

# *SAUDI ARABIA IN FOCUS*

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## **MUSLIM WORLD**

### **King Abdullah calls for unity, tolerance in remarks at OIC summit**

King Abdullah bin Abdulaziz called for unity and tolerance in order to address the challenges faced by the Muslim world in remarks opening the third extraordinary summit of the Organization of the Islamic Conference (OIC) December 7.

"Let us bid farewell to the age of division and disintegration in order to usher in a new era of unity and dignity," King Abdullah said. "I look forward to a united Muslim ummah [community] and good governance that eliminate injustice and oppression for the sake of the comprehensive Muslim development that eradicates destitution and poverty."

The King denounced extremism and stressed that unity must be achieved through tolerance, not bloodshed. "How painful that the ideology sprouted forth by criminal minds has unleashed wanton evil and corruption on earth," he said. "Fanaticism and extremism cannot grow on an earth whose soil is embedded in the spirit of tolerance, moderation, and balance."

The two-day summit was convened in Makkah in response to a call made earlier by King Abdullah. Its goals included strengthening Islamic unity to fight common challenges, developing a plan for reforming the OIC, and addressing the issues of disaster relief, poverty and disease.

## **FOREIGN POLICY**

### **Prince Turki discusses Iraq, terrorism, Saudi reform**

In a wide-ranging interview with US reporters December 7 and 8, Saudi Ambassador to the United States Prince Turki Al-Faisal said that he sees good things taking place in Iraq despite the difficult situation, citing events such as the recent reconciliation conference in Cairo and the upcoming elections. The ambassador added that he was surprised that no weapons of mass destruction were found in Iraq following Saddam Hussein's ouster. Saudi Arabia believed Saddam had WMD, although there was no specific information, he said.

On the insurgency in Iraq, Prince Turki commented that terrorists are using political actions by the US for their own purposes. The prince said that while the US invasion of Iraq may have accelerated global terrorism, he believes terrorism would have continued on a global scale with or without the invasion because

terrorism is a disease that is ideologically motivated. He also called for a global response to combating terrorism.

Turning to Al Qaeda, Prince Turki speculated that Osama bin Laden was still alive, but questioned his leadership of Al Qaeda, pointing out that there appears to have been a shift towards No. 2 Ayman Al-Zawahiri, who has "done all the talking" lately. Regardless of leadership, Al Qaeda remains a threat, he warned.

Prince Turki said he believes reform will progress in Saudi Arabia, but stressed that it will take time and that it must come from within without being imposed by the government. He said he believes women will be elected to the Consultative Council (Majlis al-Shura) and regional councils.

## **ECONOMY**

### **Budget for FY2006 largest in the Kingdom's history**

On December 12, King Abdullah bin Abdulaziz announced the state budget for FY2006, the largest in the Kingdom's history. Total revenues are projected at SR390 billion [\$103.9 billion], with expenditures expected to total SR335 billion [\$89.33 billion]. The budget also allocates SR126 billion [\$33.59 billion] for new projects. The King added that the national debt is now down to SR 475 billion [\$126.7 billion].

The new budget emphasizes education as well as development programs and projects that improve essential services for Saudi citizens, the King said.

### **Saudi Arabia officially becomes the WTO's 149th member**

Saudi Arabia formally joined the World Trade Organization (WTO) December 11, becoming the organization's 149th member. The Kingdom was approved for membership in the WTO on November 11, 2005, and became a full member 30 days later, in time for the WTO summit in Hong Kong. Saudi Arabia is the world's 13th largest merchandise exporter and 23rd largest importer.

## **FOREIGN AID**

### **Kingdom opens first of seven health centers in Niger**

On December 8, The Saudi Arabian Red Crescent Society opened the first of seven planned health centers to be established in various parts of Niger. The Kingdom has also sent 70 tons of medical supplies and equipment to the drought-stricken West African country.

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