The Organization of the Islamic Conference (OIC) was established in 1969 with the goals of representing the Muslim world and support cooperation among Muslim nations and is the largest transnational Muslim organization representing 57 Muslim countries. Institutions like the OIC are needed not only for political reasons but also because of the feeling of alienation, insecurity and dispossession among the Muslim masses. This feeling is caused by the rapid process of tortured modernization and international politics that surround the relationship between Muslim societies and the major power players of the modern world. Furthermore, the Euro-centric historiographies of our educational systems make it virtually impossible to place non-Western histories on world history charts. History is assumed to begin with Greece and end somewhere on the two sides of the Atlantic.

Newly emerging networks of communication including the OIC are seen as potential voices for the Muslim world. Such voices are direly needed to express the concerns of Muslim societies to foster peace, justice, and equality. The omnipresent reality of the voices of wisdom, compassion, and moderation was a leitmotif of the classical Islamic tradition, which has succeeded in overcoming its own eccentric and extreme sides. Today, the Muslim world is a world without a centre. It seems to have lost its spiritual dignity and magnanimity. It wants to join a battle in which there are no winners. It is a world without a voice.

Obviously, there cannot be one single voice for a world as vast and complex as the Muslim world. No single person, institution, or government claim to can speak for the entire Muslim world. What I have in mind is not a central authority that issues fatwas or makes declarations on issues of concern. Rather, it is something that will embody the ideal of finding the middle path of the Islamic tradition where the Muslim world will once again, see itself as the “middle community” (ummatan wasatuh). It is the “middle way” of traditional Islam “defined by that sophisticated classical consensus which was worked out over painful centuries of debate and scholarship.”

Not one but many voices of the “middle way” have to emerge to reflect the rich diversity as well as the multifaceted concerns and anxieties of Muslim communities the world over. This is what is happening in different parts of the Muslim world. Countless Muslim organizations, small and big, conservative and liberal, local and international, are converging on the need for such platforms where the voices of moderation, wisdom, mercy, and serious thinking can flourish. They are seeking the “middle path” to make sense of everything from the Danish cartoon saga to the mindless killings in Iraq.

The Third Extraordinary Organization of the Islamic Conference (OIC) Summit held in Mecca on 7-8 December 2005 has brought to the forefront the question of whether it can serve as a voice for the Muslim world in its struggles to cope with the political and spiritual challenges it faces. Though the OIC has been severely criticized for its ineffectiveness, as the cartoon crisis in Denmark shows, the author argues that it is bound to play a critical role in the relations between the Muslim world and the West especially at a time when the former is struck with a sense of distrust, dislocation, and dispossession.

Newly emerging networks of communication including the OIC are seen as potential voices for the Muslim world. Such voices are direly needed to express the concerns of Muslim societies to foster peace, justice, and equality. The omnipresent reality of the voices of wisdom, compassion, and moderation was a leitmotif of the classical Islamic tradition, which has succeeded in overcoming its own eccentric and extreme sides. Today, the Muslim world is a world without a centre. It seems to have lost its spiritual dignity and magnanimity. It wants to join a battle in which there are no winners. It is a world without a voice.

Obviously, there cannot be one single voice for a world as vast and complex as the Muslim world. No single person, institution, or government claim to can speak for the entire Muslim world. What I have in mind is not a central authority that issues fatwas or makes declarations on issues of concern. Rather, it is something that will embody the ideal of finding the middle path of the Islamic tradition where the Muslim world will once again, see itself as the “middle community” (ummatan wasatuh). It is the “middle way” of traditional Islam “defined by that sophisticated classical consensus which was worked out over painful centuries of debate and scholarship.”

Not one but many voices of the “middle way” have to emerge to reflect the rich diversity as well as the multifaceted concerns and anxieties of Muslim communities the world over. This is what is happening in different parts of the Muslim world. Countless Muslim organizations, small and big, conservative and liberal, local and international, are converging on the need for such platforms where the voices of moderation, wisdom, mercy, and serious thinking can flourish. They are seeking the “middle path” to make sense of everything from the Danish cartoon saga to the mindless killings in Iraq.
One of the central messages of the Summit was a call to "unity" and "joint action." The other issues discussed included the formation of a joint Islamic solidarity fund, cooperation among NGOs, curbing extremism and preventing ethnic and sectarian clashes, establishing a balance between security and freedom, giving a larger role to women, ensuring the protection of human and minority rights in Muslim countries, combating terrorism and Islamophobia, improving relations between the Muslim world and the West, increasing economic and scientific cooperation among the OIC member states, investing more in education, and opening new offices of the OIC in places where Muslims live as minorities.

The recommendations of the Forum were submitted to Heads of State in the Third Extraordinary OIC summit held in Mecca, 7-8 December 2005. Fifty-seven presidents, prime ministers, or their representatives attended the Summit. The Forum and the Summit produced three documents: the Mecca Declaration, Final Communique and the 10-year Programme of Action. One of the central messages of the Summit was striving for unity and solidarity among Muslim nations, fighting against terrorism and extremism of all kinds, and recovering the middle path of moderation. Corruption, poverty, illiteracy, and lack of transparency and political accountability in Muslim countries were singled out as among the most pressing issues. It was also emphasized that unity among Muslim nations should be strengthened and that Muslim countries should play a larger role in all the major international organizations.

The main agenda of the Mecca Forum was the reform and restructuring of the OIC in view of the current problems in the Muslim world. In the Forum, the participants discussed a long list of issues and made a number of suggestions. The themes of the forum were divided into three main areas: political, economic and scientific, and cultural-intellectual. Each panel proposed a vision, evaluated the current situation and challenges, and made suggestions as to how to achieve the projected goals. One of the themes that came up recurrently was the lack of political will on the part of member states to implement the numerous resolutions of such meetings. The gap between what is said and what is done was highlighted as a major defect undermining the credibility of the OIC and similar institutions.

The recommendations of the Forum were submitted to Heads of State in the Third Extraordinary OIC summit held in Mecca, 7-8 December 2005. Fifty-seven presidents, prime ministers, or their representatives attended the Summit. The Forum and the Summit produced three documents: the Mecca Declaration, Final Communique and the 10-year Programme of Action. One of the central messages of the Summit was striving for unity and solidarity among Muslim nations, fighting against terrorism and extremism of all kinds, and recovering the middle path of moderation. Corruption, poverty, illiteracy, and lack of transparency and political accountability in Muslim countries were singled out as among the most pressing issues. It was also emphasized that unity among Muslim nations should be strengthened and that Muslim countries should play a larger role in all the major international organizations.

The main agenda of the Mecca Forum was the reform and restructuring of the OIC in view of the current problems in the Muslim world. In the Forum, the participants discussed a long list of issues and made a number of suggestions. The themes of the forum were divided into three main areas: political, economic and scientific, and cultural-intellectual. Each panel proposed a vision, evaluated the current situation and challenges, and made suggestions as to how to achieve the projected goals. One of the themes that came up recurrently was the lack of political will on the part of member states to implement the numerous resolutions of such meetings. The gap between what is said and what is done was highlighted as a major defect undermining the credibility of the OIC and similar institutions.

The recommendations of the Forum were submitted to Heads of State in the Third Extraordinary OIC summit held in Mecca, 7-8 December 2005. Fifty-seven presidents, prime ministers, or their representatives attended the Summit. The Forum and the Summit produced three documents: the Mecca Declaration, Final Communique and the 10-year Programme of Action. One of the central messages of the Summit was striving for unity and solidarity among Muslim nations, fighting against terrorism and extremism of all kinds, and recovering the middle path of moderation. Corruption, poverty, illiteracy, and lack of transparency and political accountability in Muslim countries were singled out as among the most pressing issues. It was also emphasized that unity among Muslim nations should be strengthened and that Muslim countries should play a larger role in all the major international organizations.

The other issues discussed included the formation of a joint Islamic solidarity fund, cooperation among NGOs, curbing extremism and preventing ethnic and sectarian clashes, establishing a balance between security and freedom, giving a larger role to women, ensuring the protection of human and minority rights in Muslim countries, combating terrorism and Islamophobia, improving relations between the Muslim world and the West, increasing economic and scientific cooperation among the OIC member states, investing more in education, and opening new offices of the OIC in places where Muslims live as minorities.

Giving just a list of the above issues attests to the enormity of the problems faced by the Muslim world today. They point to the urgency of taking action to stop the further alienation and frustration of Muslim communities throughout the world. In the absence of proper representation, such lingering problems are bound to result in chaos and further destruction. At this point, the Danish cartoon crisis gave the OIC a unique chance to play the role of a credible negotiator between Europe and the Muslim world. It was important for the OIC to make a plea of calm and moderation in the name of the Muslim world. Even though these calls did not have an immediate impact on street demonstrations, they helped start a number of official initiatives to address the crisis at an international level. OIC became the main institution to convey the message of the Muslim masses to the halls of European Union, and this is no small matter for the global representation of Muslim issues in the West.

Institutions like the OIC, if endowed with a proper vision and equipped with the necessary means, can make a difference to alleviate some of the pain suffered by millions of people within and outside the Muslim world. Otherwise, the hard realities of poverty, corruption, impotence, mistrust, anger and indifference are bound to continue to produce confused minds and hardened souls. Reversing the course of events for the better will be a historic moment not only for the Muslim world but for all the children of Adam.

Ibrahim Kalin is Assistant Professor of Islamic Studies at the Department of Religious Studies at the College of the Holy Cross, Worcester.

Email: ikalin@holycross.edu

Notes
5. From the opening speech by Prof. Ekmeleddin Ihsanoglu, the Secretary-General of the OIC, Mecca, 9 September 2005.