

A conference for the support of tourism between Islamic countries

> Bangkok - Motaz Othman

From 7th – 9th September Bangkok hosted the 2nd International Islamic Economic, Cultural and Tourist Conference, organized by the Islamic Chamber of Commerce and Industry, the Thai Islamic Trade and Industrial Association (TITIA) and the Thailand Convention and Exhibition Bureau.



Group photo of the participants

صورة جماعية للمشاركين

This conference aimed at promoting economic, cultural and tourist exchanges between countries of the Organization of Islamic Conference (OIC) and to work out a platform for the exchange and consolidation of co-operation with the kingdom of Thailand in order to support its 12 million strong Muslim community - 12% of the population.

The organizers made intense efforts for the success of this conference. The reception, lodging, and organization were of high quality, reflecting the great interest of the Thai government and the efforts of the TITIA in particular its director, Anirut Smuthkochorn, as well as Mrs. Attiya Ali secretary of the Islamic Chamber.

The conference, which began with a reading from the Koran, saw the contribution of 37 speakers who presented their views and projects for future co-operation between countries of the OIC in all fields.

Dr. Taleb Rifai, vice-president of the World Tourism Organization (WTO), presented some statistics on world tourism in general and tourism between Islamic countries in particular.

He also highlighted some of the challenges facing tourism in Moslem countries, by quoting the example of China and the growth of the tourism sector there. He encouraged Muslim countries to diversify their tourist products, while stressing cultural tourism as a major attraction.

Dr. Winai Hahlan, of the University of Chulalongkorn, described the "Halal Scientific Centre" which offers consultations in food and training professionals working in the halal food industry in Thailand.

Professor Abu Nasser Muhammad Abdus Zaher, President of the Islamic Bank of Bangladesh, gave a brilliant lecture on the economic evolution of his country and its impact on tourism. Dr. Abbas Sidqi highlighted the role of the craft industry in Muslim countries, its influence on tourism and the creation of incomes for its workers. The representatives of Turkey, North Cyprus, Azerbaijan, Kazakhstan, North Thailand, Nigeria, Bangladesh, Pakistan, Iran, Sudan, Malaysia and Palestine gave information about tourism in their countries.

I made some interventions, where I asked the Muslim countries to stress the presentation of cultural programs to tourists and not to let them be satisfied with beaches, hotels and shopping, since the strong point of these countries lies in their cultural content. In the same way, I suggested holding congresses for tourism promotion by Islamic countries in European countries. The participation of the international tourism media should be ensured.

It is regrettable that this conference saw a limited participation of Moslem countries. Certain speeches were too long and the debate of the participants was reduced.

The conference concluded with the presentation of 25 recommendations concerning the economy, culture and tourism including: increase in tourist promotion between countries of the OIC; the development of places of interest and Islamic cultural sites and their promotion through package tours; the need for promoting halal hotels; abolishing visa requirements between Islamic countries and developing the tourist web sites of Islamic countries to highlight their Islamic attractions. ■