

Statement of H.E. Dr. Mohammad Mahdi Mazaheri
President of ECO Cultural Institute
At the Opening of 27th Meeting of ECO Regional Planning Council
December 5, 2016, Tehran

Mr. Chairman,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

It is a matter of distinct privilege for me that as my first official function within the great ECO family, I am speaking at this very important meeting as the President of ECO Cultural Institute, which is one of the main specialized agencies of Economic Cooperation Organization.

At the outset, I would like to express my sincere gratitude to the ECO Member States for putting your trust and confidence in me to lead ECI.

Mr. Chairman,

In view of the principles visualized in the Treaty of Izmir, as the basic document of the Economic Cooperation Organization, culture is the common bond that brings all the nations of the region together. Despite all the political and economic developments as well as drawing of political boundaries, this bond has ever remained a matter of unity.

I firmly believe that all roads of cooperation pass through culture and we in the ECO Region, share a splendid common cultural heritage that is a precious means of accomplishing the lofty aims and objectives of Economic Cooperation Organization that is ushering prosperity and stability through regional economic cooperation.

For that reason, our predecessors, both within the framework of the former Regional Cooperation for Development (RCD) and its revival as the Economic Cooperation Organization, foresaw an independent institution for the promotion of the cultural and historical commonalities of our region and fostering cultural interactions.

Excellencies,

Today, we are facing challenges that jeopardize the peace, stability, security, and peaceful coexistence of the peoples of Western and Central Asia including ECO Region. To tackle such challenges, we not only require to implement harmonious, convergent economic policies, but also we should rely on the glorious common cultural and historical heritage of our nations; A legacy that has forever been the harbinger of peace, friendship, spirituality and peaceful coexistence for the peoples of this region. Our common cultural ties could definitely serve as a safe, enlightening and priceless option against the waves of violence, extremism, bigotry and terrorism.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Amidst such challenges, institutions such as ECO Cultural Institute and other sister organizations working under the umbrella of Economic Cooperation Organization and within the framework of cultural intra-governmental cooperation could play a pivotal role.

After around two decades of activity, ECO Cultural Institute has enhanced the profile of the Member States. It has not only set a bright, worthwhile record in promoting the common cultural heritage of the region but also facilitated cultural exchanges amongst the Member States.

Mr. Chairman

Unfortunately, out of the 10 members of ECO family, only four countries have acceded to the Charter of ECO Cultural Institute so far. This number of membership doesn't suffice to carry out the heavy responsibilities that the Institute has been mandated to undertake.

The leadership of ECO is well aware of the fact that it is vital for the very survival of ECI that all the ten ECO member countries play their role, without which the Institute may not be able to achieve the goals envisaged in the Charter.

Our success is contingent upon the collaboration of all members to make the existing commonalities recognizable internationally. Therefore, through this distinguished Forum, I seize the opportunity to invite the ECO countries to become ECI's full members.

In this regard, I hope that a practical mechanism is also devised within the future roadmap of the Organization in 'ECO Vision', for joining of other ECO countries to ECI.

However, ECI has not limited its plans and programs to its full members. Various programs organized in the fields of art, culture, and literature as well as different exhibitions mounted and research works carried out have encompassed all the ten ECO Member States to the extent possible because we are of the opinion that art and culture knows no boundaries.

In the opportunity ahead and relying on the collective wisdom of humanity, we will try to hold an international approach in mind and contribute a small part towards easing the humanity's suffering through the rich cultural heritage of ECO region and the cooperation and assistance of ECO countries.

Excellencies,

As per the directives of the 26th ECO RPC-Meeting, ECI has attempted to diversify and expand its scope of activities in all areas of arts and culture including literature, music, visual arts, handicrafts plus sports and has also continued conducting scholarly researches. Nevertheless, the expansion of scope and continuation of such programs necessitates the support, assistance and cooperation of the member states.

Meanwhile, I would like to point out that the details of ECI's achievements during the past year and the agenda for the year to come shall be presented to the pertinent committee meetings for specialized agencies by my colleagues.

Here, I would like to acknowledge the worthwhile efforts made by the former Presidents of ECO Cultural Institute for their outstanding contribution to the aims and objectives of the Institute during the past years.

In conclusion, Excellencies, I would like to invite the esteemed participating delegations to attend the cultural program arranged by ECI in their honor at its headquarters on Thursday, December 8, 2016 after the closing session of the RPC meeting.

Thank you.