

Statement by the President of the Islamic Republic of Iran
H.E. Dr. Hassan Rouhani
14th ECO Summit

Your Excellency Mr. Erdogan;

At the outset, I would like to express my gratitude to you and to your colleagues for effective efforts during Turkey's chairmanship of the Economic Cooperation Organization (ECO), as well as for organization of this important meeting. This is a great pleasure to have another opportunity to attend this august meeting of the honourable Heads of ECO Member States. I hope that this Summit will serve as yet another step towards integration, welfare, and prosperity of the nations of the ECO Region as well as the promotion of the ECO.

Honourable Presidents,

Economic Cooperation Organization constitutes a priority in the paradigm governing Iran's regional and neighborhood policies. ECO enjoys invaluable potential in terms of human and natural resources, energy reserves, complementary economies, interested private sectors, and an incomparable regionally and globally transit and transport advantages. In fact, ECO meets all the requisites for being a success story of regional integration.

There have been major steps towards the enhancement of economic cooperation within ECO and precious achievements have been made. However, in certain areas such as trade, the achievements have not met expectations. Despite the high trade potential and the necessary infrastructure in place, intra-regional trade remains as low as less than 10 per cent- totally unacceptable. This has also been addressed in the ECO Vision 2025.

We are of the view that we need to concentrate on operationalization of the ECO agreed programmes and decisions with a view to accelerating the pace towards realization of the goals and objectives of the Organization. To that end, the following proposals are suggested:

Implementation of ECO trade agreement as well as working out ways and means to expand intra-regional trade,

Further activation of private sectors for the sake of trade boost,

Strengthening and activation of the existing and new ECO agencies such as ECO Trade and Development Bank, ECO Reinsurance Company, ECO Regional Institute for Standardization (RISCAM), and ECO Chamber of Commerce,

Removing the obstacles and challenges, encountering transit and transport cooperation as the fundamental infrastructure for trade expansion.

The Islamic Republic of Iran remains ready to actively contribute to the operationalization of the ECO Trade Agreement (ECOTA) and creating the necessary financial, banking and customs arrangements while having on board all ECO Member States. Given our geographical location, we are prepared to share our transport network as well as infrastructures and facilities along Persian Gulf and Oman Sea with ECO Members, particularly the landlocked countries, bridging them with international waters and markets.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

The international community is now experiencing formidable challenges which have affected all facets of human life. The COVID-19 has deeply and destructively affected economic and welfare conditions of the countries in the world. No country can afford to tackle such challenges single-handedly. Rather, it requires collective will along with joint cooperation. Accordingly, we consider very timely and promising for ECO Region the theme of this Summit, namely "Regional Cooperation in the Post- COVID Era".

In the time of the pandemic, the international community has disappointedly failed to act against unilateral measures and unlawful sanctions dragged into the realm of the fight against the disease, targeting the countries' capabilities in their struggle against this global plague. The great powers' depriving other nations of fundamental rights as well as their disrespect for international organizations necessitate response from the like- minded countries including through strengthening cooperation and creating a united front against these challenges.

In the last 4 years, the international community has witnessed the US illegal approach and a full-scale economic war against Iran. These cruel and illegal sanctions have inflicted irreparable damage to Iran's government and people. As per Iran's wisdom and insight, the JCPOA has so far survived despite the fact that the US had opted for its obliteration. **The US, as the one who violated the Deal, shall lift all sanctions and take practical steps in order to be able to return to JCPOA.** The Islamic Republic of Iran will reciprocate action by action. The return path to the JCPOA is straightforward, and if the US government is determined to return, there is no need for negotiations.

Allow me to announce that the US unlawful unilateral measures have failed to bring the great Iranian nation to its knees. Notwithstanding severe economic pressure, this nation has relied on its domestic capabilities and has even made breakthroughs and achieved great achievements including in the fight against COVID-19 and its impacts. A vivid example is the production of corona virus vaccine by Iranian scientists, where we are prepared to extend cooperation with other countries, particularly ECO countries. We are also ready to exchange our views on how to deal with post-Covid era and lay solid foundations for regional cooperation.

Mr. President,

Let me conclude by renewing my gratitude to you as well as to the organizers of this Summit in Ankara, and the colleagues in the ECO Secretariat in Tehran. Seizing this opportunity, I would also like to express my congratulations to my dear brother, H.E. Mr. Berdimuhamedow, on the occasion of incoming ECO Chairmanship by Turkmenistan.

I thank you for your attention.
