

**Statement by H.E. Mr. M Yahya Maroofi, the ECO Secretary General  
At the 18<sup>th</sup> Informal Meeting of the ECO Council of Ministers (COM)  
(Sep 27, 2011-New York)**

**Your Excellency, Dr. Ahmet Davutoglu, Foreign Minister of the Republic of Turkey and  
the Chairman of the ECO Council of Ministers,**

**Honourable Foreign Ministers of the ECO Member States**

**Excellencies and Dear Colleagues**

It is my privilege to welcome you to the 18<sup>th</sup> Informal session of the ECO Council of Ministers (COM) in New York and avail myself of the opportunity to express my sincere gratitude to H.E Dr. Ahmet Davutoglu, the honourable Foreign Minister of Turkey for gracing the occasion. I am equally thankful for the participation of distinguished Foreign Ministers/Representatives of other Member States. Allow me also to place on record our deepest thanks for the Permanent Mission of Turkey for the invaluable assistance in hosting today's session.

**Excellencies**

In keeping with the format of Informal COM Meetings, I would embark on a brief resume of developments in ECO's agenda since the formal Meeting of the Council of Ministers held in Istanbul in Dec, 2010. During the period under review, important sectoral Ministerial Meetings were held. The 21<sup>st</sup> Meeting of the Regional Planning Council was also organized in May, 2011 in Tehran. It finalized our Work Programme for the current year and efforts are underway by the Secretariat for effective follow-up of the decisions of the last Summit, COM, sectoral meetings and the RPC.

On the sector of trade, I am pleased to report that the fourth Ministerial Meeting on Commerce and Foreign Trade was held after a gap of six years in July, 2011 in Kabul. The Meeting agreed to mark 2010-2020 as the 'decade of economic integration and trade liberalization' and reached a number of important decisions on such matters as initiating negotiations on ECO Free Trade Agreement (ECOFTA), developing a Plan of Action to establish Free Trade Area by 2015 and expediting ECOTA implementation. While the Meeting helped pick-up fresh momentum on trade-related initiatives, nevertheless, substantive progress would require effective follow-up and implementation by the Member States. Due priority must be given to cooperation in the Trade sector to increase intra-regional trade to 20% by 2015 from its present level of approximately 7% as envisioned in ECO Vision 2015.

**Excellencies**

On the transport sector, progress has been made in the construction of the railway on Kazakhstan-Turkmenistan-Iran route. The project is likely to be completed by the end of December 2011. Similarly, the preparatory work for construction of a railway on Kyrgyz

Republic-Tajikistan-Afghanistan-Iran route is underway. Moreover, the feasibility study on revitalizing the ECO Container Trains on Istanbul-Almaty and Almaty-Bandar Abbas Routes was completed in the early 2011. The Demonstration Run of the Bandar-Abbas Almaty Container Train will be launched in October 2011 on the occasion of the ECO International Conference on Development of Transit and Logistics.

The Governments and the business community of the Member States en route the ECO Container Train on Islamabad-Tehran-Istanbul Route are jointly working on commercializing the freight services of this train. The ECO's study on operational aspects of this train was successfully completed in 2011. Marketing studies have now been started.

As regards road-transport, following the project on Truck Caravan in 2010, a monitoring project involving 1,000 commercial journeys across the whole region is being launched in partnership with IRU. Development of Transport Corridors between Islamabad-Tehran-Istanbul in 2011 and between the Kyrgyz Republic-Tajikistan-Afghanistan-Iran is also being pursued. The reactivation of the TIR Convention in Afghanistan is in its final stages with close cooperation between the ECO, IRU and the Government of Afghanistan. A joint ECO/IRU meeting will be held in November 2011 in Herat to launch the movement of Afghan trucks under the TIR system.

### **Excellencies**

In the Energy sector, efforts are underway to launch a fresh project on Interconnection of the ECO Countries Power Systems. The Secretariat is engaged in consultation with relevant organizations to seek financial assistance for the Project. In the Minerals sector, a Concept Paper is being developed by Iran for identifying and undertaking appropriate projects with the financial assistance of international organizations.

The 4<sup>th</sup> ECO Ministerial Meeting on Environment held in June 2011 in Iran adopted a Framework Plan of Action on Environmental Cooperation and Global Warming in ECO region as well as a Project Profile for implementation of the Framework Plan of Action. Efforts are made by the Secretariat to facilitate project implementation. The ECO Institute of Environmental Science and Technology (ECO-IEST) was established in February, 2011 on the project basis.

### **Excellencies**

In the field of agriculture, efforts are in hand for the implementation of the ECO Regional Programme for Food Security (RPFS). The Regional Coordination Center (RCC) for implementation of the Programme will be established in Ankara.

In the area of industry, the interim coordination Unit (ICU) of the RISCAM (Regional Institute for Standardization, Conformity Assessment and Metrology) has recently been established within the ECO Secretariat.

### **Excellencies**

Efforts are afoot in the health sector to undertake projects in the light of ECO regional report on Health Related Millennium Development Goals to assist the Member States in the realization MDGs related to blood transfusion and pharmaceutical affairs, reducing child

mortality, improving maternal health and combating HIV/AIDS, malaria and other diseases.

### **Excellencies**

The project on “Fight Against Trafficking from/to Afghanistan” with the ECO Member States is under way by a consortium of GIZ, Interpol, UNODC and BKA Germany. The International Kick-off Conference for the EU-funded Project was organized by the DOCCU on January 24, 2011 at the ECO Secretariat, Tehran.

### **Excellencies**

Afghanistan represents an important land-bridge within the ECO region and plays a critical role in regional integration. Through its modest Afghan Reconstruction Fund, ECO has endeavoured to contribute to the country’s reconstruction efforts. ECO has actively participated in various regional initiatives on Afghanistan including Istanbul Summit on Friendship and Cooperation (2010) and RECCA. ECO is also part of the High-level Core Group on Afghanistan established on the sidelines of the International Conference on Afghanistan in Kabul in July last year preceded by a Meeting of the Regional Bodies. ECO would be represented in the upcoming Istanbul Conference on Afghanistan in Nov this year by the participation of the Secretary-General.

### **Excellencies**

The Secretariat has paid close attention to furthering substantive cooperation with the United Nations system and other regional and international organizations. Our efforts are aimed, inter alia, at enlisting technical and financial support of international partners and enhancing ECO’s standing. The ECO’s comprehensive Plan of Action for enhancing external relations is being implemented. A comprehensive review of ECO’s MoU/Agreements has recently been prepared and circulated to the Member States. A new MoU is likely to be signed with the Developing -8 Organization. In order to remain focussed in our efforts, draft Modalities for signing new MoUs/Agreement is being developed. The draft Modalities for granting observer and dialogue partnership status at ECO has been finalized at the CPR Meeting. The document, when it is approved by the 20<sup>th</sup> COM, would guide the Secretariat to pursue long-term and strategic cooperation in the sphere of external relations. The ASEAN-ECO Joint Ministerial Meeting has been revived. It held its 11th session on 24 Sep, 2011 during which it reached important decisions to carry forward ongoing cooperation between the two Organizations. Similarly, cooperation with CICA has been brought under sharper focus. It is expected that a joint Work Programme would be finalized soon to implement the MoU with CICA.

Given the significance of the inter-regional cooperation, the Secretariat has endeavoured to promote meaningful interaction with other regional/sub-regional organization. At the invitation of UNESCAP, the Secretary-General participated in the Informal meeting on Sub-Regional Connectivity for Asia-Pacific Regional integration. I emphasized that efforts must be intensified to activate the Working Group on Power Trade and Interconnection led by ESCAP and ECO with the participation of ASEAN, SAARC, and PIF without further delay.

In line with the decision of the 19<sup>th</sup> COM Meeting, the Secretariat is actively following up on establishing ECO Contact Groups at important regional/international organizations. The Contact Groups at New York and Vienna have already been rendered operational. At other

places like Geneva, Bangkok, Rome and Jeddah, the matter is being followed-up through the Turkish Permanent Representative in Tehran. In this context, I would request the Meeting to kindly expedite dispatching instructions to their relevant Missions in line with the revised Terms of Reference.

With respect to the ECO Science Foundation and the ECO Educational Institute in Islamabad and Ankara respectively, I need to highlight, again, that establishment of these two Specialized Agencies have suffered inordinate delay. The 21<sup>st</sup> Meeting of the Regional Planning Council had recommended to the CPR to establish a High-Level Task Group to expedite realization of these two Specialized Agencies in a time-bound manner. The proposed Task Group has since been established and it is expected that the Group would expedite their realization without further delay.

### **Excellencies**

ECO needs to give special attention to ‘Public Diplomacy’ to enhance public awareness on ECO, its aims, activities and achievements etc.

### **Excellencies**

At the 11<sup>th</sup> ECO Summit, it was decided to establish an Eminent Persons Groups to formulate recommendations for enhancing ECO’s visibility, dynamism and efficiency. I am pleased to report that the EPG process has kicked-off following its inaugural meeting held in July, 2011 in Ankara. The EPG has drawn up its work programme and would conclude its work by the end of June, 2012. It would submit its final Report/Recommendations to the ECO COM Meeting in 2012. I wish to avail myself of the opportunity to request Uzbekistan and Turkmenistan to kindly nominate their respective Eminent Persons for the Group.

### **Excellencies**

The year 2011 marks the 19<sup>th</sup> year of ECO’s enlargement from a three-member regional-forum to an expanded regional grouping of ten countries. In the course of these years, ECO has made headway towards fostering regional integration. Nonetheless, in the months and years ahead, we are expected to be more visible in terms of our achievements. This would require active support of and greater owning by the Member States of ECO’s initiatives. I earnestly solicit Your Excellencies support in expediting signing, ratification and implementation of ECO’s framework Agreements including among others ECO Trade Agreement (ECOTA), the Revised Protocol to the Agreement on Simplification of Visa Procedures for Businessmen and Transit Drivers, Customs cooperation, Investment Promotion, ECO Trade & Development Bank, ECO Cultural Institute, ECO Science Foundation, ECO Educational Institute and ECO Reinsurance Company. We need to be collectively vigilant in our determination to render the Organization a viable and effective regional Organization and enable it to successfully implement the aims and objectives of the mandate entrusted to it by the Member States. Thank you.