

## International Muslim conference calls for Mideast peace

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April 12, 2016

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(RNS) The world's largest gathering of Muslim leaders kicks off a five-day conference this week that will call for a new peace process to end the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

Other weighty issues at the Organization of Islamic Cooperation summit include combatting extremism within Muslim nations, countering Islamophobia in the rest of the world, and protecting the Rohingya—a group of Muslims suffering persecution in Myanmar.

Meeting in Istanbul April 10–15, delegations from the OIC's 57 member states are expected to “focus on exceptionally critical circumstances, regionally and internationally,” said Iyad Ameen Madani, OIC secretary general. Founded in 1969, the OIC calls itself “the collective voice of the Muslim world” and holds summits every three years.

More than 30 heads of state are expected to attend the summit, including Turkish president Recep Tayyip Erdogan, King Saud of Saudi Arabia, Pakistani prime minister Nawaz Sharif, Lebanese prime minister Tammam Salam, and Palestinian Authority president Mahmoud Abbas.

The group said a new international conference on the conflict between Israelis and Palestinians should take as its starting point United Nations resolutions on the hostilities and the “Arab Peace Initiative.” Though Israel and the U.S. have decried U.N. resolutions on the conflict as unfair to Israel, the initiative, when first brokered by Saudi Arabia in 2002, drew some support from both Israeli and American government officials. More recently, some Israeli officials have said subsequent changes to the document now render it unacceptable.

Madani says the summit aims to create “a collective vision for the Muslim world over the next ten years” and called it “the only forum in which such a vision can

practically be agreed on by heads of state and official delegations from across the entire Muslim world.”