**OIC and Pakistan**

The Organisation of Islamic Co-operation (OIC) has completed 50 years of its existence. Pakistan was one of its founding members in 1969 and is taking part in the celebrations in Jeddah through a high level delegation, led by the Prime Minister’s advisor on information, Firdous Ashiq Awan.

Although the need for cooperation among Islamic nations has been felt for a long time, it was the despicable arson attack on Al-Aqsa mosque in 1969 that proved catalytic for the birth of this international organization which is now the second largest intergovernmental  body after the United Nations — with 57 member states. Pakistan has played an active role all these fifty years in espousing co-operation among member states and supporting the just causes of Palestinians and Kashmiris.

Conflict resolution between member states is the core task the OIC has performed, but with mixed results. Soon after its inception, the OIC, along with the Arab League, was tasked with resolving the conflict between the Palestine Liberation Organisation (PLO) and the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan. King Faisal bin Abdul Aziz and President Jamal Abdul Nasir led a joint mission to Amman in 1970 and successfully resolved the issue. In 1974, the OIC played a yeoman role in bringing Shaikh Mujib ur Rehman from Dhaka to participate in the Lahore Islamic summit, which implied the first recognition of Bangladesh in Pakistan.

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 Pakistan was the chairman of OIC Peace Committee that tried to bring peace between Iraq and Iran during the first Gulf War. The Committee, under President Zia ul Haque, made several shuttles between Tehran and Baghdad. It even toyed with the idea of posting a military contingent, drawn from the member states, along the Iran- Iraq border. However, Iran kept insisting that the Peace Committee should first spell out the aggressor. Later Iran boycotted an OIC Foreign Ministers meeting held in Baghdad. After that, the Peace Committee became irrelevant as its neutral status as a mediator was questioned by a party to the conflict.

 In 1985, Syed Sharif ud Din Pirzada, an eminent Pakistani lawyer, was unanimously elected as Secretary General of the OIC . Before that, Mr. Pirzada had been Law Minister under President Ayub Khan and Attorney General under President Zia ul Haque. Much of his tenure was consumed in efforts to stop the disastrous war between them. This was an onerous job as Pakistan was also the Chairman of the OIC Peace Committee and it was during his tenure that activities of the organization in the field of science and technology were strengthened through the COMSTECH secretariat in Islamabad.

COMSTECH is the ministerial standing committee for scientific and technological co-operation of the OIC established by the third Islamic Summit in Makkah in 1981. The president of Pakistan is its permanent chairman. The core mandate of COMSTECH is to strengthen cooperation among OIC member states in science and technology, enhance their capabilities through training in emerging areas and follow up actions on implementation of resolutions in this field. It also draws up programs and proposals to increase the capability of Muslim countries in science and technology.

The 11th Islamic Summit, held in Dakar in 2008, adopted an amended OIC charter, which included the protection of human rights and fundamental freedoms as one of its objectives. The amended charter had been drafted by a panel of eminent persons, especially selected from the member countries. Pakistan participated actively in drafting the amended charter.

It was essential for the OIC to graduate to the norms of the 21st century and tell the world that the Islamic view on human rights was compatible with modern times. The new charter also expresses its resolve to protect the rights of Muslim communities in non-member states. Emphasis was also laid on the rights of women, children and family.

Palestine and Kashmir are the two core issues of the Islamic World. Pakistan played a leading role in enabling the PLO to get observer status at the UN. The OIC decided to appoint its own Contact Group on Kashmir, at a ministerial meeting held in Tehran in 1994. Pakistan has always looked at the OIC as an important forum for political support on Kashmir. However, there was some disappointment felt when Indian Foreign Minister Shushma Swaraj was invited earlier this year as guest of honor to an OIC ministerial meeting in March this year. To express his disdain, Pakistan Foreign Minister Shah Mahmood Qureshi abstained from attending that meeting.

However, when India suddenly revoked Kashmir’s autonomy in August, in violation of international law, the OIC issued a strong condemnation through its Standing Executive Committee. The organization remains an important forum for Pakistan for the espousal of the Kashmir case. OIC has also recently appointed a special representative on Jammu and Kashmir, much to the disdain of the Indian leadership. For Pakistan, it is a reaffirmation that OIC resolve in supporting the just cause of Kashmiris has, in fact, gained strength.