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THE OIC AND THE MUSLIM MINORITIES IN NON-MEMBER STATES

The Organisation of Islamic Conference (OIC) since its inception in 1969, has developed into a major international forum. Today, there is a greater recognition of the role of Islamic countries in furthering the cause of peace, harmony and cooperation among nations for greater and enduring human welfare. The OIC, as an international Islamic Organization vows to uphold the cause of Muslims all over the world including Muslim minorities in non-member states. The welfare of nearly 350 million Muslim minorities, almost 35% of world's Muslim population, living beyond the OIC member states, is obviously too important a problem to be left outside the agenda of activities of the OIC, an organisation committed to protect and promote the legitimate interests of the world Islamic Ummah. During the first decade following the establishment of the Organisation of Islamic Conference, this awareness has been sharpened both within and outside the Islamic countries.

Muslim minorities across the globe are becoming more and more self-conscious and are striving to establish their economic and political rights on an equal footing with other citizens of the states to which they belong and preserve their sociocultural heritage. The OIC, fully aware of the problems and difficulties of Muslims in non-member states, addressed itself to the task of taking positive steps towards serving the cause of these minority Muslim communities. This is reflected in the objective of OIC, which pledges "to strengthen the struggle of all Muslim people, with a view to safeguarding their dignity, independence and national rights."¹

1. *Charter of OIC*; 1972, p. 3.

An attempt has been made in this paper to examine the role of OIC, as an international Islamic forum, in promoting the cause of Muslim minorities and to highlight the limitations that it encounters in the process. The paper will also focus on the options available to OIC, in adopting a well defined approach on the Muslim minority affairs. The paper first attempts at portraying a profile of Muslim minorities in non-member states and the general nature of their problems. The second section goes on to highlight the role of the OIC *vis-a-vis* these problems with specific reference to some of the important Muslim minority issues. The last section contains some concluding observations.

PROFILE OF MUSLIM MINORITIES

“Minority denotes a distinct separate group of people who are different in certain easily recognised aspects from the majority.”² A minority can be a racial, linguistic, religious or nationality group different from the dominant group by any of these traits. Muslims living in non-Muslim countries obviously form groups of religious minority in respective countries of their living.³

Demographic Composition

The overwhelming majority of the Muslim minorities—about 275 million—live in Asia. In Africa, they number about 30 million, in America 5 million and in Australia 200,000. Europe and Soviet

2. *Encyclopaedia Britannica*; 15th Edition; Volume 12, p. 26.

3. However, whether they should be termed as minority is debatable. Many Muslims, including Dr. Bammatt, professor of Islamic studies in Paris, argue that Muslims are part of a universal Ummah, and that, therefore, they should not be termed a minority. In a seminar in London, he called for a thorough analysis of the concept of minority, before applying it to Muslims. However, for the purpose of my study, I would refer to them as minorities, because given the present state system they are part of the respective body politic, within a defined geographical boundary, to which they have to relate in the first instance.

Central Asia together have more than 25 million Muslims.⁴ Table I presents the distribution of Muslim minorities in countries with 5000 and more Muslims. It may be noted that given its generally high rate of growth, Muslim population in these countries may be expected to increase to a substantial proportion of the population of their respective countries by the end of this century. The Muslim population of Soviet Union, for instance, will be 100 million compared to an estimated 150 million Russians by the year 2000.⁵

Ethnic Composition

Muslims can rarely be classified under any ethnic group as they may come from a multiplicity of ethnic or racial groups. This is particularly true for Europe & America where Muslims consist of the indigeneous population as well as immigrants from different parts of the Muslim world. Among the Muslim minorities in Asia, there are several ethnic groups. As for instance in China, the main ethnic Muslim groups are the Uigurs and Hui.⁶ Likewise in Africa Muslims are profoundly divided by ethnic differences.

Socio-politico-economic Condition

With the exception of those in Europe, North America and Australia, most of the countries, where Muslim minorities are found, are developing ones, a number of them having authoritarian form of government. Most of these states are preoccupied with problems of their mainstream non-Muslim population. This is obviously related to their overall economic problems of poverty and social backwardness. Because of this preoccupation, the government tends to neglect the minority and their grievances. This results in a feeling of seperateness and discrimination by these minorities. They

4. Aslam Abdullah; *Muslim Minorities: Pressured, not Deterred; Arabia: The Islamic World Review*; January 1983, p. 37.

5. *Time*; April 16, 1977, pp. 30.

6. Richard V. Weekes; ed. *A World Ethnographic Survey*; Greenwood Press; West Port, Connecticut, p. 167.

find themselves isolated from the nucleus of the social and political authority which leads to a deep sense of deprivation and frustration.

Table I : Muslim Minority Population of the World

Sl. No.	Country	Total Pop. 1979 (Thousands)	Muslim Pop. 1979 (Thousands)	4 as % of 3
1	2	3	4	5
I ASIA				
1.	Burma	31,800	1,300	4
2.	China	850,000	17,800	2
3.	Cyprus	600	100	18
4.	India	622,700	80,000	13
5.	Israel	3,600	200	8
6.	Kampuchea	8,000	90	1
7.	Mongolia	1,500	100	9
8.	Philippines	44,300	2,300	5.3
9.	Singapore	2,300	400	15
10.	Sri Lanka	14,100	1,100	8
11.	Taiwan	16,600	20	0.12
12.	Thailand	44,400	1,900	4
13.	Vietnam	47,300	50	0.11
II AFRICA				
1.	Benin	3,300	500	16
2.	Burundi	3,900	30	2
3.	Cameroon	6,700	1,000	15
4.	Central African Republic	1,900	90	5
5.	Ethiopia	29,400	11,700	40
6.	Gabon	500	5	1
7.	Ghana	10,400	1,900	19
8.	Ivory Coast	7,000	1,700	25

Contd.....

Table I: Contd.

1	2	3	4	5
9.	Kenya	14,400	1,200	9
10.	Malagasy Republic	7,900	500	7
11.	Malawi	5,300	700	15
12.	Mauritius	900	100	17
13.	Sierra Leone	3,200	960	30
14.	South Africa	26,100	300	1
15.	Togo	2,300	100	7
16.	Uganda	12,400	700	6
17.	Zambia	5,200	50	1
III EUROPE				
1.	Bulgaria	8,800	900	10.5
2.	France	53,400	500	1
3.	Greece	9,100	100	2
4.	Romania	21,700	100	0.80
5.	Yugoslavia	21,800	4,100	19
6.	U.S.S.R.	255,000	50,000	19
IV N. AMERICA				
1.	United States of America	216,700	800	0.37
V S. AMERICA				
1.	Guyana	800	70	9
2.	Surinam	400	80	20
3.	Trinidad and Tobago	1,100	66	6
VI OCEANIA				
1.	Australia	14,300	300	7
2.	Fiji	600	90	15

Source :

1. *Muslim Peoples : A World Ethnographic Survey*. Richard V. Weekes, ed Greenwood Press Westport, Connecticut.
2. *Encyclopedia of Third World*, George Thomas Kurian, Mansell, London, 1979.
3. *Time*, April 16, 1979,

“The remoteness from centres of decision making and the economic exploitation suffered at the hands of the predominant communities, are two characteristics shared by the Muslims of Thailand, Philippines and many other third world countries.⁷ Linguistic and educational discriminations are among the most commonly found grievances. Muslim minorities in many states complain of being deprived of

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proper educational facilities including discrimination in case of university and college admission.⁸ The government of some of these countries, however, claim that they are paying more attention to the needs of the Muslim minorities.

In the developed countries of both East and West Muslim minorities also find themselves pressured and are sometimes even deterred from practicing their faith. In China the policy towards ethnic and religious groups including Muslims has recently been relaxed, providing greater freedom to practice Islam by Muslim minorities. The new Chinese leadership has tried to mitigate the excesses of the Cultural Revolution which were proved to be detrimental to the interest of Muslims in China.

It is difficult to generalize the conditions of Muslim minorities in different countries as they are the product of different environment, culture, tradition and social system. Despite the dissimilarities, one feature which is predominant among all Muslim minorities is that they are in a relentless struggle not only to protect their identity

7. Mohammed Ayoob, ed. *The Politics of Islamic Reassertion*; Vikas Publishing House, Pvt. Ltd. New Delhi, 1982; p. 286.
8. The literacy rate of Indian Muslims for instance is only 18% (Arabia June 1983 p. 37), compared to national adult literacy rate of 36% (*World Development Report 1983*, World Bank).

as Muslims but also to gain the recognition of their basic socio-politico-economic rights.

ROLE OF THE OIC

The question of Muslim minorities in non-Muslim countries has received substantial prominence in the agenda of the OIC during the Fourth Islamic Foreign Ministers Conference held in 1973. The Conference adopted a resolution entitled "The situation of Muslims throughout the world"—which *inter alia* expressed concern "that Muslim minorities in some countries did not enjoy political and religious rights guaranteed under the norms of international law." The Conference appealed to the states having Muslim minorities, "to respect their culture and belief and grant them their rights in accordance with the UN charter and the Universal Declaration of Human Rights"⁹. It also requested the Secretariat to draw up a report on the condition of these minorities and submit to the next conference. Again in the Sixth ICFM in 1975, the Conference "entrusted the General Secretariat with the task of preparing a comprehensive study of the conditions of Muslim minorities"¹⁰.

In 1977 in Tripoli, during the Eighth ICFM, the Conference called upon the governments concerned, "to ensure full respect for the legitimate social, economic, educational and religious rights of Muslim minorities in their countries"¹¹. The most concrete step regarding the Muslim minorities was taken at the Ninth ICFM at Dakar in April 1978. The Conference approved the establishment of the "Department of Muslim Communities in Non-Member States" which would look after their interest. The main objective of this department is (i) to collect information, statistical data, (ii) to study possible ways of co-operation with Muslims in non-member states and (iii) to monitor their interests respecting the relations between

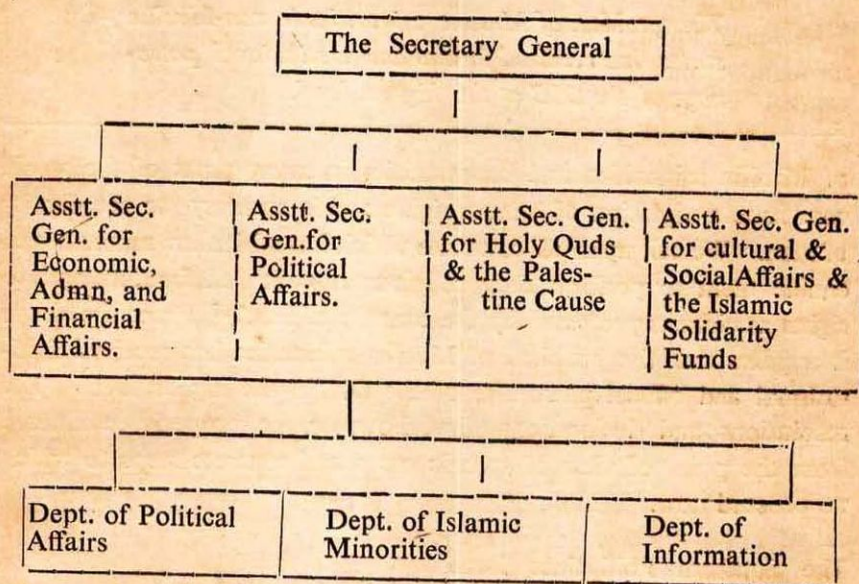
9. Resolution no. 10/4 of the Fourth ICFM; Benghazi, March 1973.

10. Resolution no. 9/6 of Sixth ICFM; Jeddah.

11. Resolution no. 11/8 of the Eighth ICFM; Tripoli, 1977.

these communities and their countries of residence."¹² This Department works under the supervision of the Assistant Secretary General for Political Affairs, who is responsible to the Secretary General of OIC. The placing of this department is shown in the Organisational Chart of the General Secretariat.

Chart—I : Organisational Chart of the General Secretariat of OIC



Source : *Organisation of Islamic Conference, General Secretariat, Jeddah.*

Another Ministerial Committee was formed in the eleventh Foreign Ministers Conference which was entrusted with the tasks of :

- (1) Contacting the Governments of states in which there are Muslim Communities.
- (2) Following up the implementation of resolutions adopted by OIC.

12. *Organisation of the Islamic Conference; General Secretariat; Jeddah, p. 34.*

- (3) Consulting and co-operating with the organizations, institutions and personalities concerned with affairs of the Muslim communities.

The Makkah Declaration adopted at Taif during the Third Summit meeting of the OIC has enumerated the essence of the objective of OIC with regard to the Muslim minorities. "The Persecution

The problem of Muslim minorities in non-Muslim states has received formal and institutional patronage of the OIC at the highest level.

of Muslim minorities and communities in many parts of the world constitute a violation of human rights and is contrary to the dignity of man. We call upon all countries which have Muslim minorities to enable them to perform their religious rites in full freedom and to rights as citizens protected by the sanctity of law."¹³ From the above it appears that the problem of Muslim minorities has received institutional and official patronage of the OIC at the highest level. The resolutions and declarations may, however, be properly evaluated from the point of view of specific cases and concrete steps to which we proceed now.

The Southern Philippines Issue

One of the most important problems, which puts the credibility and effectiveness of OIC vis-a-vis the Muslim minority issue to test, is the problem of the Muslims in Southern Philippines. The Moro Muslims of Southern Philippines have been fighting against Christianisation since the arrival of the Spaniards in the 16th Century. They complain that since the 1950's Manila's policy has been to push Northern Christian Filipinos into the Muslim south with the objective of imposing political and commercial supremacy. Threatened with such domination and in the face of Manila's continued religious

13. *Makkah Declaration*; Third Islamic Summit Conference; Makkah al Mukarramah, January 1981.

persecution, the Moro Muslims formed the Moro National Liberation Front (MNLF) which was welcomed by many Muslim leaders.

OIC in its Forth ICFM in 1973, expressed "deep concern over the reported repression and mass extermination of Muslims in Southern Philippines" and called on the government to "take prompt measures to provide protection and Security for Muslims." The OIC also sent a delegation to Philippines to discuss the issue with the government. It also requested Indonesia and Malaysia—both members of the OIC, to use their good offices for the same purpose.

In its Fifth ICFM in Kualalumpur in 1974, the OIC called for a "Political solution" to the Southern Philippines' Muslim problem within the context of Philippines' sovereignty. The conference also recognised MNLF as the sole representative of Muslims in the South. The OIC, however, was conscious of the complexity of the problem as it relates to an independent sovereign state.

Towards the end of 1974, under pressure from the Islamic Conference, Marcos agreed to negotiate with the MNLF. A series of meetings were held between the two sides under the sponsorship of the Islamic Secretariat, which established during the Sixth ICFM in 1975, a quadripartite ministerial commission with Foreign Ministers of Senegal, Saudi Arabia, Libya and Somalia, to work out a full agreement between them. Though the Philippine government finally agreed according to the Tripoli Agreement reached between the Manila government and the MNLF in December 1976 to grant a form of Islamic self-government to the 13 Muslim provinces of Mindanao, Sulu and Palawan with separate legislature, administration, legal system, security forces, education and financial and economic system, subsequent decisions and actions by Manila made the agreements impossible to implement.¹⁴ This led to the deterioration of relations and the escalation of violence. The quadripartite ministerial committee and the General Secretariat continued with efforts to restore negotiations between both parties. However, the problem is at a standstill due to government's insistence on its policy and

14. *Report of the Secretary General of OIC to the Eleventh ICFM*; p. 22.

reluctance to bring about a negotiated settlement. "Subsequent ICFM meetings have reaffirmed the condemnation of the Philippine government's handling of the situation, however, the conference has stopped short of endorsing MNLF demands for political and economic sanctions against the Marcos government."¹⁵

It may be well observed that the most important limitation to OIC manoeuvrability is posed by Marcos' continued claim that the Moro problem is an "internal affair" of the Philippines. A constraint of greater dimension is, however, posed by the disunity of the Filipino Muslims themselves. The MNLF led by Nur Misauri, demands complete independence of the Muslims while Hashim Salamat, the leader of a breakaway faction insists on autonomy for Muslims in the Philippines.¹⁶ Another new organisation under the banner of Bangsa Moro Liberation Organisation (BMLO) has made its appearance in Saudi Arabia under the leadership of Rashid Lucman one of Mindano's Sultans. The increasing differences among the Muslims have not only turned out to be an instrument in the hands of the Manila authorities, but also reduced the potential of international support¹⁷ including those from the OIC.

Given these constraints, in evaluating the role of the OIC in relation to the issue, it can be safely asserted that it is in great measure due to the efforts of the OIC that the problem has by now been turned into one of substantial international concern. During the 8th ICFM in Tripoli in 1977, the MNLF was thus granted as an exceptional measure the status of an observer within the Islamic conference. The efforts of the OIC are expected to have some positive impact on the issue in favour of the Muslims. Given the official recognition of the MNLF and the Moro issue by the Islamic Secretariat, it would be difficult for Marcos to eliminate his southern problem merely as a domestic issue. Another important factor which Marcos cannot

15. *The Politics of Islamic Reassertion*; Op. Cit. p. 228.

16. Husain Haqqani, Factionalism stalks the Moro Camp; *Arabia, The Islamic World Review*. June 1983, p. 37.

17. *Ibid.* p. 38.

overlook is his need for oil from the Middle East. This increasing need restricts him from taking extreme measures against MNLF. Furthermore, as a member of ASEAN, the Philippine government can hardly afford deterioration of its relation with Malaysia and Indonesia, the two ASEAN states in the OIC.

The Cyprus Issue

When Cyprus became independent in 1960, the Turkish minority (18% out of 600,000) was to share power with the majority and the leader of the Turkish population to hold the office of Vice President. But the Turks soon realized that they were relegated to a secondary role because of their minority status. Unable to reconcile themselves to a second place in a Christian dominated system, the Muslim Turks revolted which led to the breaking out of a civil war in 1963.¹⁸ The escalation of intercommunal clashes in the following years led to the Turkish military intervention of the island. This "resulted in the flight of 180,000 Greeks southwards to the Greek region, while 100,000 Turks were regrouped in the north."¹⁹ The Muslim Turks of Cyprus demand a federation of two fully autonomous states of Cypriots and Turks.

The Greek-Turkish feuding in and over Cyprus has been a concern of the international community for more than two decades. A UN peacekeeping force has been stationed on the island under the supervision of the Security Council since 1964. The OIC, in its Seventh ICFM in 1976, supported the equality in rights for Turkish Muslim Community of Cyprus as co-partners with the Greek Cypriot Community within the framework of independence, sovereignty, territorial integrity and the non-alignment of the Republic of Cyprus. The Conference also agreed that the representatives of the Turkish Muslim community of Cyprus be invited to attend the future meetings of the Islamic conference.

18. Raphael, Israeli, *Muslim Minorities under Non-Islamic Rule; Current History*; April 1980; p. 163.

19. *Ibid.* p. 164.

The Eighth ICFM, in 1977 "welcomed the agreement reached between the leaders of the two Cypriot communities, aiming at the establishment of an independent, non-aligned, Federal Republic of Cyprus. During its consecutive sessions of ICFMs, the OIC reiterated its solidarity with the Muslim Cypriots and encouraged the efforts of UN to reach a just solution of the Cyprus problem.

The Thirteenth ICFM held in Niamey in 1983 urged the member states of OIC to take necessary steps to promote the cause of Muslim Cypriots and reaffirmed its support for the efforts of the Secretary General of UN, to reach a permanent negotiated settlement.

Other Muslim Minorities

Similar problems are faced by minorities in many other non-Muslim States. The Muslim refugees in Kampuchea are faced with a grave situation in the Thai-Kampuchean border. OIC requested Malaysia, a member of the organisation to render all possible assistance and co-operation to accomodate Kampuchean Muslim refugees pending their final settlement in other countries.

Rohinga Muslims of Burma's Arakan region have complained of Rangoon's repressive policies. In 1978, 200,000 Burmese refugees fled into the border areas of Bangladesh following alleged acts of persecution by the non-Muslim population. But as a result of an agreement reached between Bangladesh and Burma through negotiation, all the refugees were repatriated with their landed property restored to them.

In Southern Thailand, Muslim minorities also allege discrimination against them. "Average income is well below the national level, unemployment is high and Government projects are few and far between".²⁰ The Muslim guerillas demand independence for Thailand's four Southern provinces, a position which, however, the OIC was unable to accept.

20. John Davis; Patiani: A Political Powder Keg; *Arabia; The Islamic World Review*, August 1982; p. 22.

In Eastern Europe, there is an upsurge of interest of Muslims to identify themselves with the World Islamic Ummah. This is considered in general by the authorities as a threat to the communist power. In Yugoslavia, for instance, thirteen Muslim leaders were arrested in March (1983) including imams and professors in Sarajevo, and are now facing trial. In India, the 100 million Muslims are yet to secure a representation in the parliament, the civil service, the army, the police and all other government departments commensurate with their numerical proportion. The greatest problem which the Muslims of India faced since independence in 1947, are the hundreds of anti-Muslim riots." According to a report from the Indian home ministry, 319 incidents of communal (anti-Muslim) riots occurred in India in 1981 alone. The latest and the greatest since 1947 is that of Assam in which 5,000 Muslims were killed."²¹

Critical comments were voiced from several Muslim countries over the issue and some Muslim organisations have demanded compensations for the displaced people. Mrs. Gandhi expressed her displeasure over the resolution of the Islamic Council, London, which condemned the massacres. She stated that interferences in India's internal affairs would not be allowed and sent personal letters to heads of state/government of 31 Islamic countries refuting reports that large numbers of Muslims were killed in Assam. It, however, appears that India has been successful in establishing and maintaining cordial relation with many of the influential Islamic countries.

The Muslims in Eritrea have been engaged for decades in a struggle for independence and in the process made enormous sacrifices. Many of them were driven from their own homes and fled into neighbouring Somalia. In its forth ICFM in Benghazi the OIC declared its full sympathy with the Eritrean people and supported their legitimate struggle for self-determination and full freedom. It also appealed to the Organization of African Unity (OAU) to treat Eritrean issue, within the framework of African fraternity with

21. Aslam Abdullah; Assam's Continuing Agony. *Arabia; The Islamic World Review*, June 1983, p. 32.

a view to finding a political solution, which fulfills the aspirations of the Eritrean people.

In its Third Islamic Summit Conference in Makkah in January 1981, the Conference decided "to set up a Committee including Senegal and Guinea and the Secretary General, to carry out the necessary contacts and to follow up peaceful efforts and to present a report to the next ICFM."²²

The OIC, aware of the grave situation in Uganda, resulting from the influx of over half a million refugees into Sudan, expressed its concern in its Tenth ICFM in 1979 and hoped that human rights and equality among all the peoples of Uganda, irrespective of religion and creed will be respected. It also "requested all the member states to extend material aid and assistance to the Ugandan refugees and requested Secretary General of the OIC to work out ways and means for providing assistance to Ugandan refugees."²³

There are a host of other problems facing Muslim minorities around the world, the cause of their identity and welfare being at stake. However, a greater danger is that emanating from the internal conditions of the Muslim minorities themselves. Besides in some cases Muslim problems are generally over-politicised. There is a prevailing opinion, that if political problems are solved all other difficulties will disappear. It seems to be more important for them to realise that by improving their education, culture and economy and above all by eliminating internal disunity they can look forward to a more viable position for themselves within their respective states.

Socio-Economic

In the Socio-economic sphere, the success of OIC to serve the cause of Muslim minorities has, however been more visible. Islamic Solidarity Fund was established in 1974 which has become one of

22. *Resolution No. 9/3-p(IS) of the Third Islamic Summit Conference; Makkah Al Mukarramah; Saudi Arabia, January 1981.*

23. *Resolution No. 14/10-p of Tenth ICFM; Morocco. May 1979.*

the most important sources of financing for the Muslim communities and minorities, spread over all parts of the world. Earlier in its Fourth ICFM in 1973, OIC appealed to Islamic states to extend aid to Muslim minorities in order to raise their religious, cultural and social standards.

The Islamic Solidarity Fund besides its assistance to member states of OIC has extended substantial aid to hundreds of Islamic groups and minorities. It is important to note that 22% of total disbursement of the Islamic Solidarity Fund were channelled for the interest of Muslim minorities.²⁴ The area wise distribution of the fund for the Muslim minorities over the world is shown in Table II.

Table : II General Distribution of Islamic Solidarity Fund Allocated for Muslim Minorities

Area	% of total allocated fund
Asia	30%
Europe	30%
America	19%
Africa	11%
Oceania & Australia	2%

The Fund organised the grant of assistance and material aid to the Muslim minorities with a view to raising their religious, cultural and social standards and contributed towards the building of the mosques, hospitals and schools needed by the Muslims.

Islamic Solidarity Fund (ISF) plays a major role in relieving the effects of crises, catastrophes and natural disasters that may hit Muslim minorities in non-member states. Upto October 1980, the fund dealt with 50 cases of assistance to many states and Muslim minorities, including internal crisis and oppression such as those which effect minorities in Philippines, Burma and Ethiopia.²⁵ In its

24. *The OIC; The Islamic Solidarity Fund*; General Secretariat Jeddah, p. 29.

25. *Ibid.* p. 27.

Fifth ICFM in 1974 the conference decided to establish a body to be called the "Filipino Muslim welfare and Relief Agency" for the purpose of extending welfare and relief aid directed to Muslims in Southern Philippines. The aim was to ameliorate their conditions and enhance their social and economic well-being.

During the Eighth ICFM in 1977, the OIC recommended to the permanent Council of ISF to provide all necessary material assistance to the Muslim minorities and communities. In its Ninth ICFM in 1978, the OIC approved the proposed budget for the "Department of Muslim communities in Non-member states," which during its first year totalled US \$474,670 as indicated by the General Secretariat. In its Eleventh session of the Foreign Ministers Conference in 1980, the Secretary General of the OIC reviewing the situation of Muslim refugees in Africa and Asia, called on the Conference and member states, to extend urgent assistance to refugees in Somalia, Eritrea and Kampuchea. The Conference also requested Islamic Development Bank (IDB) to establish a Special Fund, to assist the economy of the Muslim Turkish community of Cyprus.

The IDB, during the year 1981-82 financed several assistance programmes for promoting the cause of Muslim minorities. Significant among them are—assistance to Islamic Nizamiyah University in Sri Lanka, worth US \$700,000, assistance to Islamic college for training of teachers of Arabic-Islamic education in Majboraka (Sierra Leone) amounting to US \$1.50 million and the establishment of Arab Islamic Schools and assistance to Benan University at Lome, Togo, totalling US \$1.30 million."²⁶

One of the major academic projects, which the Islamic Solidarity Fund intends to contribute towards the promotion of the interest of Muslim minorities is the Islamic Teachers Training College in Chicago. This project will have educational, cultural, religious and political importance to the Islamic cause in this part of the world. Other ISF supported universities, institutions and Islamic centres in

26. *Seventh Annual Report*, Islamic Development Bank; Jeddah, Saudi Arabia, p. 57.

non-Muslim States include those in UK, Yugoslavia, India, Korea and West Germany.”

CONCLUDING OBSERVATIONS

From what has been presented above, it can be asserted that the OIC has played a commendable role in safeguarding and promoting the interests of Muslim minorities in non-member states. The success of the OIC is more visible on the socio-economic front, with evidence of concrete positive impact. On the political front, efforts of the OIC, albeit with significant achievements, have encountered limitations for obvious reasons.

Every sovereign state in the world has its own constitutional laws regarding minorities. The OIC, respecting the sanctity of sovereignty cannot and should not take any political measure if that amounts to interference in the internal affairs of an independent state. Thus while making commitments to the Moro Muslims of the Philippines and the Turkish Muslims of Cyprus, the OIC has been rightly cautious so as not to interfere in the domestic affairs of a sovereign state.

There is however, a difference of opinion among the member states regarding the role of OIC in the political sphere. Some hard-line member states tend to insist on a more active role on the part of OIC including supply of arms and financial assistance to secessionist movements. Notwithstanding such differences, there seems to prevail a genuine consensus among the member states led by the mainstream moderate ones that the OIC should refrain from making any political move which may be construed as interference in the sovereign rights of individual states. Such a position is backed by a shared concern of potential ethnic disturbances in their own countries. These member states feel that a radical position of the OIC regarding Muslims in non-Muslim countries might provoke ethnic uprising by non-Muslim minorities in their respective countries.

It is more important, on the other hand, that attempts are consolidated to bring the ranks of the Muslim minorities themselves

closer on issues of their shared interest, and internal cleavages are eliminated to enhance their own position in their respective states.

The OIC may try to mend the forces of disunity within the ranks of Musiim minorities by using its socio-economic assistance programme as the catalytic force.

Their internal dissensions, whatever their nature may be, weakens their position as a strong force in challenging the domination of majority. One way for the OIC to mend such forces of disunity may be to use its socio-economic assistance programme as the catalytic force in stimulating the spirit of unity and solidarity on the basis of Islamic education and training as well as assistance for general socio-economic development of minorities.

The cause of Muslim minorities if strongly presented to the international arena by the OIC might restrict the non-Muslim countries from pursuing repressive policies over the Muslims in those countries. Today's Islamic power generates a universal reluctance to antagonise Muslims. Thus countries with sizeable Muslim minorities might probably be persuaded to make an effort to liberalize their minority policy.

In resolving the outstanding issues centering on the grievances of Muslim minorities one option available to the OIC may be to assign responsibilities for a particular issue to small groups of member states with one or other form of influence on the country concerned. For instance, in the case of Moro dispute in the Philippines, the OIC has used the good offices of Malaysia and Indonesia, two of the important ASEAN partners of the Philippines.

Another way to safeguard the interest of the Muslim minority in non-Muslim states is to ensure that the non-Muslim minorities in Muslim states are treated on an equal footing with the Muslim citizens so that the Islamic states may serve as examples worthy of emulation by non-Muslim countries in the treatment of their minorities.