



**Statement by H.E. Mr. Halil Ibrahim Akca
ECO Secretary General**

**At the
Fifth Ministerial Conference of Heart of Asia-Istanbul Process**

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**Honorable Chairmen
Excellencies
Distinguished Delegates
Ladies and Gentlemen**

It is indeed a great pleasure and honour for me to address this august Ministerial Conference here in Islamabad. At the outset, I would like to express my heartfelt gratitude to the Pakistani authorities for warm welcome, generous hospitality and excellent arrangements for this Conference.

We appreciate the Heart of Asia-Istanbul Process and we believe that this Ministerial Conference would really help in producing tangible results for Afghanistan. This Conference is indeed a vivid reflection of profound pledge of Heart of Asia countries, as well as the international community, for making joint efforts for stability, security and prosperity of Afghanistan. We understand that investing in Afghanistan is undeniably indispensable to stability in the region.

Distinguished Delegates

I would like to share that Afghanistan is one of the active member states of ECO and we have been carrying out some projects for its reconstruction under ECO Special Fund for Reconstruction of Afghanistan.

Efforts are underway for connecting Central and South Asia and China with Europe through Kyrgyz-Tajikistan-Afghanistan-Iran (KTAI) ECO Railway Corridor. Afghanistan will also become connected through railway to Uzbekistan on Mazar-e-Sharif-Termez. Route to Iran through Herat-Islam Ghale Route would provide direct connection to the ECO Container Train network through Istanbul-Almaty and Bandar Abbas-Almaty Routes. Likewise, linking Afghanistan, through Kandahar-Spin Bouldak to Quetta

(Pakistan) by rail will also enable Afghanistan to access the open sea ports of Pakistan from and to have access to the ECO Container Train network through Islamabad-Tehran-Istanbul Route.

Furthermore, negotiations for customs facilitation, insurance, visa and security arrangements of some of the ECO corridors are also ongoing with direct and indirect bearing on Afghanistan. ECO is assisting in accession of Afghanistan to the relevant international conventions which are instrumental to facilitating transport.

It is heartening to share that Afghanistan will be the sixth ECO country to be the WTO Member which will open new avenues of development through trade. Also, it has also become sixth member of the ECO Trade and Development Bank based in Istanbul leading to more projects for trade and development.

Counter-narcotics activities continued to stand high in the ECO agenda and forthcoming Interior Ministers Meeting in Pakistan would further help in improving the coordination in this area. Similarly, upon formulation of Regional Disaster Risk Reduction Strategy at ECO, Afghanistan will be one of the immediate beneficiaries.

Distinguished Delegates

ECO has always supported the goals of lasting peace, security, prosperity and growth of the region. We believe that through enhanced cooperation, strong connectivity and continued endeavor of the participating and supporting states and collaboration of the international and regional organizations tangible results would be achieved in the decade of transformation aiming at reconstruction, development and self-reliance of Afghanistan. ECO also reiterate its support to the United Nations in coordinating international efforts.

Excellencies

We have taken certain initiatives in the fields of infrastructure and energy aimed at strengthening regional economies through enhanced connectivity, liberalization of trade and promotion of investments and these would have impact on the lives of the people living in the region.

We welcome the development of North-South and East-West energy and trade corridors and encourage linkages to be made to these in a manner that these provide maximum regional coverage and benefit.

Honourable Co-Chairmen Excellencies

ECO maintains that Confidence Building Measures (CBMs) are important tools to link the Heart of Asia countries and appreciate supporting countries and organizations' commitment and contribution to the implementation of the CBMs activities. Enhanced participation and contribution in implementation of the CBM activities would yield high dividends for the whole region.

It is evident that success of ECO efforts to bring about economic development for the Region and its 440 million inhabitants is contingent on the success of the efforts for more secure and prosperous Afghanistan. Accordingly, I would like to assure this forum of full support of Economic Cooperation Organization (ECO) to programmes/projects for and by Afghanistan, including those projected under relevant CBMs. ECO has proved its value for all kinds of partnership, enhancing capacities and collective arrangements for Afghanistan and will continue to play its role in future. ECO will soon organize a high-level meeting with the participation of the relevant authorities of Afghanistan as well as other ECO Member States to discuss and agree on an optimal ECO advocacy policy for Afghanistan for the years to come.

I would like to conclude my remarks by assuring the esteemed Forum of highest level commitment in the Economic Cooperation Organization (ECO) to support initiatives for Afghanistan.

I thank you for your kind attention