

A look back at 50 years of OIC as it meets in Makkah for Islamic Summit

Author:

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JEDDAH: From defending Palestinian rights to taking a unified stand on threats against member states, the Organization of Islamic Cooperation (OIC) – the world's second-largest inter-governmental body after the UN – has been making a difference in the Muslim world for the last 50 years.

The Islamic Summit in Makkah on Friday will be the organization's 14th ordinary summit, and will be attended by kings and heads of state and government of the OIC's 57 member countries.

The OIC first met a month after an arson attack inside Al-Aqsa Mosque in Jerusalem on Aug. 21, 1969.

An Australian tourist had set fire to a structure in the main Al-Qibly Mosque, destroying the 800-year-old pulpit of Saladin.

Reacting to the incident, representatives from 24 Islamic states gathered in Rabat, Morocco, from Sept. 22 to 25 for the first Islamic Summit, marking the birth of the OIC.



Saudi Arabia's late King Faisal arriving in September 1969 at the Islamic Summit in Rabat, where the OIC was established. (Getty Images)

The next year, the first ever meeting of the Islamic Conference of Foreign Ministers (ICFM) was convened in Jeddah, and a decision was taken to establish a permanent secretariat in the Saudi city, headed by the OIC's secretary-general.

The summit in Rabat was attended by representatives of the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO) with observer status.

The attendees pledged their adherence to the UN Charter and condemned Israel for the Al-Aqsa arson attack.

The second Islamic Summit was convened in February 1974 in Lahore, Pakistan, after a gap of five years.

Representatives from nearly 35 countries attended, proclaiming that "the solidarity of the Islamic peoples is based not on hostility towards any other human communities nor on distinctions of race and culture."

The Lahore gathering called on OIC member states to sever all relations with Israel in favor of Islamic solidarity.

Seven years later, in January 1981, Saudi Arabia hosted the third Islamic Summit, known as the "Palestine and Al-Quds Al-Sharif Session," from which Iran and Libya stayed away.

The final declaration read: "All Muslims form one nation of moderation, rejecting alignment to any and all blocs and ideologies, steadfastly refusing to surrender to divisive influences or to conflicts of interests."

Convened against the backdrop of the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan, the summit in Jeddah expressed its deep concern over Cold War developments, and renewed its call for the withdrawal of all foreign forces from the country.



A crowd watches as firefighters put out a fire in Jerusalem's Al-Aqsa Mosque in August 1969. (Getty Images)

The delegates decided that OIC member states would contribute at least \$3 billion for the creation of an Islamic World Development Program.

The Saudi crown prince at the time, Prince Fahd bin Abdul Aziz, declared a grant of \$1 billion by the Kingdom for its implementation.

In January 1984, Morocco hosted the fourth Islamic Summit in Casablanca at the invitation of King Hassan II, with representatives from 42 member states and international organizations, notably the UN and Arab League, in attendance.

The summit reaffirmed its commitment to the principles on which a solution to the Israeli-Arab conflict was to be based: Israel's withdrawal from all Arab territories occupied in 1967, and the restoration of the Palestinians' national rights, including their right of return and right to self-determination.

Three years later, in January 1987, Kuwait hosted the fifth Islamic Summit. The four-day meeting, attended by 44 member states, condemned the US for its support for Israel. With "Al-Quds Al-Sharif, Concord and Unity" as the theme, Senegal hosted the sixth Islamic Summit in Dakar in December 1991.

In the Dakar declaration, participants reaffirmed their “resolve to face the Israeli occupation of Palestinian and other Arab territories occupied since 1967; as well their determination to continue to reject and oppose the pursuit of Israeli plans and practices.”

The Islamic Summit returned to Casablanca for its seventh session in December 1994. The session, which coincided with the OIC’s 25th anniversary, was attended by 49 member states and international organizations.

At this gathering, delegates pledged to correct the image of Islam, referring to the spirit of “jihad” based on general principles of Shariah law.

The Palestinian issue also featured prominently at the summit, with participants voicing their support for the PLO in its struggle for Palestinian rights.

The delegates condemned Serbia’s aggression against Bosnia-Herzegovina, its non-compliance with UN Security Council resolutions, and its rejection of the Five-Nation Peace Plan.

The eighth session was convened under the patronage of Mohammad Khatami, Iran’s then-president, in December 1997, with “Dignity, Dialogue, Participation” as the theme.

The summit in Tehran was attended by 53 member states and inaugurated by Iran’s Supreme Leader Ali Khamenei.

Large contributions were made by several Gulf countries, with Saudi Arabia alone giving \$10 million for OIC activities and institutions.

The ninth Islamic Summit was convened in Doha, Qatar, in November 2000, with the theme “Peace and Development: Al-Aqsa Intifada.”

It was attended by 52 member states, with Bosnia-Herzegovina, the Central African Republic, Ivory Coast and Thailand participating as observers, and Russian President Vladimir Putin taking part in the opening session.

Against the backdrop of the US invasion of Iraq, the 10th Islamic Summit was convened in Putrajaya, Malaysia, in October 2003.



A Palestinian helped by a paramedic out of her building damaged by an Israeli air raid on Gaza City on Nov. 19, 2012. (AFP)

Delegates strongly condemned threats by the Israeli government against then-Palestinian President Yasser Arafat, and appealed to the international community to force Israel to respect UN resolutions.

The summit strongly condemned the terrorist bombing of the Jordanian and Turkish embassies and the UN headquarters in Baghdad, and of holy sites in the Iraqi city of Najaf.

It also rejected “unfounded campaigns and allegations against Saudi Arabia,” and called for their end.

The summit expressed solidarity with, and support for, the Kingdom, and its backing of all Saudi efforts to fight terrorism.

The Islamic Summit returned to Dakar in December 2005 for its 11th session, where leaders pledged that their governments would do whatever it would take to make contributions amounting to \$10 billion to the Islamic Solidarity Fund for Development, which was established under the aegis of the Islamic Development Bank (IDB).

In 2013, the 12th Islamic Summit was convened in Cairo, Egypt, with the participation of 56 member states along with a number of international and regional organizations.

Participants condemned the Israeli assault of November 2012 on the Gaza Strip, and the policy of collectively punishing the Palestinian people,

particularly Israel's blockade of the enclave.

The last Islamic Summit before the upcoming one in Makkah was held in April 2016 in Istanbul, Turkey.

There, delegates reaffirmed their commitment to the OIC's central purpose: The Palestinian cause and the preservation of Haram Al-Sharif as an Islamic site.

They expressed concern for Muslim refugees who had to leave their home countries, notably Syria, due to armed conflicts and oppression. They also decried the rise of xenophobia and Islamophobia in Western countries.



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OIC Islamic summit in Saudi Arabia to be held during last 10 days of Ramadan

[UAE and US launch joint defence cooperation agreement](#)

Wed, 2019-05-29 23:05

The United Arab Emirates and the United States announced on Wednesday the start of a joint Defense Cooperation Agreement, a statement issued by the

state-run news agency WAM said.

“The implementation of the Defense Cooperation Agreement between the UAE and the US will enhance military coordination between the two countries and at this critical time will give further progress to the strong military, political and economic partnership that exists between them,” the statement added.

The UAE and the US signed the agreement earlier this year.



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[Project to restore Egypt's Groppi cafes to their former glory](#)

Author:

Wed, 2019-05-29 22:38

CAIRO: In 1884, Giacomo Groppi (1863-1947) came from Switzerland to Egypt where he would establish a celebrated food business bearing the family name.

In 1890, Groppi arrived in Alexandria, where he built a large number of shops. And at the beginning of the 20th century (1909-1925) he established three cafes in Cairo, which still carry his name.

The most famous cafe is located in Talaat Harb Square, in downtown Cairo. This place was the favorite of the upper class in Egypt, and some considered it the most luxurious cafe in the world.

The legendary "Groppi Talaat Harb" is situated at the heart of the Egyptian capital and was until recently a destination for many visitors before it was closed for maintenance and restoration.

"We used to come in the 1950s to the Groppi Garden every morning to eat fresh croissants. I still remember the taste today," Shafiq Nakhla, an architect, said. "Groppi's products were better than they were in Paris at the time."

"No one could compete with Groppi. We could see the aristocratic class who seemed to be going to a party descending from a Rolls-Royce or Cadillac wearing the best hats and neckties, and entering Groppi. "The women wore outstanding dresses," Shafiq said.

"I learned from my father that many of the characters had their own seats, including the journalist and poet Kamel Al-Shennawi, as well as the writer Tawfiq Al-Hakim and the Nobel laureate Naguib Mahfouz, who read the newspapers there," said Mustafa, one of the senior waiters.

"I also heard that during World War II the men of the British Eighth Army frequently visited Groppi in Adly Pasha Street, including General Montgomery, who was visiting to enjoy the evenings of jazz in the garden," Mustafa said.

FASTFACT

Groppi is famous for introducing a number of desserts, along with natural juices and chocolate varieties. It received fame worldwide as it held concerts and hosted musical groups.

"King Farouk, the former king of Egypt, was very impressed with the chocolate made at Groppi and in World War II he sent 100 kilograms of chocolates to King George and his two daughters, Elizabeth and Margaret," the waiter said.

Groppi is famous for introducing a number of desserts, along with natural juices and chocolate varieties. It received fame worldwide as it held concerts and hosted musical groups.

In 1981, Chizar and Bianchi, the last of Groppi's heirs, sold the business to the Arab food company Lokma, which tried to preserve the traditional character of the shops in form and style.

To this day Groppi retains its charm, although its condition has somewhat diminished.

Alchemy Design Studio announced in November 2017 that it was reviving the place. The company added through its official account on Facebook that it sought to add modernity to this icon and stressed that it had a sense of pride and responsibility to implement the project.

The National Committee for the Development and Protection of Cairo's Heritage also issued its recommendations to accelerate the development of the Cafe Groppi.

It previously announced that the project would take six months to a year and was likely to be available again to the public in the second half of 2018, but so far no official statement has been issued for the opening of the Groppi in Talaat Harb.

The other branch, on Adly Street, is also undergoing development work, especially in the garden, while the cafe is half completed. The third branch, located in Cairo's Heliopolis area, is the only one that is operating at full capacity.



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Protesters say clashes among security forces kill vendor

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Wed, 2019-05-29 14:59

KHARTOUM: A Sudanese medical union says a gunfight among security forces has erupted, killing a female street vendor by mistake, as protesters resumed their two-day general strike.

The Sudan Doctors Committee says the clashes took place Wednesday in the capital of Khartoum and that a number of protesters have been wounded.

The committee is part of the Sudanese Professionals Association, which has been spearheading the protests that led to the military overthrow of longtime ruler Omar Al-Bashir last month.

Also on Wednesday, thousands of Sudanese resumed the final day of their two-day strike in a bid to press the ruling military council to hand over power to a civilian-led authority.

The strike comes as negotiations between protesters and the generals, who took over the country after Al-Bashir's ouster, remain deadlocked.



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[Netanyahu scrambles for allies as deadline to form government looms](#)

Author:

Wed, 2019-05-29 22:25

JERUSALEM: Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu scrambled to cobble together parliamentary support for a coalition on Wednesday, just hours ahead of a deadline to form a new government or face the possible end of his decade of combative leadership of Israel.

In a parallel countdown, the 120-seat assembly debated a motion to dissolve itself and trigger snap elections that Netanyahu could contest anew, rather than being forced to step aside for a rival to try to form a coalition.

Netanyahu's plans for a fifth term following an election in April were cast into doubt by a presumed ally, rightist ex-defence minister Avigdor Lieberman, who has conditioned sitting in government with ultra-Orthodox Jewish parties on amendments to their military draft exemptions.

Three hours before the 2100 GMT deadline, Netanyahu's conservative Likud party announced that it had managed to sign up 60 lawmakers – half the assembly but just shy of a majority.

Even that account was disputed, however, by the centre-right Kulanu party, which had previously said it would run with Likud.

"Kulanu has not signed a coalition deal," the party tweeted.

In another sign of Netanyahu's strong desire to retain the premiership, the opposition centre-left Labour party said it had been offered – and had refused – an offer to join a Likud-led coalition. Likud, which said it plans to head a right-wing government, neither denied or confirmed this.

Political sources said Netanyahu was simultaneously seeking agreement with the leaders of parties on voting to dissolve parliament and setting a mid-September date for a new election.

Having declared himself the election winner last month after he squeezed past an insurgent centrist challenger, ex-general Benny Gantz, Netanyahu saw his political future hang in the balance.

Failure to forge a coalition would take the task out of the 69-year-old Netanyahu's hands and empower President Reuven Rivlin to ask another legislator, either from Likud or the opposition, to try.

Political commentator Chemi Shalev, writing in the left-wing Haaretz daily, said a last-minute agreement was still possible and Netanyahu would still be the favourite to win a new election.

LAST STAND?

But he said Netanyahu's critics now find themselves fantasising about a world without him. The prime minister, first elected in the late 1990s, has been in power for the last decade.

"It's not an easy task, given his decade in power and the four more years he supposedly had coming. Young Israelis can't even begin to imagine an Israel without him: Netanyahu as prime minister is all they've ever known," Shalev wrote.

Lieberman has stuck to his guns in a battle with the ultra-Orthodox United Torah Judaism party, a member of Netanyahu's current interim government, to limit traditional military draft exemptions for Jewish seminary students. Without the support of Lieberman's Yisrael Beiteinu party, which has five Knesset seats, Netanyahu cannot put together a majority government of right-wing and religious factions.

The brinkmanship six weeks after the closely contested April ballot has deepened political uncertainty in a country riven with division.

A new election could also complicate U.S. efforts to press ahead with President Donald Trump's peace plan in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. Even before it has been announced Palestinians have rejected it as a blow to their aspirations for statehood.

The White House team behind the proposal, including Trump's son-in-law Jared Kushner, is in the Middle East to drum up support for an economic "workshop" in Bahrain next month to encourage investment in the occupied West Bank and Gaza. The group is due in Israel on Thursday.

Lieberman said on Wednesday he was not backing down in what he termed a matter of principle over the conscription issue, and he denied Likud allegations his real intention was to oust Netanyahu and lead a "national camp".

Until the drama over coalition-building, public attention had been focused more on moves Netanyahu loyalists were planning in parliament to grant him immunity from criminal prosecution and to pass a law ensuring such protection could not be withdrawn by the Supreme Court.

Netanyahu faces possible indictment in three corruption cases. He has denied any wrongdoing in the cases and is due to argue at a pre-trial hearing in October against the attorney-general's intention, announced in February, to indict him on bribery and fraud charges.



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