

**Alija Izetbegović's Speech at the Organisation of Islamic Conference (OIC)**

**Teheran, 11<sup>th</sup> December 1997**

“Bismillahi-r-Rahmaani-r-Raheem,

Mr. Chairman,  
your Excellencies,  
dear brothers and sisters!

It is a great privilege for me to have the chance to speak at this important gathering of Muslim countries. I have just returned from the Conference in Bonn. That was a specific conference devoted to Bosnia, where the situation in my land was observed, and some important decisions were made. Unfortunately, the time for this Summit and the Bonn Conference overlapped, so I am addressing you now. Thank you for this exceptional occasion.

Respecting your time and today's Conference programme, I will focus on only one subject tonight: the East and the West and my Bosnia in between. I got the idea for this subject during my current and continuing journey. For during this week, I have flown from Bosnia to Saudi Arabia for the Conference on Education, then to Europe for the Conference about Bosnia and finally here, today, to Teheran for the Islamic Conference. That is East-West-East.

I think that I know these two parts of the world rather well. On this journey of mine, I established some new facts, some of them good, some of them bad.

I discovered the encouraging fact of about 5,000,000 pupils and students in Saudi Arabia, but a bad one as well: there are around 68.5 % illiterate people in another Muslim country. The second piece of good news, which I have just heard, is that 20,000,000 people attend school in Iran, but the bad news is that illiteracy among women in almost all Muslim countries is inadmissibly high. Women represent half of the human race. Uneducated women cannot bring up the generation that will lead our nations into the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

Forgive me, for I will now be very open. Nice lies do not help, but sour truths could be a cure. The West is not corrupted or degenerated. The 'Rotten West' of a self-deceiving communism paid a high price for this. The West is not rotten. It is strong, educated and organised. Their schools are better than ours and their cities are cleaner than ours. The level of human rights in the West is higher and social care for the poor and less able, better organised. Westerners

are, most often, responsible and accurate people. Those are my experiences with them. I know, as well, the dark sides of their progress, and I am not letting them out of my sight.

Islam is the best – this is the truth – but we are not the best. Those two are different things and we always switch them. Instead of hating the West, we should compete with it. Did not the Qur'an order us to do just that: 'Strive to achieve the virtue of deeds...' With the help of religion and science, we can create the power that we need. It is a long and hard road, it is an exhausting climb up the hill, the hill that the Qur'an talks about, but there is no other way.

So, let us establish funds for education everywhere. Do not let any child of ours remain uneducated. Rich Muslim countries should help the poor ones in this regard. Let's do this today or convene a conference on the same.

Some people think that advantage can be reached by terror. That delusion spreads quickly. Terrorism is a consequence of our present and of our future weakness. It is not only immoral, but it is unproductive as well. Immoral because innocent people are hurting and unproductive because it has never and nowhere solved anything. All serious political movements in history rejected terrorism. I think that the Qur'an forbade it with a specific sentence: "It is the same to kill one innocent human being as it is to kill the whole of humanity..." Unfortunately, there are those who forget that.

Now a few words about the Bosnia that I have come from. I mentioned the East and the West. Bosnia is positioned between these two, on the Big Border, as we like to put it. Every tenth Bosnian died in the past war. We paid a high price for our right to survival and freedom. That is why you should not let new injustice happen in Bosnia. Tell everyone that Bosnia is a holy country to you, because it has been drenched with the blood of innocent people, your brothers in faith.

Some Western countries are our friends. You will recognize them by the fact that they are helping Bosnia, supporting its integrity. Cooperate with them on this historical mission, infinitely important for many reasons for us and for you, and for the civilized world as a whole. Because Bosnia is a great experiment that concerns every man and every woman in the world.

The less fortunate part of our people remained outside Bosnia and Herzegovina more than a century ago, and now lives as a minority in Serbia, Yugoslavia, in a region called Sandzak. I appeal to you to recognise the status of a Muslim minority in the Organisation of Islamic Conference to the Bosniaks, the Muslims of Sandzak.

Finally, I would like to thank the Iranian Government for hosting this Conference, the great Iranian people for the selfless support and assistance they provided to us, especially during the war, and all of you for everything you have done to help my country in the most difficult moments of its history.

Thank you."