

**Statement by H. E. Dr. Shamil Aleskerov, ECO Secretary General
at the 12th ECO Summit Meeting
(Baku, 16th October 2012)**

**Excellency Ilham Aliyev, the President of the Republic of Azerbaijan,
Honourable Heads of States/Governments/Delegations,
Excellencies,
Distinguished Delegates,**

I am privileged to present before the esteemed leadership of the ECO, a brief account of the activities and progress of the organization during last two years. At the outset, I wish to avail myself of this opportunity to express my deepest gratitude to H.E. Abdullah Gul, the honourable President of the Republic of Turkey, and H.E. Recep Tayyip Erdogan, Honorable Prime Minister of the Republic of Turkey, for the excellent manner in which they led our Organization since the 11th ECO Summit in Istanbul. I would also like to convey my heartfelt felicitations to His Excellency Ilham Aliyev, the honourable President of the Republic of Azerbaijan, on his election as the Chairman of the 12th Summit.

Excellencies,

Since the last Summit, we have made considerable headway in increasing and deepening regional cooperation in the light of the principles and objectives of the Organization.

Excellencies,

Shoring up trade cooperation continued to be the main plank of our efforts to promote regional integration. It gives me immense pleasure to report to this august forum that the implementation of tariff reduction under the ECO Trade Agreement (ECOTA) will commence on 1st January 2013. I am sure that the implementation of ECOTA will not only give a quantum boost to intra regional trade but also take us closer to establishing a Free Trade Area in the region as visualized in the ECO Vision 2015.

The implementation of ECOTA needs to be accompanied by greater cooperation in trade facilitation and trade promotion activities so that our business communities may reap the full benefits of trade liberalization. Not only that, we also need to support and facilitate the accession of non-WTO Member States as only three out of the ten countries of ECO are at present on the WTO membership.

The ECO Trade and Development Bank continues to expand its membership and operations to meet the growing demand for finance. The completion of the process of membership by the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan and the Republic of Azerbaijan will constitute a significant step towards enhancing the contribution of the Bank to growth and sustainable development in the region. Moreover, it is

our firm conviction that we have to increase the resources and paid-up capital of the Bank for enhancing its regional impact.

Excellencies,

Significant progress has been registered in increasing cooperation in transport and communications. A comprehensive ECO Railway Network Development Plan has been approved; the freight service of the ECO Container Trains on Islamabad-Tehran-Istanbul and Istanbul-Almaty routes is being streamlined; and the Container Train on Bandar Abbas-Almaty route is being launched. The ECO/IRU Project for Regular Monitoring of Trucks has been completed, while the ECO Road Network Development Plan is being given final shape.

The ECO Region is enormously rich in energy, which makes cooperation in the energy sector a priority area for the Organization. Under the ECO Plan of Action for Energy/Petroleum Cooperation (2011-2015), Member States are engaged in collaboration for the full utilization of their energy potential.

In ECO we strongly believe that growth and development should not be at the expense of environment. The 4th ECO Ministerial Meeting on Environment adopted the Framework Plan of Action on Environmental Cooperation and Global Warming (2011-2015), which will go a long way in ensuring sustainable development in the region.

Food security is another area whose importance we are fully alive to. Under the ECO Regional Programme for Food Security (RPFS), a number of projects especially on seed sector have been concluded. The premises of ECO Veterinary Commission (ECO VECO) were inaugurated in Tehran last week. Regional Coordination Centre on the Implementation of the ECO Regional Programme for Food Security (RPFS) will soon be established in Ankara before the 5th ECO Ministerial Meeting on Agriculture to be held in November this year in Antalya, Turkey.

Concrete progress has been registered for cooperation in the areas of SME development, Standardization and Privatization.

Increasing intra regional cooperation for achieving Human Development and Millennium Development Goals remained among our priorities in 2011 and 2012. The 1st Meeting of the ECO Ministers/Heads of the Human Resource Development Responsible Organizations will be held on 12-13 November 2012 in Tehran. The meeting will focus on the priority sustainable human development issues.

Excellencies,

Establishment of ECO Parliamentary Forum has been another creditable achievement of the Organization. The Forum's inaugural meeting was hosted by Pakistan in September last. **The Charter of the Parliamentary Assembly of ECO Countries has been approved by the 20th Council of Ministers.**

On the external side, ECO continued to strengthen cooperation with the United Nations and other international and regional organizations. I have the honour to report to Your Excellencies that two important ECO institutions, namely ECO Science Foundation and ECO Educational Institute were operationalized in December 2011 and March 2012 respectively which were pending approximately for 15 years.

At the end, I assure Your Excellencies, that with your able guidance and support, ECO will move closer to realizing its ideals.

Before I conclude, I would like to once again express my gratitude to the Government of the Republic of Azerbaijan for their excellent hospitality. I also thank Honourable Heads of States/Governments and Heads of Delegations from the Member States for their presence.

Thank you, Excellencies.
