

**ECO Secretariat**  
**Tehran**

**Report on the**  
**Official visit of the ECO Secretary General to New York**  
***(23-28 September, 2011)***

1. A two-member ECO delegation led by H.E. Mr. M. Yahya Maroofi, the Secretary-General, undertook an official visit to New York from Sep 23-28, 2011 to attend the 66<sup>th</sup> United Nations General Assembly Session, the 18<sup>th</sup> Informal Meeting of the ECO Council of Ministers, and the 11<sup>th</sup> ASEAN-ECO Joint Ministerial Meeting. The Secretary General also met with the UN Under-Secretary-General/High Representative for the Least Developed Countries, Landlocked Developing Countries and Small Island Developing States (UN-OHRLLS) to discuss matters of mutual interest.

**Participation in the 66<sup>th</sup> Session of the UN General Assembly:**

2. In line with the past practice, the Secretary-General represented ECO at the 66<sup>th</sup> Session of the UN General Assembly.

**The 11<sup>th</sup> ASEAN-ECO Joint Ministerial Meeting:**

3. Pursuant to the recommendation of the 21<sup>st</sup> Meeting of the Regional Planning Council of ECO (May, 2011-Tehran), the 11<sup>th</sup> ASEAN-ECO Joint Ministerial Meeting was held on 24<sup>th</sup> Sep, 2011 at the United Nations Headquarters in New York. The Meeting was co-chaired by H.E. Mr. HOR Namhong, the Deputy Prime Minister and the Minister of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation of the Kingdom of Cambodia (coordinating country of ASEAN-ECO relations) and H.E. Dr. Ahmet Davutoglu, the Foreign Minister of the Republic of Turkey (Chairman of ECO COM) on behalf of ASEAN and ECO respectively. It was attended by the Foreign Ministers/Representatives of ECO and ASEAN Member States. The Secretariats of ECO and ASEAN were represented by H.E. Mr. M. Yahya Maroofi, the ECO Secretary-General and Mr. Sayakane Sisouvong, the Deputy-Secretary-General of ASEAN respectively.

4. The proceedings of the Meeting followed an approved agenda. A joint Press Release was issued after the close of the Meeting. The Summary-Record of the Meeting is being circulated separately.

**The 18<sup>th</sup> Informal Meeting of the ECO COM:**

5. The 18<sup>th</sup> Informal Meeting of the ECO Council of Ministers (COM) was held on 27<sup>th</sup> Sep, 2011 in New York on the margins of the 66<sup>th</sup> Session of the United Nations General Assembly. It was organized by the Permanent Mission of the Republic of Turkey to the United Nations in New York and chaired by H.E. Dr. Ahmet Davutoglu, the Turkish Foreign Minister in his capacity as the current Chairman of the ECO COM. The Informal Meeting was attended by the Foreign Ministers/Representatives of Afghanistan, Azerbaijan, Kazakhstan, Iran, Kyrgyz Republic, Pakistan, Tajikistan and Turkey. The Informal COM Meeting was preceded by a Meeting of the ECO Contact Group in New York on 9 Sep, 2011. The Contact Group Meeting formulated recommendations for enhancing ECO's cooperation

with the UN system. The recommendations were subsequently deliberated and endorsed by the Informal COM.

6. The proceedings of the Informal COM Meeting followed an approved agenda. A joint Press Release was endorsed by the Meeting which was issued to the Media at the close of the Meeting. The Summary-Record of the Meeting is being circulated separately.

**Bilateral Meeting with the UN Under-Secretary General/High Representative of LDCs, LLDCs and SIDSs:**

7. The ECO delegation held a bilateral meeting with H.E. Mr. Cheick Sidi Diarra, the Under-Secretary General of the UN and High Representative for LDCs, LLDCs and SIDSs at his office on 28<sup>th</sup> Sep, 2011. The Secretary-General briefed Mr. Diarra on key developments in ECO particularly in such areas of cooperation as Trade, Transport, Energy and Environment. On trade, the Secretary-General referred to the 4<sup>th</sup> ECO Ministerial Meeting on Commerce and Foreign Trade held in Kabul in July 2011 and informed about the decisions taken by the Meeting on expediting implementation of trade concessions under ECO Trade Agreement (ECOTA) and establishing a working group to launch negotiations on ECO Free Trade Agreement (ECOFTA) to establish Free Trade Area in the ECO region by 2015. The Secretary-General added that pursuant to the decision of the 4<sup>th</sup> ECO Ministerial Meeting, ECO would soon embark upon negotiating a comprehensive trade facilitation agreement among the ECO membership.

8. The Secretary-General underscored the importance of developing efficient multi-modal transport linkages in the region in order to capitalize on the strategic location of the ECO region as a land-bridge between Asia and Europe. In this connection, he briefed about various ongoing projects in the rail and road transport sectors. The Secretary-General stated that in order to give transit/market access to the landlocked Member States and smaller economies of the region, several projects were being pursued vigorously. In this regard, he informed about the successful run of Silk Road Trucks Caravan in 2010, the regular operation of the ECO Container train on Islamabad-Tehran-Istanbul route since 2010 and progress on launching ECO Container trains on Almaty-Bandar Abbas and Istanbul-Almaty routes in the near future. He also informed about the incentives offered by Iran to ECO Member States at various Free Trade Zones in the country.

9. The UN Under-Secretary-General lauded the progress made by ECO on various fronts especially transport-related projects in the region. He underscored the significance of transit/transport system/linkages, especially railways, to provide efficient market access to the landlocked countries in the ECO region. He also stressed the significance of removing trade barriers and reducing transit time to give boost to trade in the region.

10. Sharing information about ongoing efforts of UN-OHRLLS on different initiatives for the land-locked countries, the UN Under-Secretary-General mentioned that his Office would organize a high-level meeting on trade facilitation among the land-locked countries in Kazakhstan in the second half of 2012 to encourage exchange of experiences among the stake-holders. Referring to the Almaty Programme of Action, he further informed that the UN-OHRLLS would seek mandate from the UN General Assembly this year to undertake an interim review of Almaty Programme of Action in 2013. The review would aim at stock-taking and assessing the progress made so far on implementation of the Programme of

Action. In this regard, he added that a preparatory/coordination meeting among various regional organizations was also being planned.

11. The Under-Secretary-General also informed that on the initiative of Mongolia and with the support of the land-locked countries and UN system, an international think-tank has recently been set-up in Mongolia to enhance analysis-capacity of the landlocked countries on trade and transit matters and to mobilize international support for various initiatives related to these issues.

12. The ECO Secretary-General while referring to his previous meeting with the Under-Secretary-General in Sep, 2010 recalled that during the meeting both sides had agreed to undertake joint study on transit trade/trade facilitation in the ECO region. He added that encouraged by the positive response of the UN-OHRLLS, the Secretariat prepared a Concept Paper (copy at Annex-I) on a joint Study on “ECO Transit Trade Procedures- Need for Cooperation in Trade Facilitation”. The Representative of the ECO Secretariat briefed the Under-Secretary-General that according to the Concept Paper, the proposed joint Study would aim at studying the Customs regimes/procedural requirements for regional/transit traders, potential of intra-regional trade, identifying the impediments and suggesting policy recommendations for enhancing trade and economic cooperation among the ECO Member States. The proposed Study would also formulate recommendations for developing appropriate strategies and mechanisms, extending necessary support for capacity building and strengthening the existing IT related infrastructure in the region to promote trade. He said that modalities and other details concerning the proposed Study could be worked out in consultation between the two Offices. It was further mentioned that the proposed Study Project would give special focus to the needs of the smaller economies of ECO Member States like Afghanistan, Kyrgyz Republic and Tajikistan. The Representative further observed that the recommendations of the joint Study would also help ECO in developing a comprehensive Trade Facilitation Agreement for the region as tasked by the ECO Ministerial Meeting on Commerce and Foreign Trade.

13. With regard to funding for the proposed Study, it was mentioned that the Secretariat would seek assistance of the UNOHRLLS in securing necessary support-technical and financial from relevant international funding agencies to initiate the proposed Study. The Secretary-General stated that if required, ECO may also contribute a modest amount from its ECO Feasibility and General Purpose Fund (ECO-FSGPF) with approval of the ECO Council of Permanent Representatives (CPR) in Tehran. The Secretary-General added that UN-OHRLLS and ECO Secretariat may also jointly seek, if required, assistance of IDB and the World Bank for conducting the study. He reaffirmed ECO Secretariat’s readiness to initiate the study with the assistance of UN-OHRLLS at the earliest. In response, the Under-Secretary-General renewed interest to undertake joint studies on transit trade/trade facilitation in the region and assured that the Concept Paper would be examined by his Office and that views would be shared with the Secretariat at the earliest. It was agreed that the focal points of the two sides would maintain regular interaction to jointly review the Concept Paper, coordinate finalization of the proposal and work out other necessary details concerning the proposed Study at the earliest.

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