

**Club of Rome 2002 Annual Conference
Ankara, 27 & 28 October 2002**

**Opening statement delivered by H.E. Fikret Nesip Üccan, Permanent Undersecretary of the
Ministry of Culture of Turkey**

Your Royal Highness,
Excellencies,
Distinguished members of the Club of Rome,
Honourable Guests,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

It is a great honour and a great pleasure for me to welcome you at Bilkent University for this year's Annual Conference of the Club of Rome.

This is on more than one account a very special occasion. The conference is being held in Turkey for the very first time and it will focus on the manifold challenges of the Black Sea region and the Caspian Sea Basin, with which Turkey has strong geographic and historical links.

These are regions of the world which too often, and unjustly so, make mostly negative headlines in the media. We hear of ethnic cleansing, of civil war and social unrest, of the rise of micro - nationalisms and of various forms of fundamentalism. Nobody ever reminds us, that despite the undeniable tensions in the region, we live in countries that share a common culture, expressed in folksongs, folkdances and food. And even though we do not share a common language, we do indeed share a common vocabulary:

We Turks say *corba* for soup. So do the Romanians and, despite years of war, the Serbs, the Croats and the Bosnians. The shepherd is a *tsopanis* in Greek and a *coban* in Turkish. The Georgian noun for room *otahi* is the same in Persian and in Turkish. No need to say that Arabic too has enriched vocabularies from the borders of China to the gates of Vienna.

Beyond this community of culture and vocabulary, we ought to look further to a community of speech. As His Royal Highness Prince El Hassan Bin Talal, the President of the Club of Rome, has mentioned on several occasions, above all the nations and cultures of the world need to talk, and they need a platform for dialogue.

As a global think-tank with members from five continents, the Club of Rome is indeed one such platform whose role is becoming the more important as tensions in the world heighten. For more than thirty years, the Club of Rome, one of the most prestigious and prominent non-governmental organisation has contributed with its reports and declarations to the major debates of our era.

As we all know, the Middle East is again at the brink of war and Turkey with strong links with all the future belligerents is not insensitive to the situation. Hence hosting the conference here has indeed a special meaning: There are participants from Georgia and Russia, from the United States and the Arab world, from India and Pakistan, from the Balkans and Central Asia, who share the ideals of the founders of the Club of Rome who believed that through expertise and dialogue it was possible to prepare a better future for the whole of mankind.

Such an ideal may cause the cynics to smile but we should not forget that history remembers long-sighted idealists and visionaries, not the petty selfish calculations of the cynics. The great Ottoman Turkish reformist poet Ibrahim Sinasi wrote the following verse:

Milletim nev-i beserdir vatanım rûy-i zemin

which could be translated as *Mankind is my nation and the Earth my country*. He was echoing the famous words of the French Poet Victor Hugo who longed

to have the world as a fatherland and mankind as a nation.

Avoir pour patrie le monde et pour nation l'humanité....

And though those words have been much used and misused throughout the twentieth century I sincerely believe that they still constitute an ideal worth striving for. I hope that the conference will give greater understanding of the region to those from outside and indeed constitute a platform for future dialogue.

Bu hasret bizim.

This is what we are longing for.