



Statement by
H.E. Mr. Halil Ibrahim Akca
Secretary General of
Economic Cooperation Organization (ECO)
at
"2nd Meeting of the ECO Heads of National
Organizations/Centers for Civil Registration"

17 October 2017, Istanbul

**Honorable Minister;
Excellencies;
Distinguished Participants;
Ladies and Gentlemen;**

It is a distinct privilege for me to address this august forum on behalf of Economic Cooperation Organization. At the outset, I would like to express my profound gratitude to the people and the Government of Republic of Turkey particularly to the H.E. Mr. Suleyman Soylu, the Honorable Minister of Interior, for warm hospitality extended to us and the excellent arrangements made for this important meeting in this beautiful and historical city of Istanbul.

Excellencies,

As a 10-country intergovernmental organization, ECO has been involved in promoting regional cooperation and harmonization in a wide array of areas and sectors with direct and indirect impacts on the social and economic development of individual Member States and the ECO Region as a whole, ranging from trade, transport, energy, agriculture and food security, tourism, environment, health and human development, drugs control, disaster risk reduction, etc.

The economic and demographic indicators of the ECO Region and its individual Member States have been changing since ECO enlarged its membership from 3 to 10 countries in 1992. ECO countries, cumulatively as a region, have shown better economic performance compared to some other economic blocs in the developing world. This is against the backdrop that the intra-regional economic and trade interactions have been remained lower than expected. As regards demographic statistics, the population of ECO Region has exceeded 470 million, a 30 percent increase in the last 15 years compared to the 20 percent increase in world population. This drastic increase in the number of inhabitants in our countries and the ECO Region

implies the critical need for enhanced and upgraded people-centered services rendered by our governments through proper policy responses and measures at the national and local levels, assisted by relevant regional and international programmes and processes.

The “ECO Vision 2025”, endorsed in March 2017 by ECO heads of state and government in Islamabad, has identified 6 priority areas for regional cooperation until 2025: 4 sectoral priority areas (trade, transport and connectivity, energy and tourism) and 2 cross-sectoral priorities (economic growth and productivity, and social welfare and environment). Accordingly and to achieve expected outcomes, people-related services and programmes will be top on the ECO agenda when exploring programmes and projects for regional cooperation.

The United Nations defines civil registration as “governmental machinery set up in the country, state, province or any other territorial subdivision of the country for the purpose of legal recording of vital events related to the civil status of the population on a continuous basis, as provided by the laws and regulations of the country, state, province, etc.” As it is illustratively shown by this definition, governments take the prime responsibility for registration of civil status of their population through continuous and permanent recording of the occurrence and characteristics of vital events pertaining to the population in accordance with the legal requirements of the country in question. Civil registration guarantees the legal documentation of vital events as provided by the laws of the countries. These records are also a main source of vital statistics. Therefore, complete coverage, accuracy and timeliness of civil registration are essential for high quality of vital statistics. This engages all institutional, legal and technical arrangements in a technical, sound, coordinated, and standard manner throughout the country.

Excellencies

Ladies and Gentleman

The First Meeting of Heads of National Civil Registration Organizations/Centers of ECO Member States was held on 3-4 October 2011 in Tehran. The objective of the Meeting was to provide opportunity

for the ECO Member States to exchange their experiences on important issues related to civil registration and associated services where the participants shared experiences and best practices in their respective countries on areas such as registration of vital events; production and release of population statistics and information; National Codes and Smart Cards; promotion of safety and security factors for issued documents; civil status registration and E-Government. The Meeting also deliberated on the issue of educational and research co-operation.

This 2nd Meeting of the ECO Heads of National Organizations/Centers for Civil Registration today is providing another timely opportunity for the Member States to agree on possible regional arrangements on civil registration cooperation. As it is the case for United Nations' relevant programmes, it is obvious that the objective of any ECO regional supporting programme in civil registration should be to assist Member States in developing capacities to operate and maintain the fundamental systems of civil registration and vital statistics in a coordinated manner. This may include publishing subject-specific handbooks on civil registration and vital statistics systems; organizing the regional workshops on improvement of civil registration and vital statistics; best-practice sharing programmes; etc.

Important issues are on your agenda for today discussions. This is encouraging to note that ECO Member States have already created, or started to create, some platforms for cooperation in other sectors which can be utilized in the areas under your discussions today; namely *Civil Status Registration and best E-Government practices; Technological and educational cooperation among ECO Civil registration organizations; Sharing Best Practices and Experience in Geographical Information Systems; and Sharing Best Practices and Experience of ID Cards (Digital/Electronic Identification Card*. These platforms include, among others, i) ECO Statistical Network; ii) ECO surveying and mapping cooperation (for GIS purpose); iii) ECO information and communication technologies (the next ICT ministerial

meeting will be held early December in Baku); iv) ECO education programmes (ECO Education Institute has recently been re-activated); etc.

Besides, we have been expanding our external relations through wider cooperation with a range of UN agencies which can be of some help to regional cooperation on civil registration. I recently discussed with United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) the ways and means for enhancing cooperation and technical assistance in emerging population-related issues. United Nations Children Fund (UNICEF) has also expressed readiness to cooperate with ECO in capacity-building, knowledge/experience sharing and policy advice, as well as in implementation of joint projects.

ECO-wise speaking, the ECO Regional Planning Council will meet soon after your meeting (in mid-December 2017) which provides timely opportunity to incorporate what you will agree today in the ECO work programme.

Dear Participants;

Ladies and Gentleman;

Having all in mind and relying on your productive discussions today, I wish you a successful meeting which will generate new momentum for cooperation.

Thank you for your attention.