The khat gathering is not a cultural gathering, nor a literary salon and certainly not a business meeting. Science, literature and work are positive activities in people's lives, whereas khat gathering reflects only the negative aspect of life. People spend their money, waste their time deteriorate behaviour. Cleanliness, hygiene and decency are lacking. Fortunately for contemporary human society, the use of khat is limited to very small circles. Most people do not know khat. Some people know it but do not use it. A worldwide concensus is taking shape to condemn the use of khat. A scientific concensus begins to have itself evident indicating with proof the harmful effects on the human being of that substance.

Before reaching these conclusions, religion had forbidden the use of khat because it harmed men's faculties and because of its adverse effects on human life. People are becoming increasingly aware of the harmful effects of khat and many worry about the dangers of khat on the life of men and societies.

Funds have been raised, studies and research carried out and exchanges of opinion, debates and conferences, of which this is one, have taken place. Without the conviction of the dangers of khat, without the desire to cooperate for the improvement of humanity, there would not be such activities.

After this brief introduction, I would like to deal with some social problems related to the of khat.

It would be useful to distinguish here between the producer and the dealer on the one side, that is to say between the cultivator and the trader, and the consumer on the other side.

The objective and the motivation of the first party is to deal in khat and to make a large profit from it.

The second party has a different set of objectives. Up to a certain point this group, the users are those who will be more exposed to economic and social harm than the others. It is true, that
Let us consider each group separately.

Cultivators and dealers.

Khat is planted on pieces of cultivated land the surface areas of which vary according to the wealth of the owners. One thousand square metres yield crop which can bring him 30,000 to 60,000 US $ per year. The farmer who owns 2,000 - 3,000 square metres earns an average of US $ 90,000 per year. The one who owns more than 3,000 square metres could earn US $ 200,000 per year. Three-quarters of the farmers who grow khat earn an average of more than US $ 5,000 per month. 50 to 75% of the dealers have an average monthly income between US $ 4,000 - 5,000.

This means that growing khat is more profitable than selling it, probably because of the ease with which it can be marketed and because the places where it is sold are very often well-known to the public. It is true that placing restrictions on the market and hence increasing the risks in the trade of khat will push up the price and thus permits the black market dealer to make much more profit than that obtained by cultivation.

We observe nowadays a new category of agricultural labourer who are employed as wage-workers to harvest khat. The monthly wages of a worker on a big property could amount to $ 3,000. This is a very high salary for manual labour in agriculture; which indicates the profitable aspect of the production and marketing of khat.

Thus it is easy to understand the tendency of some khat producing countries to export khat and in this way obtain additional revenue for the national income to which are added taxes on exportation imposed by the state for the national treasury and in this area khat resembles other drugs.
Another problem arises from the fact that khat is grown on lands that are needed for other nutritional crops. The latter are losing ground in view of the great profits made from the cultivation of khat. Now, the decrease in this food production has caused an increase in nutritional and public health problems and the state is forced to import foodstuff and therefore to face economic problems on national level.

The observations made above give us an idea of the social characteristics of the kind of people who produce and market khat. It is a wealthy social class with social and economic stability, having enough wealth to satisfy the needs of life, to take care of the children’s education and to provide for their leisure interests. They live, in general, in modern-style well equipped properties, have big families and like other successful producers and merchants, aspire for more services, leisure, amusements and social well-being.

The users

They are very often illiterate but there are also educated users in some societies. This is related to the prevalent attitude in society towards khat use and to the levels according to which users are classified. Nevertheless, there is an increasing tendency among educated users in those societies to reject the use of khat. Most khat users are married and have families. It is estimated that 64% of the users fall in this category. There is instability in their marital life and divorce rate among them is high. Among the signs of social instability is the existence of a large number of unmarried males. The social condition of the users is well reflected in their economic condition. Unlike the producers and dealers, these users live in rented accommodation in apartments of low standard. Some of them are not integrated in a family but live alone or with friends of the same type and under similar conditions. A large percentage of users (60%) have no permanent income, although they keep families with several members. Almost half of that category has a monthly income of less than $500, in general the monthly income of their families does not exceed $1,000.

In spite of this fact, the purchase of khat continues daily. Khat users agree that their expenses exceed in general their incomes unlike the producers' and dealers' whose income exceed their expenses.

It was possible to obtain an idea of the personal feelings of those who deal in khat about
wealth and privacy. All cultivators and all dealers consider themselves among the wealthy citizens in their society, whereas 75% of the users think of themselves as poor and only 25% regard themselves as middle-class. The user's main sources of income are from wages, loans and family help.

These were a few general aspects of the social conditions surrounding those who are involved with khat. Our information is based on the preliminary results of an investigation on the spot carried out in three Arab countries by the Centre for Criminal Research of the Ministry of Interior of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia. It was possible to gather this information thanks to the collaboration between the Ministries of Interior of those countries. The research relied on a meeting between the research workers of the Centre and other local collaborators on one hand, and those involved in khat who were chosen on the basis of a sampling for an experimental research. The objective was to be able to describe the social backgrounds of those involved in khat, to determine the different types of relations possible which might appear during the research and to formulate hypotheses capable of ensuring the theoretical framework which could be established.

We can put forward the following preliminary remarks:

1. The producers and dealers of khat tend to be rich, whereas the users tend to be poor. Whatever may be the cause of the wealth of the first group and the poverty of the second group the main factors in wealth and poverty evidenced by the study are production and distribution for the first and consumption for the second. Thus, would indicate that there is a relationship between the sale of khat by the first group and its wealth on the one hand and the use of khat by the second group and its poverty on the other.

2. Spending on khat constitutes one of the main expenses of the khat user, whose income is in general lower than his expenses, whereas the income of the producers and dealers exceeds their expenses.

3. There is a direct relationship between near poverty and the use of khat. As if khat use were a way of escaping from the misery of life and hard circumstances. The more one uses, the more one spends money on buying khat and hence, poverty will take deeper roots and problems will increase. As to those who are wealthy and use khat, they seem to do so for other reasons.
4. There is very likely a relationship between family instability, absence of marriage, dislocation of the family through divorce and the use of khat. This instability is to be found among users and not among producers of and dealers in khat.

5. We cannot confirm the existence of a relationship between education and the use of khat. Most of the cultivators, distributors and consumers are illiterate. This can be explained by the prevalence of illiteracy in general in the Muslims who are involved in khat use.

6. The cultivation of khat results in the decrease of cereals and other cultures. The limited supply of these products results in

   a) Lack of food consumption and therefore malnutrition and the diseases resulting from it;

   b) Increase of importation costs that is relying on foreign sources to provide staple products, which runs counter to the national interest.

The foregoing remarks are to stimulate awareness and calm consideration of this problem and to carry out more research in this important field.

I take this opportunity to express the hope that this conference will make a recommendation urging that research centres and researchers take up the problem of khat consumption by studies and research on the effects of the use of khat, alcohol and other drugs in general and their harmful effects on man, society and the national economy and that all bodies at all levels should cooperate to accomplish this task.