

**Inaugural Statement by H.E. Mr. Mohammad Khazaei,
Deputy Minister of Economic Affairs and Finance of the Islamic Republic of Iran
at the 25th Meeting of Regional Planning Council
(1-5 March, 2015 - ECO Secretariat)**

بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمَنِ الرَّحِيمِ

**Distinguished Heads of Delegation,
Honorable Secretary General,
Distinguished Guests, Ladies and Gentlemen,**

I am very pleased to have the opportunity to address the 25th Meeting of the Regional Planning Council of the Economic Cooperation Organization. At the outset and on behalf of the Government of the Islamic Republic of Iran, allow me to extend a warm welcome to the distinguished delegates of the ECO Member States and wish you all a pleasant and memorable stay in Tehran. I would also like to extend my words of thanks to H.E. Mr. Shamil Aleskerov, honorable ECO Secretary General and his staff in the Secretariat for their hard work to make necessary preparations for the 25th Meeting of ECO Regional Planning Council. My gratitude also goes to my colleagues at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs whose extensive efforts in preparation for this Meeting deserve heartfelt appreciation.

Distinguished Participants,

Over its history, the Economic Cooperation Organization has achieved many important milestones in its work for regional development through common efforts, building on the Member States' close cultural ties, shared historical past, and joint plans for the future. The idea of institutionalizing cooperation for regional development helps take a holistic look at the region, its resources and economy, business interest, and the potential for growing stronger together.

ECO Region enjoys immense potential to ensure successful regional cooperation and integration. All these need a new architecture for cooperation and the RPC can play a pivotal role in this regard. Regional Planning Council is an annual exercise that plays a crucial role in providing the high-ranking officials of the Member States with solid basis for important decisions. An aggregated technical and planning expertise helps ECO in coping with the complexities of its yearly program of work. In RPC meetings, planners from different Member States choose from amongst alternative programs based on the availability of resources and the priorities of the membership. Needless to say, the ultimate goal is to increase the overall efficiency as well as the consistency of the Organization and its components. I trust the 25th RPC Meeting in Tehran would serve this purpose.

**Excellencies,
Distinguished Participants,**

Two decades of expanded cooperation among most important countries of South Asia, the Middle East, Central Asia and the Caucasus has developed a new pattern of regional cooperation which has yielded notable achievements in areas such as trade, energy, agriculture, industry, mine, environment, banking, science and technology, private sector partnership, education, culture and in particular transport and transit. Despite these achievement, we still have a long way ahead towards new horizons for cooperation.

On the other hand, few challenges still continue to slow down the trend of progress in our organization. These impediments need to be addressed by the earnest efforts of the whole membership. We should work together to strengthen the solidarity among ECO Member States, promote the visibility of the Organization within and beyond the region, and enhance the efficiency and viability of the decisions and joint plans of the Organization.

Accordingly, the Organization is now conducting a reform process built on the experiences of the last two decades. In this regard, we are delighted that a Working Group has been established to finalize the proposed outline for implementation of the recommendations by ECO Eminent Persons Group on enhancing efficiency, dynamism and visibility of the ECO. We acknowledge the efforts of this Working Group and urge the members of the group to expedite their deliberations on the reform process, with a view to bring matters under discussion to a fruitful conclusion at the earliest.

Given the technical nature of the planning exercise, the Regional Planning Council is expected to help reform process through developing a reform-friendly annual program for the Organization. The RPC's contribution should entail more focused and result-oriented annual program, elevating the ECO profile from within the outside the Region perspectives.

**Excellencies,
Ladies and Gentlemen,**

We are approaching the end of the current ECO Vision 2015 and therefore, there is a need to assess the implementation of the Vision and to determine the extent to which the targets set forth in the Vision have been achieved in various sectors. It is equally important to analyze the reasons that have impeded the implementation of the goals and objectives set in the ECO Vision 2015. Furthermore, there is a need to initiate consultations for setting the strategic direction of the Organization for the coming decade, namely a new "ECO Vision 2016-2025". The current RPC Meeting may be utilized to as a first step to discuss and reflect on the results of the ECO Vision 2015 and to work out the structure of a new vision for the upcoming years. I wish you all success in your deliberations on this topic.

**Distinguished Guests,
Ladies and Gentlemen,**

The Islamic Republic of Iran has contributed to the work of the Organization in more than two decades. To mention just a few in regards to Iran's commitment to the overall work of the Organization since the last RPC Meeting, I should emphasize that tangible progress has been made in transport and communication sector. The ECO new railway corridor connecting

Iran, Turkmenistan and Kazakhstan was officially inaugurated by the Presidents of en-route Member States on 3rd December 2014 in Inche-Boroon which is expected to be a convenient and cost-effective route for cargo transportation with a view to boosting and facilitating the regional and international trade and transit cooperation. Likewise, the Islamic Republic of Iran has extended full support to the ECO regional cooperation on Information and Communication Technology.

Turning to another important issue, the Islamic Republic of Iran has been in the forefront of regional cooperation in the field of energy through, inter alia, making efforts for the establishment of the ECO Regional Electricity Market. Following the Expert Group Meeting for establishment of such market in the ECO region in November 2013 in Tehran, the first Trilateral Meeting between Iran, Turkey and ECO Secretariat was held in September 2014 in Ankara and the second such meeting is expected to be held in the Islamic Republic of Iran in the near future. We are of the view that there is a strong need for establishment of the ECO Regional Electricity Market and invite the Member States to take necessary steps for facilitation of this process. In line with the above-said, we also believe the idea of establishing a Trust Fund for financing high priority ECO regional energy projects, which was raised during the Third ECO Ministerial Meeting on Energy/Petroleum in March 2013 in Tehran, needs special attention.

Distinguished Delegates,

The Islamic Republic of Iran has always been following an “ECO advocacy” policy which will continue to be our priority in the regional policy in the years to come. This unwavering support stems from our firm belief that ECO and its goals provide a unique opportunity for the individual Member States and for the region as a whole to address potential challenges ahead and to foster the collective development strategies.

This policy has been translated into action through Iran’s contributions to the work of the Organization in 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. We will continue to provide the support and assistance in various sectors of the Organization, looking forward to a stronger and more enhanced cooperation within the ECO framework.

I thank you for your attention
