

**Statement by H.E. Dr. Mohammad Javad Zarif, the Minister of Foreign Affairs
of the Islamic Republic of Iran at the 21st Meeting of Council of Ministers
(Tehran, 26th November, 2013)**

**Mr. Secretary General,
My Distinguished Fellow Ministers,
Excellencies,
Ladies and Gentlemen,**

This is indeed an honor for me to be elected as the Chairman of the 21st meeting of ECO Council of Ministers. Allow me at the outset to express my heartfelt appreciation for the confidence bestowed upon me and my delegation. I would also like to express my gratitude to our outgoing Chairman, Foreign Minister Mammadyarov for his stewardship since the last meeting of the Council of Ministers in Baku.

Regional cooperation is an accelerating phenomenon in international relations. Even globalization of the world economy has not undervalued the imperative of regional arrangements for economic development of the countries and regions. Cooperation among neighbouring and regional countries has proved its critical importance for economic development and prosperity of people. ECO is not an exception. ECO Region enjoys vast potential for regional development. It also enjoys all required elements for success, including but not limited to, a huge and complementary market, an exquisite geographical location, the globally-known transit capacities, abundant energy resources, and rich and knowledgeable human capital.

More than two decades of collective attempts have resulted in varying degree of maturity and success in different layers and areas of regional cooperation within ECO region. The Organization has been successful in forging a range of cooperation frameworks. However, we are still away from full realization of noble objectives of our Organization. The prospects for regional integration have not been adequately improved and ECO's full potential for economic development of its Member States is yet to be realized.

In the third decade of its expansion and in order to keep pace with the requirements of a successful regional arrangement, ECO may need to put in place a new architecture with a view to becoming more responsive to the needs and merits of its countries and peoples. There shall be ensured and meaningful ECO deliverables for the entire membership. This will strengthen the sense of ownership among Member States. On the other side, there is a legitimate expectation that the entire membership lend its full support to the Organization. ECO is by far the first option for collective cooperation in our region. Our overlapping membership in other regional arrangements shall not affect our relations with and within ECO. The level of participation in our meeting today attests clearly to the top priority we all accord to ECO.

The Islamic Republic of Iran has always been following an “ECO advocacy” policy which will continue to carry increasing weight in its regional policy in the years to come. This unwavering support stems from our firm belief that ECO and the goals it pursues provide a unique opportunity for the individual member states and for the Region as a whole to survive potential challenges ahead and to foster the development strategies.

This has been translated into action through Iran’s contributions to the work of the Organization in the more than two decades. A review of the ECO activities in the past years and decades shows the scale of Iran’s commitment to the overall work of the Organization. This has also been the case since the last COM meeting in Baku. We will continue to provide needed support and assistance in different sectors and corners of the Organization.

Honorable Fellow Colleagues,

We have heavy schedule today. Our Senior Officials have facilitated our work through a comprehensive and smooth preparatory exercise. As far as I was informed by my colleagues, the Senior Officials Meeting (SOM) has reviewed ECO sectoral activities and overall performance and prepared a draft report of their meeting which reflects the state of play of the Organization. They have also drafted the “Tehran Communiqué” covering some “policy directions” for the Organization in the year to come. Both documents are now before us for final consideration and adoption. Let me pay tribute to all participating officials and delegates in the Senior Officials Meeting.

As scheduled, we are supposed to cover our agenda in the morning, followed by a Formal Lunch and Retreat Session. We will then leave for a brief inaugural ceremony in the “ECO Park” hosted by Tehran Municipality and ECO Cultural Institute. This will be an honour for me and the co-hosts to have all honorable Ministers and officials in that occasion.

Thank you for your attention
