

KEYNOTE ADDRESS BY DG, IOFS:

WORKSHOP ON DEVELOPMENT OF NATIONAL GENE BANKS IN OIC  
MEMBER STATES, 5-6 JULY 2020

**Mr. Chairman**

**Your Excellencies**

**Distinguished Participants**

Assalam alaekun warahmatullahi wabarakatuhu

It is indeed a great honour and privilege for me to welcome you all to the Workshop on Development of National Gene Banks in OIC Member States, which is holding in a video conference format from Dubai, United Arab Emirates. I must, first and foremost, express our sincere appreciation to the Government of United Arab Emirates for hosting this Workshop and for the excellent arrangements made to ensure its success.

This Workshop is taking place at a very crucial period in the history of the Organisation of Islamic Cooperation and indeed that of our new OIC specialised institution, the Islamic Organisation for Food Security. Although the Workshop had been planned before the current global health emergency occasioned by the COVID-19 pandemic, the relevance of the theme of the Workshop to both regional and global efforts at addressing the human security challenges posed by the pandemic has become more pronounced. Our region is confronted with major challenges of low food and agricultural productivity, increased food import bills and biting food scarcity, high rate of hunger and malnourishment, as

well as weak food system resilience and erosion of bio-diversity, among others.

As we gather here today to address the various components of the theme of this Workshop, which is: “Enhancing Food Security in OIC Member States through Agricultural Biodiversity”, permit me to pay homage to the efforts of the Government of Kazakhstan, the host country of IOFS in promoting intra-OIC cooperation in the domain of food security. The history of this multilateral institution for addressing food security issues cannot be complete without reference to the historical call of the First President of Kazakhstan, His Excellency, Nur Sultan Nazaerbayev in 2011, for the establishment of a framework for intra-OIC cooperation in this critical sector. By the time this Workshop would be concluding its proceedings tomorrow, the people of Kazakhstan would be celebrating the anniversary of the First President of the Republic. In view of his sterling contributions to the formation of our Organisation, we join them and President Kassym-Jomart Tokayev in wishing former President Nazarbayev a very joyous and blessed anniversary celebration.

**Mr. Chairman**

### **Distinguished Participants**

The general focus of IOFS activities is to increase domestic food productivity, through utilisation of appropriate technology, science and innovation and the scaling up of development funding mechanisms for joint humanitarian and export-substitution programmes. The very fact that food trade deficit in OIC member states is staggering and constituting Balance of Payments problems to most our countries, with the expectation of increased food import bills amidst declined level of domestic harvests due to COVID-19 lockdown measures, are issues that underscore the importance of this Workshop.

Similarly, it is a known fact that agricultural bio-diversity is closely linked to sustainable food production and would increase the competitiveness of food products emanating from OIC member states. Accordingly, biodiversity is relevant to protecting human life and livelihood, particularly among developing countries, and indeed OIC member states, which are confronted with food

security challenges. The need for collaboration among countries is very crucial to achieving sustainable socio-economic development and food and nutrition security as no one country can sustain an advanced and competitive agricultural development based on local plants alone.

In view of this international interdependence in the food sector, IOFS has also anchored its activities on promoting inter-agency collaboration for the implementation of its programmes. In this regard, let me avail myself of this opportunity to commend the various OIC and international organisations, which are collaborating with IOFS on this project, namely OIC General Secretariat, FAO, COMSTECH, IsDB, ICBA and ICARDA, among others. I also wish to express our appreciation to the various member states of OIC and IOFS which contributed to the content of this Workshop in terms of sharing national expertise and experiences.

It is my sincere hope that the outcome of this Workshop would lead to creating a credible mechanism for cooperation among OIC member states towards acquiring, conserving and sharing plant and animal genetic resources for food and agriculture. There are many challenges before us but the opportunities are also numerous if we strive to adopt those numerous creative and home-grown measures. The prevalence of the political will among our national authorities is a crucial factor in galvanising our common action.

Equally significant is the existence of common culturally-specific modalities for funding social infrastructure such as the wakf (endowment), zakat and charity (sadaqah). Similarly, the mobilisation of net-worth philanthropists in our member states as well as captains of the private sector can provide the needed development financing for the execution of the various common projects on the sustenance of national and regional genebanks.

I wish this Workshop a fruitful deliberation and a successful outcome.

Wassalam alaekun warahmatullahi wabarakatuhu.

5 July 2020