

The Organization of Islamic Cooperation (OIC): A Brief Note on Structure and Performance

The OIC is the second largest international organization after the United Nations. The OIC aims to foster joint Islamic action and cooperation amongst its member states in all areas. ¹

Structure

1. The Islamic Summit

The Islamic Summit, also known as the Conference of Kings and Heads of State and Governments, is the highest authoritative institution in the OIC. The OIC Charter stipulates that the Islamic Summit is held to discuss the vital causes that face the Islamic world and to formulate policies accordingly. It usually meets once every three years. The first Summit was held in Rabat, Morocco in 1969. So far, fourteen regular OIC Summits have been held, the last of which convened in Makkah in 2019.² Equally significant, Extraordinary Summits may be held upon recommendations of the Council of Foreign Ministers or on the request of a Member State or the Secretary-General, provided that the such a request enjoys the support of simple majority of the member states. It should be noted that seven Extraordinary Summits have been organized so far.

The first was held in Makkah in 2005 and the last one was held in Istanbul, Turkey in 2018.³

2. Council of Foreign Ministers (CFM)

The CFM is the main decision-making organ in the OIC, and its decisions are based on the policies determined by the Summit Conferences. Chapter V of the Charter requires that the ICFM meets annually in an ordinary session, but it can also meet in an extraordinary session at the request of any member state or of OIC's Secretary General, provided such a request is approved by simple majority of the member states. Moreover, the CFM has the authority to recommend holding other OIC sectorial meetings at the ministerial level to deal with the specific issues of concern to the OIC. The CFM has a central role in the decision-making process of the OIC. While the first CFM was held in 1970 in Jeddah, Saudi Arabia, the most recent CFM (47th Session) was held in the capital of Niger, Niamey, in November 2020.

3. The General Secretariat

Established by the First Islamic Conference of Foreign Ministers in 1970, the OIC General Secretariat is located in Jeddah, Saudi Arabia and is charged, amongst other things, with the provision of facilities and services for consultation of member states, dissemination of information, and implementation of resolutions taken by the OIC decision-making bodies. The General Secretariat is headed by a Secretary General who is elected by the Council of Foreign Ministers for a period of five years, a term that can only be renewed once. It is required that the Secretary General should be a national of an OIC Member State. The post is rotated between different geographical groups in the OIC (Arab, Asian, and African). So far, eleven individuals assumed the office of, and the incumbent Secretary General is Yousef Al-Othaimeen, a Chadian national.

In addition to the Al-Quds Committee, there are three permanent committees concerned with science and technology, economy and trade, and information and culture.

Subsidiary Organs

The subsidiary organs play a vital role in boosting cooperation in various fields among the OIC member states. ⁴ These organs are directly funded by the OIC and run under the supervision of the OIC General Secretariat. The list of subsidiary organs includes the following institutions:⁵

1. Statistical, Economic, Social Research and Training Center for Islamic Countries (SESRIC)
2. Research Center for Islamic History, Art, and Culture (IRCICA)
3. Islamic University of Technology (IUT)
4. Islamic Center for the Development of Trade (ICDT)
5. International Islamic Fiqh Academy (IIFA)
6. The Islamic Solidarity Fund and its Waqf (ISF).

Affiliated Institutions

Membership to these institutions is open to institutions of OIC Member states and they may be granted observer status by resolutions from the Council of Foreign Ministers. Unlike the subsidiary organs, budgets of affiliated institutions are independent of the budget of the Secretariat General. They may obtain voluntary assistance from the subsidiary and specialized organs as well as from Member States. The list includes:⁶

1. Islamic Chamber of Commerce, Industry and Agriculture (ICCIA)
2. Organization of Islamic Capitals and Cities (OICC)
3. Islamic Solidarity Sports Federation (ISSF)
4. World Federation of Arabo-Islamic International Schools (WFAIIS)
5. Organization of the Islamic Shipowners Association (OISA)
6. Islamic Conference Youth Forum for Dialogue and Cooperation (ICYF-DC)
7. International Union of Muslim Scouts (IUMS)
8. Federation of Consultants from Islamic Countries (FCIC)
9. Islamic World Academy of Sciences (IAS)
10. General Council for Islamic Banks and Financial Institutions (CIBAFI)
11. Federation of Contractors from Islamic Countries (FOCIC)
12. OIC Computer Emergency Response Team (OIC-CERT)
13. Standards and Metrology Institute for Islamic Countries (SMIIC)
14. International Islamic University Malaysia (IIUM)
15. Association of Tax Authorities of Islamic Countries (ATAIC)
16. Real Estate Union in Islamic States (REUOS)
17. Organization of Islamic Cooperation Broadcasting Regulatory Authorities Forum (IBRAF); and

the Islamic Chamber of Commerce, Industry and Agriculture (ICCIA); Organization of Islamic Capitals and Cities (OICC); Islamic Conference Youth Forum for Dialogue and Cooperation (ICYF-DC); Standards and Metrology Institute for Islamic Countries (SMIIC) and International Islamic University Malaysia (IIUM). For full list of affiliated institutions, please consult the relevant section in the OIC official site.

Specialized Institutions

Specialized institutions are established in accordance with decisions of Islamic Summits or Council of Foreign Ministers. Budgets of specialized organs are independent of the budget of the OIC Secretariat General and are approved by their respective governing bodies. The list includes:⁷

- Islamic Development Bank (IDB)
- Islamic Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (ISESCO)
- Islamic Broadcasting Union (IBU)
- Union of News Agencies of the OIC Member States (UNA)
- Islamic Committee of the International Crescent (ICIC)
- The Science, Technology, and Innovation Organization (STIO)
- Islamic Organization for Food Security (IOFS)
- Women Development Organization (WDO) in OIC Member States

The important specialized organs under the banner of the OIC are the following:

1. Islamic Development Bank (IDB)

The IDB (www.isdb.org) was established in 1973 and headquartered in Jeddah, Saudi Arabia. It is the main OIC financial arm for fostering economic development and social progress of member states. The Bank provides grants and loans for productive projects and enterprises in member states. The IDB has its own governing mechanisms, where member countries send their representatives to the Board of Governors.⁸

2. The Islamic Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (ISESCO).

The ISESCO (www.isesco.org.ma) was established in 1981 and headquartered in Rabat, Morocco. It functions like the UNESCO and aims to “strengthen, promote and consolidate cooperation among OIC member states in the fields of education, science, culture and communication, as well as to develop and upgrade these fields.” ISESCO aims also to “publicize the correct image of Islam and Islamic culture, promote dialogue among civilizations, cultures and religions, and work towards

spreading the values of justice and peace along with the principles of freedom and human rights, in accordance with the Islamic civilizational perspective.”⁹

3. Union of OIC News Agencies (UNA) www.una-oic.org
4. The Islamic Broadcasting Union (IBU) www.ibuj.org
5. Islamic World Academy of Sciences (IAS) www.iasworld.org

Affiliated Institutions

1. Islamic Chamber of Commerce and Industry (ICCI) www.iccia.org
2. Organization of Islamic Capitals and Cities (OICC) www.oicc.org
3. Organization of the Islamic Shipowners Association (OISA) www.oisaonline.com
4. World Federation of Arab Islamic International Schools (WFAIS) www.wfais.org
5. Islamic Cooperation Youth Forum www.icyforum.org Islamic World Academy of Sciences (IAS)

Subsidiary Organs

1. The International Islamic Fiqh Academy (IIFA) www.iifa-aifi.org
2. The Statistical, Economic and Social Research and Training Center for Islamic Countries (SESRIC) www.sesric.org
3. The Research Center for Islamic History, Art, and Culture (IRCICA) www.ircica.org
4. The Islamic Center for the Development of Trade (ICDT) www.icdt-oic.org
5. The Islamic University of Technology (UIT) www.iutoic-dhaka.edu

Conventions and Agreements

The OIC seeks to further cooperation among its member states through a variety of agreements and conventions. For example, the Agreement Establishing the Islamic Commission of the International Crescent, Covenant on the Rights of Children in Islam and the OIC Convention to Combat Terrorism (1999), inter alia. The following agreements are some of OIC economic mechanisms:¹⁰

- Framework Agreement on Trade Preferential System among the member states of the Organization of the Islamic Conference.

- Protocol on the Preferential Tariff Scheme for TPS-OIC (PRETAS)
- General Agreement for Economic, Technical and Commercial Cooperation among the OIC member states
- Agreement for the Promotion, Protection and Guarantee of Investment among member states of The Organization of the Islamic Conference

The OIC and the Issue of Muslim Minorities

Since its establishment, the OIC claims to have been keen to make all efforts to defend the rights of Muslim minorities in non- Member States and to stand up to their persecution. There is a Directorate of Muslim Minorities Communities in the OIC framework but isn't functional. The OIC claims to have contributed to providing various forms of support to the Muslim minority communities. The Islamic Development Bank (IDB) and the Islamic Solidarity Fund (ISF) have “indeed contributed to the efforts aimed at improving the economic and social conditions of these Muslim communities by financing development projects and humanitarian relief”.¹¹ The report “Muslim Communities in non-Member States of the Organization of Islamic Cooperation 2020” also sheds light on some of the efforts undertaken by the OIC to care for and support Muslim communities.¹² The report is mentioned in the Information Resources Center (IRC) official webpage. The report is of poor quality. For example, the section regarding the US the report states:¹³

Total population: 326.766.748 Muslim population (2019): 2.75 – 6 million. The history of Islam in the United States goes back to the early years of its founding, as Islam and American Muslims have mixed with the history of the United States over the past two centuries. The exact history of this intermingling is not known, and while this is partly due to the fact that the Muslim population was often a small group, Islam features in the history of American slavery and emancipation. The US census does not include data on religions, so there are no official statistics on the number of Muslims in the US. However, in 2011 a Pew Research Center survey reported that 3.45 million Muslims live in the United States. They far outnumber that estimate, according to the Council on American-Islamic Relations, a Washington-based lobbying group, which estimated it at between 6 and 7 million Muslims³³. Muslims are not evenly distributed across the country. Some states have larger Muslim communities, such as New Jersey and Washington, DC.

Regardless of their real number, American Muslims are at the center of the most contentious issues: US foreign policy, national security, terrorism, integration, religious freedom, and American identity. American Muslims come from a variety of backgrounds, and a 2009 Gallup poll described them as the most ethnically diverse religious group in the United States.

The information given above on the United States is very inadequate and doesn't do justice to the Muslim American community. The Gallup poll survey used is 2009 which is outdated. An earlier estimate disclosed that the Muslim population is growing, and in the next two decades Muslims could become the second-largest religious group in the United States, according to a Pew Research study. According to the Pew Research Center data, the Muslim population is growing at an accelerated rate, and will more than double from an estimated 3.45 million in 2017 to an estimated 8.1 million in 2050. Islam could be the second-largest religion by 2040.¹⁴ Most accept the estimate of Muslim American population to be between 5 million to 8 million.¹⁵

It shouldn't be acceptable to the American Muslim community leadership. Also, surprisingly the OIC hasn't been contacted by Islamic organizations to correct the section on the US.

The OIC Failure to Support the Cause of the Chinese Muslim Uyghurs Minority Community

Given the growing influence of China in the Muslim world, the human right abuses of the minority Muslim community are being deliberately ignored by the OIC. A coalition of US Muslim groups, including Council on American-Islamic Relations, claimed that the OIC members were being intimidated by China's power. Thus, US Muslim groups have accused OIC of backing China's Uighur 'genocide'.¹⁶ Muslim groups in the United States have pleaded for OIC to speak out on China's mass imprisonment of Uyghurs, accusing the global body of abetting what some described as genocide.¹⁷

The OIC frequently takes up cases in which it believes Muslims are mistreated. However, the OIC is quiet over China's western region of Xinjiang, where rights groups say that more than a million Uighurs and other Turkic-speaking Muslims are being held in camps as part of an effort to stamp out Islamic customs and forcibly integrate the community.

In a March 2019 resolution, the OIC said it “commends the efforts of the People’s Republic of China in providing care to its Muslim citizens” after a delegation visited. Meanwhile, the US, which has a rising rivalry with China, has likened the treatment of the Uighurs to the actions of Nazi Germany and voiced disappointment that the OIC has not spoken up. China describes the camps as vocational training centers and says that like Western nations, it is working to “reduce the allure of Islamic extremism”.¹⁸

Meanwhile, the leadership of other Muslim communities have also failed to launch a sustained campaign, in collaboration with partners, to galvanize the entire Muslim community to lobby the OIC for policy change. The Biden administration is currently focusing on the issue and confronting China over human right abusees of Uyghurs.

The US on December 10, 2021 had imposed extensive human rights-related sanctions on dozens of people and entities tied to China and added Chinese artificial intelligence company SenseTime Group to an investment blacklist.¹⁹

The US added Chinese artificial intelligence company SenseTime to a list of "Chinese military-industrial complex companies," accusing it of having developed facial recognition programs that can determine a target’s ethnicity, with a particular focus on identifying ethnic Uyghurs. The U.N. experts and rights groups estimate more than a million people, mainly Uyghurs and members of other Muslim minorities, have been detained in recent years in a vast system of camps in China's Xinjiang region. However, China denies abuses in Xinjiang. Nevertheless, the U.S. government and many rights groups say Beijing is carrying out genocide there.

The OIC and the Afghanistan Emergency

In the nearly four months since the American withdrawal from Afghanistan, the world has witnessed the collapse of the Afghan government and the Taliban takeover. The country is impoverished, and hunger is increasing with millions in danger and a growing humanitarian crisis. 23 million Afghans need food assistance, with 8.7 million nearing famine.²⁰ One million children face severe, acute malnutrition, and could starve and die this winter, far more than died in 20 years of war. Schools have no money to pay teachers because the banking system is

inoperable. And the health care system is near collapse because international assistance that was the source of funding has been frozen.²¹

On December 10, 2021 it was reported that donors including the United States are expected to allow the transfer of \$280 million from a frozen trust fund to two aid agencies to help Afghanistan weather its humanitarian crisis. There had been no objections so far to the transfer to the World Food Program (WFP) and UNICEF from the Afghanistan Reconstruction Trust Fund (ARTF), which is administered by the World Bank.²² The US would not object to the transfer. The money would boost food security and health programs in Afghanistan as it sinks into a severe economic and humanitarian crisis. The US and other donors cut off financial aid and more than \$9 billion of Afghanistan's hard currency assets were frozen. Meanwhile, the United Nations has warned that nearly 23 million people – about 55% of the population – are facing extreme levels of hunger, with nearly 9 million at risk of famine as winter takes hold in Using money from the ARTF and channeling it through the WFP and UNICEF is a method to get funding into Afghanistan for basic needs in a way that does not necessarily involve US sanctions.²³

Reuters reported exclusively on Dec. 1 that the World Bank board had backed transferring the \$280 million from the ARTF to the two agencies.

On December 8, 2021 the UN High Commissioner for Refugees Filippo Grandi warned of a surge of Afghan refugees amid mounting fears of economic collapse in the war-ravaged country and called for urgent economic aid. The United Nations has repeatedly warned that Afghanistan is on the brink of the world's worst humanitarian crisis. More than half of Afghanistan's 38 million population is expected to face hunger this winter, according to aid groups, as the economy teeters on the verge of collapse following the Taliban's return to power and as international aid remains frozen.

According to the UNHCR, there are 3.4 million Afghans in Iran, including nearly two million undocumented migrants and 800,000 refugees. Furthermore, some 3.5 million Afghans have

been displaced inside their country, many of them before the Taliban came to power in August, according to UN estimates.²⁴

In the nearly four months since the American withdrawal from Afghanistan, the world has witnessed the collapse of the Afghan government and the Taliban takeover. The country is now in freefall, with millions in danger and a spiraling humanitarian crisis. 23 million Afghans need food assistance, with 8.7 million nearing famine.²⁵

Recently, Pakistan's foreign minister called on December 4, 2021 for a fresh effort to stop neighboring Afghanistan sliding further into crisis as he announced an extraordinary meeting of the OIC later this month. The meeting of foreign ministers from Islamic countries will be held in Islamabad on Dec. 19, with delegations from the European Union and the so-called P5 group of the United States, Britain, France, Russia, and China also invited.²⁶ "To abandon Afghanistan at this stage would be a historic mistake," Foreign Minister Shah Mahmood Hussain Qureshi told a news conference in Islamabad, warning that half the country was facing the risk of starvation that could trigger further chaos. "Instability could give way to renewed conflict, it could trigger an exodus of refugees," he said.²⁷

However, getting assistance to Afghanistan has been hindered by sanctions on dealing with the Taliban. The US had decided to freeze billions of dollars of central bank reserves held outside Afghanistan and the collapse of much of the country's banking system. Most probably, the OIC would deliberate at length on the issue of the recognition of the Taliban regime and sending in emergency aid to Afghanistan. Given the weakness of the OIC and the constituent Muslim member states it can be safely predicted that the outcome of the meeting would be disappointing. That shouldn't be surprising at all. Overall, the OIC hasn't lived up to its promise. It is sufficient to state here that the organization has largely failed to come up to the expectations of the Muslim nation. The OIC is paralyzed by politics and weak leadership. Nevertheless, it has undertaken many useful projects for the Muslim world and some agencies are better than others because of various factors. Some are indeed doing good work. Overall, the OIC performance is poor because of the weakness of the member-states themselves. An international organization is as weak and as strong as its constituent parts. Since the Muslim world is weak overall, the OIC is also weak.

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¹ Organization of Islamic Conference, https://www.oic-oci.org/page/?p_id=52&p_ref=26&lan=en

²² Organization of Islamic Conference <https://www.oic-oci.org/confdetail/?cID=6&lan=en>

³ Organization of Islamic Conference <https://www.oic-oci.org/confdetail/?cID=15&lan=en>

⁴ Organization of Islamic Conference, https://www.oic-oci.org/upload/journals/content/oic_journal_46_en.pdf, accessed December 9, 2021

⁵ https://www.oic-oci.org/page/?p_id=64&p_ref=33&lan=en

⁶ https://www.oic-oci.org/page/?p_id=66&p_ref=35&lan=en

⁷ https://www.oic-oci.org/page/?p_id=65&p_ref=34&lan=en

⁸ Organization of Islamic Conference www.iasworld.orghttps://www.oic-oci.org/upload/journals/content/oic_journal_46_en.pdf, accessed December 9, 2021 https://www.oic-oci.org/upload/journals/content/oic_journal_46_en.pdf, accessed December 9, 2021

⁹ Organization of Islamic Conference www.iasworld.orghttps://www.oic-oci.org/upload/journals/content/oic_journal_46_en.pdf, accessed December 9, 2021, https://www.oic-oci.org/upload/journals/content/oic_journal_46_en.pdf, accessed December 9, 2021

¹⁰ <https://www.nyulawglobal.org/globalex/OIC.html>, accessed December 9, 2021

<https://www.nyulawglobal.org/globalex/OIC.html>, accessed December 9, 2021

¹¹ https://www.oic-oci.org/upload/media/books/minority_book_en.pdf, accessed December 9, 2021, The Information Resources Center (IRC) https://www.oic-oci.org/dept/?d_id=9&d_ref=8&lan=en, accessed December 9, 2021

¹² Ibid

¹³ A Brief History of Islam in America <https://www.vox.com/2015/12/22/10645956/islam-in-america> viewed on 2 September 2020) https://www.oic-oci.org/upload/media/books/minority_book_en.pdf, p. 63

¹⁴ AJ Willingham, “By 2040, Islam could be the second-largest religion in the US”, CNN, January 10, 2018 <https://www.cnn.com/2018/01/10/politics/muslim-population-growth-second-religious-group-trnd/index.html>

¹⁵ Islam 101, https://www.islam101.com/history/population2_usa.html, accessed December 10, 2021

¹⁶ US Muslim groups accuse OIC of abetting China’s Uighur ‘genocide’, <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2020/12/18/us-muslims-press-organization-of-islamic-cooperation-on-china>, accessed December 9, 2021

¹⁷ Ibid

¹⁹ Daphne Psaedakis and David Brunnstrom, Simon Lewis, U.S. imposes sweeping human rights sanctions on China, Myanmar and North Korea, Reuters, December 10, 2021, <https://www.reuters.com/world/asia-pacific/us-issues-human-rights-related-sanctions-adds-sensetime-blacklist-2021-12-10/>, accessed December 10, 2021

²⁰ Jane Ferguson and Nick Schifrin, “Afghanistan is on the brink of mass starvation. Where is international aid?”, PBS NewsHour, December 8, 2021, <https://www.pbs.org/newshour/show/afghanistan-is-on-the-brink-of-mass-starvation-where-is-international-aid>, accessed December 9, 2021

²¹ Jane Ferguson and Nick Schifrin, “Afghanistan is on the brink of mass starvation. Where is international aid?”, PBS NewsHour, December 8, 2021, <https://www.pbs.org/newshour/show/afghanistan-is-on-the-brink-of-mass-starvation-where-is-international-aid>, accessed December 9, 2021

<https://www.thenews.com.pk/latest/914938-un-fears-surge-of-afghan-refugees-as-economy-nears-collapse>, accessed December 9, 2021
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²² Exclusive: Donors expected to back \$280 million transfer for Afghanistan, Reuters, December 10, 2021
By Arshad Mohammed and Jonathan Landay, Andrea Shalal

<https://www.reuters.com/world/asia-pacific/exclusive-donors-expected-back-280-mln-transfer-afghanistan-2021-12-10/>

²³ Ibid

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²⁵ Jane Ferguson and Nick Schifrin, “Afghanistan is on the brink of mass starvation. Where is international aid?”, PBS NewsHour, December 8, 2021, <https://www.pbs.org/newshour/show/afghanistan-is-on-the-brink-of-mass-starvation-where-is-international-aid>, accessed December 9, 2021 <https://www.pbs.org/newshour/show/afghanistan-is-on-the-brink-of-mass-starvation-where-is-international-aid>

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²⁷ Ibid