Quds, could face if they would be detained by Israeli authorities. The most important goal of this workshop should be to reveal the needs of Al Quds and express it to the whole world.

Maybe after these efforts, the United Nations or similar international organizations could be mobilized to achieve serious results.

### **How it works under occupation**

I would like to direct my words to those who say there is no occupation of the Palestinian territories:

There is a political occupation in the Palestinian territories. After 1947 they could not establish a state, being sovereign, having their own army, having accurate and accepted national borders, a national constitution and improved internal and external policies such as adopting national economics and fiscal policies.

The essential feature of Israeli occupation is, to make a separation between Palestinians and Palestine and separate Palestinians from their land. This ensures the view that Palestinians are from another planet. That a member of the Knesset said, "We will continue our struggle until not only one Palestinian is left in this land" indicates a twisted view of the Palestinian people.

Recently Turkey and a huge number of members of the United Nation intensified their efforts to raise the Palestinian flag at the United Nation among all the other flags of the world. Unfortunately the UN Security council rejected to give Palestine the state status. My sincere prayer is that we can see a sovereign Palestinian state with East Al Quds as its capital in the near future.

Palestine is under economic and financial occupation. So, capital can't circulate freely. The goods can't circulate freely. Labor, power management and information cant circulate freely. Palestinians can't reach touristic spots freely.

They are faced obstacles in acquiring property and find money to make investments. All this observations also apply to foreign investors.

I would like to describe an incident I have experienced. A few years ago a friend was willing to invest fifty million dollars in Palestine. We made a very serious preliminary examination to establish a cement grinding facility but it couldn't be realized due to the obstacles I mentioned above. Ihsan Dođramacı, the late founder of the Bilkent University, wanted to build a large health complex in Israel, on the border to Palestine. He had made very serious efforts but it couldn't realized due to the obstacles mentioned before. A few years ago Turkey decided to send 30.000 police uniforms to Palestine. After Israeli General Staff examined the fabrics to the smallest buttons, it could not be delivered to the Palestinians.

I know that Condoleezza Rice, the former US Secretary of State at her visit in Gaza, spoke out against how products which should be exported and weighed less than 1 kg were controlled in a tedious bureaucratic process. It was about boxes of strawberries and how they were controlled in a way that damaged the products.

After the decision to withdraw Jewish business from industrial zone in Erez, Turkey and Turkish investors took the responsibilities to establish an industrial zone there. Former Turkish Foreign Minister Abdullah Gül visited Erez with a huge delegation. A few days after the visit, Israel bombed the Erez industrial zone and the project was wiped out. After that, new projects were created in Jenin, a city in the West Bank. German investors were involved in the projects but the result was not worth mentioning.

### **There is a cultural occupation in Palestine**

In front of the eyes of the world Muslims were prevented from entering the Al Aqsa Mosque. Today I want to talk about a project. Within the walls of Al Quds there are around 15 Ottoman fountains. More than half of them are in the area of the Al Aqsa Mosque. Today none of them are operating. Local engineers declared that the water basins, which are supplying the fountains, are still sufficient. They declared that because of negligence and lack of maintenance the historic canals were clogged and that without any energy costs and spending millions of dollars the water can be drained. Unfortunately, water still does not

flow through the fountains. Israel's bureaucratic conception of sovereignty has left our efforts fruitless.

In recent days, it is considered that the water canals, which were constructed by Prophet Sulaiman, should be repaired to bring water from Bethlehem to Al Quds. Does the water reaches Al Quds? I would say: No.

### **There is a occupation over land and acquisition of property**

Indeed, land or buildings owned by a family for hundreds of years can be allocated to Jewish settlers by the decision of the Israeli government. Thus, homes of Christian and Muslim Palestinians are destroyed without mercy. All of the Ottoman Administrations land title records of Palestine were handed out by Turkey to the Palestinian administration in the recent years. In the hope that these documents would help property owners in the dispute with Israel.

### **The main issues behind the chaos in the Middle East is the Palestinian issue**

The development of tourism and increasing investments in the Palestinian territories are problems to be solved. However the main problem is the solution of the Palestinian issue itself. We all agree that the Palestinian issue has become not just a matter between Israel and the Arabs in the Middle East, it is an issue that effects the whole world.

It should be reconsidered by politicians and religious figures where the roots for the Palestinian issue lie, how it got so huge and still remains unresolved to this day. They should think about where they went wrong, where their thoughts were wrong, where they were responsible for the loss of thousands of lives and realize their mistakes and fix it.

Unfortunately, while the residents of Gaza living in an open-air prison during the two state solution process the Palestinians in the West Bank are facing poverty, desperation and living under heavy living conditions. The Middle East was convicted to a continuous unrest. On the other side Jews in Israel are living under a great fear, produced by themselves. When i have visited the Israeli Ambassador in Ankara I saw what the fear had done to the people regarding safety measures.

With investors who want to build schools in Palestine and Israel, we visited the Israeli Embassy in Ankara. At the door the security controlled our identification including photos and we had to answer to some questions. We thought that the

security controls were over. But then a very good Turkish speaking executive assistant came to the Ambassadors room and asked in a very gentle way:

“Sir, we still have one last question, because of our safety rules. We have to ask you this. Do you have any belongings like explosive or weapons?” Of course my answer was: “Are you asking me after the whole procedure? So let me confess that I have a Kalashnikov...”

These are the images of daily business but what matters is the elimination of the Palestinian conflict.

### **Israeli-Palestinian bilateral negotiation process has turned into a mental delusion.**

After 1948 Palestine failed to establish a state. Each effort to find a solution between Palestine and Israel failed. In my opinion every attempt in the Israeli-Palestinian peace process is doomed to fail.

To make it clear I want to tell you one of the classic Indian tales of the war between the ants and the elephants and the peace negotiations. In the tale the ants won the war because the elephants gave the ants the chance to choose the place, time and the weapons for the battle. After the battle, they came together for peace talks. When it came to prisoner exchange the elephants told that they can exchange only one ant for one elephant. The ants refused the offer. There was only one thing the ants could do. Was a new war possible? No.. As a result they have had accepted the supremacy of the elephants. Was a fair and lasting result produced? No.. The fight still continues in the Indian forest.. Should the Palestinian-Israeli conflict continue hundreds of years?

### **Did the Indian tale shows the future of the Palestinian-Israeli conflict?**

Its easy to implement the Palestinian-Israeli conflict on the Indian tale. On the one side there is an elephant representing Israel, namely a “state. On the other side on a chair sitting and tiny is the ant, representing the Palestinian people as one “person” without a state. So many international organizations forced the elephant and the ant, the “state” and the “person”, to sit at the negotiation table. This process is a cause of great injustice and unfairness; it is not fair and ethical and also a deadlock. Yes, not to establish a Palestinian state in 1948 was a mistake, but the bilateral negotiation process itself has been a great error too.

In short, to be the peace table not being unstable, there have to be two sovereign and independent states with fixed borders, military and security forces and strong allies. My personal opinion is, that as long as there is not a Palestinian

state, which has these qualities, the Israeli-Palestinian conflict will continue. Some experts have the opinion, that if the Palestinian issue could be solved, this will lead to the resolution of all disputes in the Middle East.

### **Does we learn from history?**

During the Ottoman rule of Al Quds, that lasted thousands of years, they always found a solution for the disputes among the three major religions. The one major solution was engraved on the entrance of the Al Khalil Gate, one of the eight gates of the old city.

The solution is based on the Qur'an. Ottoman rule solved the fight between members of the three religions with the idea of "Come together by Prophet Ibrahim". The Ottomans showed, that if you end the conflicts in conscience you can end the difficulties in the world easier.

A memo about this has been distributed to the participants. I think we will need to go back to the Ottoman formula for a permanent solution of the Palestinian problem. As I said, at the beginning we should look at the future of the Palestinian issue through the Ottoman perspective.

Thank you for your attention.