

Statement by the President of the Republic of Tajikistan
H.E. Mr. Emomali Rahmon
14th ECO Summit

Distinguished Mr. Chairman,
Excellencies Heads of State and Government,
Dear Friends,

At the outset, I would like to offer my gratitude to the President of the Republic of Turkey, His Excellency Recep Tayyip Erdogan and the ECO Secretariat for organizing this meeting.

The spread of the COVID-19 pandemic has had a negative impact on the socio-economic development of all countries and regions of the world.

We have been faced with a severe global socio-economic and financial crisis.

I hope that the today's Summit outcomes will contribute to the maximum use of the Organization's potential to overcome the consequences of the pandemic and ensure sustainable development in its region.

Trade cooperation between the member states of the Organization, as a priority task, plays a key role in promoting the integration process as a factor in the dynamic development of the regional economy.

Today, the share of the Organization's member states in Tajikistan's foreign trade turnover account, for about **40 %** of its total volume. Meanwhile, intra-ECO trade accounts for only **8%** of the total trade of its members. This figure shows that the current level of trade between the ECO member states still does not match the available opportunities and potential.

Transport and communication remains another important area of cooperation. In this dimension, a number of important programs are under development, including railway projects aimed at expanding the transport and transit capabilities of the region.

The test launch of landline freight transport along the Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Afghanistan and Iran (KTAI) transport corridor, which links these countries to China, highlights the importance of implementing UN digital transport solutions to facilitate the transportation of goods across the region's borders.

To ensure sustainable development in the region, cooperation in the fields of **energy, industry, mining and processing of minerals, as well as environmental protection and the agricultural sector** is equally important along with cooperation in the field of transport.

We support the establishment of the **ECO Clean Energy Center** in cooperation with the member countries and the Organization's Secretariat. We hope that this Center will contribute to the implementation of projects on construction of "green" energy facilities and the formation of an effective regional energy market in the region of the Organization.

With this in mind, it is very timely to implement the project on construction of a high-voltage power transmission line **CASA-1000**, which is designed to become the first energy bridge between Central and South Asia.

Agriculture and industry are very important and key sectors. The need for cooperation in these areas becomes even more urgent based on the need to overcome the socio-economic consequences of the pandemic. We believe that in the current context the Organization's Secretariat should initiate the coordination of efforts of the member countries to **protect food security**, overcome **unemployment, poverty**, as well as other specific issues aggravated during the pandemic in the ECO space.

We express the hope that the ECO project activities will focus on the elimination of these issues and all possible assistance to the socio-economic development of the member countries.

Taking into account the situation that has developed against the background of the pandemic, we also believe it is expedient to review the creation of a **regional cooperation mechanism for control of transmissible diseases**, in particular COVID-19 within the Organization.

Tourism cooperation between the Organization's member states is an effective factor in strengthening ties between our peoples. Striving to proactively participate in the development of tourism in the ECO region, Tajikistan hosted the last meeting of the tourism ministers of the Organization's member countries.

During this meeting, the city of Dushanbe was declared the tourism capital of ECO for 2020-2021. In this context, we plan to hold the International Festival "Dushanbe - the Tourist Capital of ECO" and the International Forum for the Development of Agri-tourism in May of this year in Dushanbe.

Dear colleagues,

Afghanistan's socio-economic development remains as a topical issue within the framework of our Organization. We, together with the Afghan side, plan to hold a high-level meeting of the **Heart of Asia - Istanbul Process Forum in the third decade of March of this year** within our presidency in this process. Taking this opportunity, I would like to invite the participating countries to take a proactive part in this Forum.

Tajikistan will continue to take a proactive part in the activities of the Organization, and make constant efforts to achieve its goals defined in the strategic document **ECO Vision -2025**.

We have always advocated and continue to advocate stronger cooperation throughout the entire space of the Organization for the sake of the well-being of our peoples.

At the conclusion, I would like to highlight with great pleasure the productive presidency of the Islamic Republic of Pakistan in the ECO Summit and wish the Republic of Turkey success in its work within its presidency of the Organization's 14th Summit.

Thank you.
