

**Statement of the ECO Secretary General,
H.E. Mr. Khusrav Noziri
at the Tashkent International Conference
“Afghanistan: Security and Economic Development”
July 26, 2022**

Excellency Mr. Vladimir Norov, Acting Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Uzbekistan,

Excellency Mr. Abdulaziz Kamilov, the Special Representative of the honourable President of Uzbekistan on Foreign Policy,

Distinguished Heads of Delegations, Representatives of the United Nations and other International and Regional Organizations,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Having the pleasure and privilege to attend this very important International Conference on Afghanistan, I am sincerely grateful to the Government of Uzbekistan for inviting and giving me the opportunity to speak on the issue of global significance.

I would also like to thank and felicitate Uzbekistan for organizing and hosting this forum of great magnitude which is aimed at discovering possible remedies to address Afghanistan’s crucial issues of security and economic development taking place in view of some combined causes, most obviously the country’s currently unbending and troubled state of affairs.

Let me also appreciate and congratulate the United Nations Security Council for their decision to extend the mandate of the UN Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA) which is

aimed at ensuring the successful accomplishment of UNAMA's envisioned targets in Afghanistan, particularly the coordination for provision of humanitarian assistance and the delivery of essential human requirements and needs, bridging contact between Afghan Stakeholders and the International Community as well as continuing efforts to promote good governance and the rule of law.

We all acknowledge the importance of peace, security and stability in Afghanistan, not only for its own advantage, betterment and progress but also in the greater global and regional interest. Relevantly, the regional and international community is always found eager and determined for making concerted efforts and actions for the continued uplift, welfare and development of the people of Afghanistan.

Dear Participants,

The Economic Cooperation Organization (ECO) considers the restoration of peace, security and stability in Afghanistan fundamentally necessary for maintaining the process of reconstruction, development and socioeconomic growth in the country. Such factors also play central role to upkeep an unimpeded regional connectivity and promote conducive environment for the sustainability of trade and investment activities in Afghanistan, the region and beyond.

Let me recall that resilient trade and connectivity in the region can play very vigorous role to jack up the economic development of Afghanistan, which is an important and vital member of the ECO. The country is also a main party to various cooperative mechanisms of the Organization that notably include the ECO Trade Agreement (ECOTA) and the ECO Transit Transport Framework Agreement (TTFA). ECO Trade Agreement provides preferential trade conditions to Afghanistan

for facilitating its commercial activities with other countries of the region.

Afghanistan is also partnered with ECO in several essential regional connectivity projects, especially in the country's capacity of being the crossroad for connecting the region. As specific example, Afghanistan can play quite essential role in Kyrgyzstan - Tajikistan - Afghanistan - Iran (KTAI) Road and Rail Corridors. So far, the ECO and the en-route Member States have tangibly advanced for early operationalization of this strategic corridor. Our progress to this end, include the relevant feasibility studies, construction of some of the railway routes as well as conducting road transport operations along the corridor and the destinations in Uzbekistan and Tajikistan.

The Organization is further focussed on construction of railway missing link from Herat to Mazar-i Sharif and Sherkhan Bandar which is aimed at enhancing Afghanistan's connectivity and unlocking the potential of the Central Asian landlocked countries, leading to an ultimate regional and international interconnection. Moreover, the ECO is determinedly committed to help Afghanistan for its accession to and implementation of some crucial transit transport conventions, particularly TIR Convention.

Unhindered implementation of ECO trade and connectivity projects is not only believed to serve the larger regional interest, but also the smooth execution of such ECO initiatives can support the overall economic progress in Afghanistan.

I would also underline that in line with ECO's earlier and renewed commitments, the Organization launched an ECO Advocacy Program for Afghanistan in April 2018. In this regard, a previously established Fund for Reconstruction of Afghanistan was re-named as ECO Fund for Afghanistan to

support the country's development programs and projects. A Donors' Meeting was expected earlier with the aim to seek monetary assistance at greater level for some current and new ECO projects in Afghanistan. However, the event has yet to take place in view of various administrative and technical reasons, including the situation developed in the country during the last few months.

Distinguished Delegates,

The steady economic development that witnessed during the last two decades in Afghanistan has halted due to its recent administrative, social and political crisis. The situation is not only an indication of fragility in Afghanistan but also a signal of anticipated security hazards.

The sudden economic collapse in Afghanistan is steered by sharp declines in international financial assistance, blockage to access to country's foreign assets, strained connections with international banking and the diminished investment confidence. Under this scenario, the position of Afghan economy is grim which is expected to further contract throughout 2022.

The continuously dilapidating economic conditions, widespread food insecurity, lack of proper healthcare facilities and the impact of COVID-19 have worsened the humanitarian situation in Afghanistan. Such multiple factors are pushing the people of Afghanistan on the height of vulnerability.

In light of Afghanistan's deteriorating security situation and limited absorption capacity, it is critical to seek solutions to the crisis, promote responsibility sharing regionally and globally, and foster robust and effective linkages between humanitarian actions and development initiatives to ensure the

sustainable rehabilitation and durable socioeconomic conditions in the country.

Isolated efforts cannot work or achieve any sane aim to bring relief to the sufferings of Afghan brothers and sisters. To obtain some tangible results for addressing issues that Afghanistan is presently experiencing, a more coordinated, mutual and strong response is required for the preservation of human prestige and dignity.

Apart from short-term measures, some broader steps must be taken and advocated jointly by international community to counter immediate humanitarian and socioeconomic crisis in Afghanistan. To this end, an accommodative attitude should be adopted by both the global community and the country's interim administration. The International Community under any circumstances must resume their supportive approach towards the people of Afghanistan with a view to precluding further human destruction.

Likewise, the de facto authorities in Afghanistan are required to ensure adherence to the basic standards regarding justified treatment with women and girls, respect for human rights, formation of an inclusive representative government and economic management as well as development of amicable policies to secure peaceful relations with neighbouring nations.

By creating a reciprocity-based environment, a wider program of economic assistance could be offered and implemented in different public and private sectors to expedite the process of smooth economic recovery in Afghanistan.

Excellencies,

Given the fact that Afghanistan is a very important member of the ECO, the Organization is always ready and receptive for facilitating any actions that could yield fruitful outcomes for supporting the economic development in the country. The ECO would therefore welcome any proposals and ideas for maximum collaboration with other regional and international organizations to support the down-sliding socioeconomic conditions in Afghanistan.

In the given context, I would urge all the stakeholders and the members of regional and international civil societies to sit together, with no further delay. Precluding and defeating any approaches, which are instigated by sabotaging and aggressive behaviours, would herald rationalities, economic dividend and the peace for the shared wellbeing and prosperity inside and outside Afghanistan.

I am more than optimistic that Tashkent International Conference will be successful in ascertaining some tangible recommendations and figuring out feasible ways and means to help resume the process of economic development in Afghanistan.

Thank you for your kind attention.