



In the Name of God, the Compassionate, the Merciful

Address by

DR HUSSEIN A. GEZAIRY

REGIONAL DIRECTOR

WHO EASTERN MEDITERRANEAN REGION

at the

**EIGHT INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE OF
THE ISLAMIC ORGANIZATION OF MEDICAL SCIENCES ON
THE ISLAMIC CHARTER OF MEDICAL AND HEALTH ETHICS**

Cairo, Egypt, 11–14 December 2004

Your Eminences, Your Excellencies,
Honorable Colleagues,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

It gives me pleasure to welcome you to the eighth international conference of the Islamic Organization of Medical Sciences (IOMS), which honours us this year by holding the conference at our regional office, in cooperation with the World Health Organization; the Islamic Organization of Education, Sciences, and Culture (IOESC); the Council of International Organizations of Medical Sciences (CIOMS); and the Ajman University Science and Technology Network. I want to thank in particular Dr Muhammad Awad Tag Al-Deen, the Minister of Health and Population, who represents Dr Ahmad Nazeef, the Prime Minister and Patron of this great scholarly gathering. Dr Tag Al-Deen contributes his clear insight and penetrating opinions, which we have, for a long time, benefited from in solving many problems. The importance of this

conference stems from the fact that its participants – the elite of our jurisprudence scholars, scientists, and researchers – will address a subject of great importance, namely the Islamic Charter of Medical and Health Ethics. It is a long-awaited subject. This conference of ours has raised hopes that answers will be found for several pressing questions and that clear courses will be charted for Muslim physicians to follow in practising their profession and conducting their research, at a time in which life is characterized by its complex aspects and diverse ideologies.

First of all, allow me to express my thanks to the Islamic Organization of Medical Sciences, which is the sponsor of this significant event. The Organization began to function at the beginning of 1981, which coincided with the beginning of the fifteenth century of the Hijri calendar. Among the many organizations that fly the banner of science and strive in the service of medicine, the IOMS has distinguished itself by its clear vision, sound methodology, a commitment to moderation, unceasing activity, and comprehensive contribution.

One derives great pleasure when one learns that the IOMS has managed so far to hold about thirty scholarly conventions, bringing together in each of them a group of science specialists and pious jurists, and choosing subjects which relate to people's daily life and which are regarded as too intricate to solve. One of these is the subject we are going to examine and discuss today: the Islamic Charter of Medical and Health Ethics, with reference to research conducted on human subjects within the framework of the International Ethical Guidelines for Biomedical Research, prepared by the Council for International Organizations of Medical Sciences, and also with reference to the relationships a physician has with his colleagues, patients, and society. It also pleases me to express a warm greeting and abundant praise to all the individuals who have been striving, with God's help, to see this initiative realized; who have been blessed, by Him, with the means to see their efforts succeed; and who are headed by my brother and friend Dr Abd Al-Rahman Al-Awadi. I thank him and all those who have responded to his call and are cooperating with him and who deserve praise for their work in this world and their work for the Hereafter. Only God can give them their due reward.

It is also a great pleasure to me to welcome the representatives of the Islamic Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization, which has made since its establishment, and is still making today, evident educational, scientific and cultural contributions in most Islamic countries. It has

firmly implanted in the minds of people the fact that Islam is a benevolent creed, a constructive culture, a humane civilization and a lifestyle. It has emphasized that our religion is a spiritual, ethical, cultural and civilized force that:

- makes a contribution of extreme importance to the enrichment of human civilization,
- brings the nations of the world to be acquainted with each other,
- strengthens their brotherhood and friendship,
- spreads peace among them, and
- supports productive dialogue with other cultures to achieve cultural coexistence that guarantees respect for the cultural identity of all peoples.

At the same time, ISESCO has demonstrated that Islam is committed to the principles of justice, equality, solidarity, and joint responsibility to strengthen international cooperation, with all available means, for the improvement of education, scientific knowledge, technology, culture and communications.

Furthermore, I want to thank the Ajman University Network and its noble president, Dr Sa'eed Abdullah Salman, who spared no effort in elucidating many important categories and pointing out future courses and future horizons. I also thank the Council for International Organizations of Medical Sciences, which collaborated with the World Health Organization and the Islamic Organization of Medical Sciences in preparing the International Ethical Guidelines for Biomedical Research Involving Human Subjects.

I take the opportunity which this conference provides to have the honour of meeting many venerable scientists and scholars and listening to many honourable thinkers. They all deserve my thanks for accepting the invitation and going through the hardships of travelling to participate in this conference. I especially thank the participants from the Far East, that is from Indonesia and Malaysia, and from the Far West, that is from the United States and Europe. I also welcome the respected scholars and scientists from all Arab and Islamic countries. I am confident that all of us will long remember this wonderful occasion that has brought us together today, and that

physicians and other health service workers will remember the outcome of your sessions over the few coming days, whenever their practice calls on them to benefit from that outcome.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

It goes without saying that the importance of this subject for all of us and for the World Health Organization in particular, derives from the vows that WHO has undertaken to get people, all people, to enjoy the highest possible level of health in their places of living at an affordable cost. This health-for-all concern is supported, theoretically at least, by the great and steady acceleration of scientific and technological achievements that characterize contemporary culture, and the determination of societies to keep up with that pace in order to acquire the gains and benefits from new discoveries and research findings. An unexpected surprise has been brought, however, by the reality of our present life, and challenges have been posed, confusing even the most patient. For health is indicated to be still at a low level in developing societies, and income in most parts of the world is still below the poverty line, in spite of the availability of resources and inventions. The reason for this is, first of all, the crisis of ethics and values that the whole world is facing today.

We agree that all commendable moral values come from the same source and follow a clear course that covers the whole earth, East and West. They are values that honour man for his human nature, that are honoured by God, and protect his basic rights to live, enjoy freedom, safeguard his possessions and health, and have sufficient sustenance throughout his life. Let us always remember that by ethics, we mean the positive ethics that a person embraces voluntarily, bearing their responsibility with full commitment. Man's position as regards these moral values is determined by the following principles.

The first principle is that Man is honoured. God, the Most Glorious and Sublime, says, "We have honoured the children of Adam." This honouring implies that man should be kept in full health and well-being and his privacy should be respected.

The second principle is that the aim of religious law is to protect the five vital requisites, which are religion, life, offspring, property and reason. These can only be protected by maintaining one's health.

The third principle is that every human being has the right to live; his life is respected and protected. One human soul is equal in value to all human beings. God, the Most Glorious and Sublime, says, “. . . and when he saves [a life], it is as if he saved the lives of all people.” Any aggression against the life of a human being, even if it is a fetus or an old or disabled person, is an aggression against all people: “When a person kills a soul – unless it is [in punishment] for a [murdered] soul or for corruption on earth – it is as if he has killed all people.”

The fourth principle is that fairness and charity are most important values. In the language of the Quran, fairness also means equality and implies quality as well. A good thing is a thing of high quality. The Arabic term for charity also implies a touch of compassion and gentleness, and a giving nature, which makes a person wish for his brother what he wishes for himself and even give priority to others over himself, even when he suffers a dire need. Charity also denotes a living conscience and mindfulness of God, the Most Glorious and Sublime, in every action and behaviour, as implied by the statement of the Prophet, blessing and peace be upon him: “Charity is to worship God as if you saw Him.” These two values, fairness and charity, have been in practice since the early days of this culture, to which we belong and of which we are proud. It is not surprising then that Islam regards entitlement to health as the right of every human being, without any discrimination based on colour, gender, or religion, and that the provided care, as viewed by Islam, begins at birth, with the provision of wholesome nursing, and continues to old age, when enough is provided to ensure a healthy life. Between infancy and old age, no sick, crippled, or injured person is deprived of proper care.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Perhaps you share my opinion that it is important to hold meetings, seminars, symposia, and conferences to discuss important subjects in the field of medical and health ethics in our present time. In one part, these ethics are hardly different from those of old, but in another part, great issues have emerged and they require from us considerable thinking, deliberation, and discussion. They also require bold and serious moves that will enable us to achieve fairness in extending health services to all people, without discriminating between rich and poor, or disabled and able, or against anyone that belongs to a particular religion, state or race. This is the challenge facing all of us.

In conclusion, I sincerely commend those colleagues who worked hard to get ready the key documents which you are going to review and discuss at this conference. These documents will be enriched by your contribution and will take their proper, final form at the conclusion of your sessions. As they exist now in your files and bags, they need a lot of enrichment through examination and discussion.

I pray to God to make us all successful in achieving what is good to our nations and to all people.

Peace be upon you, with God's mercy and blessings.