



**Statement**  
**by H.E. Mr. Khusrav Noziri, ECO Secretary General**  
**at the Informal Ministerial Meeting on Environment**  
**of the ECO Member States**

**On the sidelines of the Twenty-eighth Session of the**  
**Conference of the Parties of the United Nations Framework Convention**  
**on Climate Change (COP28)**  
Dubai, 9 December 2023

**Honourable Ministers,**  
**Distinguished Delegates,**  
**Ladies and Gentlemen,**

I would like to extend my deep gratitude to the Republic of Azerbaijan, particularly to His Excellency Mukhtar Babayev, Minister of Ecology and Natural Resources, for hosting the ECO Informal Ministerial Meeting on Environment and making excellent arrangements for its success.

This meeting, being held on the sidelines of the UN Climate Change Conference (COP28) in Dubai, takes place at a critical moment of negative consequences of environmental challenges to which no country or community is immune. Therefore, I am confident that our meeting can provide a timely opportunity to exchange views on the opportunities and challenges in achieving regional environmental goals and showcase how the ECO region's industrial growth can be aligned with the climate targets of the Paris Agreement.

The Ministerial is thus expected to build necessary political momentum for galvanizing ambitious plans and speeding up actions on our environmental agenda across multiple cross-sectoral areas. I hope our Member States can bring their collective voice to the global negotiation table and push for positive outcomes that drive meaningful shifts on both regional and global scales.

**Distinguished Participants,**

ECO region cannot stay unaffected by the dire consequences of environmental degradation and climate change on human life. Needless to say, the resource-intensive growth has caused serious damage to many natural ecosystems in our region leading to environmental degradation and climate disruption. Given these growing challenges, the designation of the environment and impacts of climate change as a cross-sectoral priority of ECO was necessary, but not sufficient.

As you are well aware, our Member States have the shared geographies and natural resources, including shared water resources and marine environments, and coastal and terrestrial ecosystems. Consequently, addressing ecological and climate challenges should envisage trans-boundary responses.

While the right to a clean, healthy, and sustainable environment is seen as a human right today, we need a framework and clear roadmap to define and make our regional priorities in this area as concrete as possible. We understand that ECO is not quite a homogeneous entity, so it cannot be expected to put together common positions on a whole range of environmental issues. However, Member States can agree on some common grounds or niches in the areas where they wish to make progress and strengthen regional capacities. They may reach a consensus on priorities for climate action, biodiversity conservation, and addressing land degradation. It is in such a context that the adoption and implementation of the new 'ECO Cooperation Framework on the Environment' and its annexes are of great significance.

In January, the 26<sup>th</sup> ECO COM Meeting decided on establishment of the High-Level Dialogue Platform on Environmental Cooperation, initiated by the Republic of Uzbekistan. This mechanism can make a positive complementary and advisory contribution to the decision-making bodies and existing sectoral platforms of our Organization in the field of environment. After all, we need to incorporate scientific findings into policymaking that will have long-term benefits for our countries from the environmental sustainability perspective. We might need positive yet innovative practices underpinned by knowledge and science.

This is where the role of the newly established High-Level Dialogue Platform on Environmental Cooperation is key. We welcome the proposal of Uzbekistan, announced at the last 16<sup>th</sup> ECO Summit, to organize the first meeting of the High-Level Platform within the framework of the Samarkand Climate Forum in 2024.

Furthermore, the ECO Secretariat in partnership with the Chairmanship of Azerbaijan in ECO elaborated the Regional Initiative on Resource Efficiency, Sustainability, and Circular Economy in the ECO Region (RESCUE). This initiative aims at contributing to a just transition to a resource-efficient, circular and regenerative economy, and advocacy for more sustainable management of natural resources. Given the ever-increasing prioritization of the subject thematic in the global agenda, its regional uptake could gain strong support by international partners. ECO countries may thus position themselves as proponents of just and innovative transition to circularity in international arena.

Given the latest developments in the field of biodiversity, particularly the adoption of the Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework, biodiversity-related cooperation needs to be enhanced in ECO's environmental agenda over the coming years. This interest has to be sought through different ways and means including validation and implementation of the revised Work Program on

Biodiversity in ECO Region (2023-2030). Its adoption could be instrumental in capacity building and enhanced cooperation for conservation and sustainable use of biodiversity as well as management of biodiversity at the national and regional levels. This step will also be indicative of solidarity with the recently adopted Global Biodiversity Framework.

Increased frequency and severity of droughts during the last few decades along with the challenges related to development agenda and population growth have aggravated land degradation in several parts of the region and increased sand and dust storms, which overall threaten the livelihood and welfare of people across the region. All these challenges necessitate deliberation and coordination with a view to agree upon a common ground document for guiding the regional activities on this critical challenge. To this end, the early launching of the ECO LandCare Programme could be pertinent to contribute to halting and reversing land degradation and associated impacts in the ECO region through long-term collaborative efforts.

Taking into account the increasing significance of combating desertification and sand and dust storms in the region, this issue should be seen as an integral part of climate change mitigation and adaptation, conservation of biodiversity, and land degradation management strategies.

### **Ladies and Gentlemen,**

We must admit that beyond and above creating new platforms and documents, to deliver on the environment, collective and concerted actions by all the ECO Member States are required. We need a whole-of-government approach rooted in a solid political will, as well as a whole-of-society approach combined with adequate means of implementation, including proportionate financial and technical resources for such a purpose, which are missing at the current stage. It is also quite significant that the ECO Member States pave the way to further mainstream the environment and climate resilience in development planning, programming, and budgeting nationally and across the region.

Furthermore, the ECO region has to continue to adapt to the new realities of climate change and further work together to mitigate its worst effects. It is an imperative to heighten the global and regional attention to climate change as a defining challenge of the XXI century. We can collectively reaffirm that addressing climate change and overcoming its impacts remains a top priority on our regional agenda.

We need to focus on finding ways and means to decouple economic growth from resource use and GHG emissions. Our region can be at the heart of a renewable future. We must identify the enormous potential of our region in renewable energy and sustainable development. We need to attract investment and innovative technologies to position our region as a forerunner in the global transition to green development. We must seek to promote a more just and sustainable paradigm of

development. To facilitate the process, we have to collectively urge the relevant funds to further simplify the procedures for disbursement of resources, considering the special conditions within developing country Parties as the ECO Member States.

Last but not least, as was highlighted by the ECO 7<sup>th</sup> Working Group Meeting on Environment last month, we need to organize sectoral events on the environment including the Ministerial Meeting on Environment regularly. We hope the Member States will demonstrate more enthusiasm in hosting and participating in such events.

The ECO region's potential is huge, and we are barely scratching the surface. Together, we can and must activate these potentials and smartly harness the existing capabilities. This could free up capacity, creativity, and resources to dedicate to the most value-added activities and to shape our green and sustainable future. We can thus develop a more networked, inclusive, and effective ECO for environmental action and SDG acceleration.

Thank you for your attention.