

Third ECO Meeting of Heads of Veterinary Organizations
Statement by ECO Secretary General
(October 7-8, 2018, Tehran)

**Your Excellency,
Deputy Minister, Ministry of Agricultural Jihad
Distinguished Delegates,
Representative of FAO
Ladies and Gentlemen,**

It is a great pleasure for me to extend to you a very warm welcome at this meeting of the Heads of Veterinary Organizations. My very sincere thanks to Deputy Minister H.E. H.E. Dr. Alireza Rafiepour for inaugurating this meeting and my appreciation to the Ministry of Agricultural Jihad of the Islamic Republic of Iran for hosting this important meeting. I also value the cooperation of ECO member states for their participation and I am grateful to the distinguished representative of FAO for their participation.

Distinguished delegates,

ECO countries face common challenges in veterinary and livestock fields which is, undoubtedly, one of the important areas of cooperation on the ECO agenda. The First Ministerial Meeting on Agriculture, held in Pakistan in July 2002, underscored the urgency of addressing veterinary and livestock issues. It called for a well laid-out scientific Plan of Action to develop regional cooperation in this field.

The First Senior Officials' Meeting (SOM) on Agriculture, held at Tehran in July 2004, called for establishing an ECO Permanent Commission for Prevention and Control of Animal Disease (ECO-PCPCAD) in the region. From then to drafting statute of ECO-VECO Veterinary of ECO region made an extraordinary endeavor.

The draft Statute, which was approved during the 19th COM; aims at achieving very valuable objectives. These include, establishing an animal disease surveillance network, collecting information on the existence and

outbreak of animal diseases and promoting disease investigation. The Permanent Commission would also encourage exchange of information on national animal health legislation and facilitate the harmonization of animal quarantine regulations. Besides, it would strengthen the national capabilities through appropriate training and research. These are very constructive objectives and, I believe, they merit the support of all ECO member states.

However, real progress in these areas first requires reliable animal disease information, both at the national and regional levels. Such information must be epidemiologically sound. It must promote early warning and understanding of disease spread and behavior. It should be credible enough to facilitate taking the right decisions. It must lead to control measures which are scientifically sound, economically feasible, effective and sustainable.

Distinguished delegates,

Allow me to share with you another important aspect of veterinary cooperation in ECO. I am of the opinion that the ECO-VECO should focus on promoting animal and animal products trade in the ECO Region. It may concentrate on removing barriers, issuing common certificate, establishment of slaughterhouse, and reference laboratory networks and facilitating quarantines check points at the borders. The livestock sub-sector plays a significant role in the GDP of ECO Member States. It is also very important for foreign exchange earnings through the export of hides, wool and fibre, and intestine casings. Further this sub-sector provides gainful employment and wherewithal to large segments of the nomadic populations. Balanced growth and development of the agricultural sector in ECO region cannot be conceived without due attention to the development of the livestock sector.

The agriculture occupies a considerable share in the compositions of GDP and labor force. Constituting more than 11 percent of the overall value-added and employing nearly 37 percent of total active population of the region. Agriculture is also one of the major source of growth and development of ECO region. The region is very rich in variety of soil, environmental and climatic conditions, suitable for livestock diversification. Livestock production in the ECO countries is predominately based on traditional systems, including small holdings of cattle, sheep and goats in villages and small towns for their household requirements of milk and

meat. It is essential to promote intra-regional trade on livestock in the ECO Region which will affect the welfare of the people. I am confident that the promotion of the intra-regional trade in animal and animal products in Member States will assist to overcome macroeconomic, poverty and food security problems.

The recent high food prices, which have affected thousands of families throughout the developing world and ECO Member States, created urgent need for governments to strengthen their safety net systems to ensure that the rise in the price of basic commodities does not trigger an increase in poverty rates. The producers prices of cattle meat live weight in Turkey is four times more than Azerbaijan or Kazakhstan, or meat prices in Iran, 70 percent more in Kyrgyzstan. All Member States are close and 1-2 days distance by roads from each other, which can decrease the transportation fee. The low transportation fee will automatically affect the unit price for exporting animal and animal products among ECO Member States. The total livestock import of ECO Member States was about 3.2 billion USD in 2016 from all countries, out of which ECO Member States' share stood just at 9%.

Although, the great potential and opportunities prevail in the ECO Region for the development of livestock sector, but the presence of various Trans-boundary Animal Diseases (TADs), poses a threat to this important sub-sector. We are expecting projects proposal on combating the TADs and financial support for their implementation from esteemed ECO member States.

The ECO-VECO aims to minimize the risk for TADs to spread within and across borders of neighboring countries and thus to improve the health care of the livestock in the ECO Member Countries. The said Commission will strengthen the capability of Government agencies to address the issue of TADs both at national and regional levels. This will be a much needed platform for the National Veterinary Services to discuss common problems or risk issues openly and formulate actions to be taken in order to minimize the risk of TADs.

As we consider the combating with the TADs in the ECO Region, ECO has prepared the draft Concept Project Proposal on Technical and Financial Assistance for the Formulation and Control of Trans-boundary Animal Diseases (TADs) in the ECO Region. The said project proposal

shall be submitted to the relevant ECO institutions for evaluation and financial assistance.

Distinguished delegates,

While appreciating the ECO-VECO for preparing the Draft Work Plan of the priority activities for the years 2019-2024, I would like to request all Member States to actively take part in deliberations and support those projects and events indicated in the given plan.

In conclusion, I emphasize the need for steady progress in this field. We have to make up for covering the inadequate performance of past years. I am quite optimistic that this important meeting will certainly help enable us to make focused and productive deliberations. I wish you complete success and assure you of the ECO Secretariat's complete support and cooperation in this regard.

I thank you,