

## Statement of the ECO Secretary General

*Annex-VI*

*Hon'able Mr. Chairman,  
Hon'able Heads of State/Government,  
Excellencies,*

I deem it a great privilege and an honour to present to you my report on the activities of our Organization since your last meeting in Islamabad a year ago. The third ECO Summit Meeting was indeed a landmark event in the history of our organization as it witnessed the signing of several regional agreements and also set in motion the much needed process of ECO's reform and revitalization. We are grateful to the leaderships of the Islamic Republic of Pakistan for infusing greater efficacy and substance in our organization and providing a solid foundation and a concrete framework for our regional cooperative endeavours.

Before proceeding with my report, I wish to offer my felicitation to H.E. the President of Turkmenistan on his assumption of the Chairmanship of the Fourth ECO Summit Meeting. The unanimous expression of confidence in his stewardship of the Fourth ECO Summit Meeting is a befitting tribute to his eminence as a statesman, his renowned services to the cause of peace and development in our region and his commitment to ECO's goals and objectives. Under your leadership, Mr. Chairman, this meeting is assured of an outcome of immense value and far-reaching impact and promise for the future of our organization. We are grateful to your Government for hosting this historic event with excellent arrangements and exemplary hospitality.

*Mr. Chairman,*

Your inaugural address as well as the statements of other esteemed leaders this morning were thought-provoking and provided valuable guidance for ECO to pursue its goals as an effective instrument of regional cooperation. The imperative of regional cooperation has never been more challenging than in the rapidly changing regional and international economic environment of today. ECO, as a major regional organization of ten Member States and representing a vast region with large material and human resources assumes a crucial role and responsibility for the socio-economic well being of its Member States. ECO also has a role to play in the revival and consolidation of the deep-rooted historical and cultural affinities among the peoples of our region. Indeed, it has a tremendous economic potential and carries within its fold the seeds of a success story of the next century. We look forward to the collective vision of our leaders for guidance in meeting the realities of today and imperatives of tomorrow.

Since its transformation nearly four years ago from a trilateral entity into one of the largest regional organizations of the world, ECO has made significant progress in determining its long term perspectives and drawing up a comprehensive blue-print of its future socio-economic development strategy in the form of the Quetta Plan of Action and the Istanbul Declaration. Both these Plans define our sectoral priorities with concrete targets to be achieved by the year 2000. These priorities cover all vital areas of economic development with transport and communications, trade and energy being at the top of our regional agenda.

In the field of transport and communications, the project-oriented Almaty outline Plan envisages the development of a modern transport and communications infrastructure linking the ECO Member States with each other and with the outside world. Inauguration of the Tejen-Seraks-Mashhad Railway Line which you witnessed yesterday and finalization of arrangements for regional use of the Karakoram High way constitute developments of far-reaching significance for our region. We hope similarly priority would be given to the completion of the remaining road and railway links within the ECO region envisaged in the Almaty Outline Plan.

In keeping with the current global trend, trade must constitute an important element of our regional cooperation and every possible effort needs to be made to forge closer economic linkages through greater intra-regional trade. We have so far relied on half-hearted preferential tariff arrangements. It is time for bold policy initiatives towards progressive elimination of all tariff and non-tariff barriers in our intra-regional trade and eventual establishment of an ECO Free Trade Area ( ECOFTA). In pursuing this goal, we need to be guided by the experiences of other regions and global trade environment.

In the field of energy, which is another priority areas for our region, important bilateral and regional arrangements envisaging networks of gas and oil pipelines and inter-connection of power grids are being pursued. Notable among them are the proposed gas pipeline from Turkmenistan to Pakistan via Afghanistan, from Turkmenistan to Europe via Iran and Turkey and from Iran to Pakistan. Efforts are also being made for the development and processing of energy resources of the ECO region. During the past couple of years, some ECO Member States have been able to attract massive foreign investments in the energy sector which would, no doubt, contribute to the overall progress and prosperity of our entire region.

*Excellencies,*

As regards the implementation of the agreements signed on the occasion of the Islamabad Summit last year, I am pleased to report to you that preliminary steps for the establishment of the agreed projects have already been initiated. An Interim Committee has finalized arrangements for the simultaneous establishment of the ECO Trade and Development Bank and the Reinsurance Company. ECO Shipping Company has already been launched. ECO Air as well as the ECO Cultural Institute and ECO Science Foundation are awaiting the completion of their pre-launch formalities. The Summit Meeting may lend its support to providing the needed impetus for expeditious establishment of these projects.

*Mr. Chairman,*

No doubt, in recent years there has been a significant progress in bilateral dealings between the three founding Members and their new partners. At the same time, there is an increasing awareness among the newly independent Republics of Central Asia and Caucasus that the fruits of their political independence can be secured only if their economies are restructured in line with the modern principles of market economy and their trade diversified in terms of exportable commodities and trading partners. In this task they surely have the support of Iran, Pakistan and Turkey on bilateral as well as regional basis. ECO also offers them a vast market in close proximity and convenient outlets to major markets of the world.

During the period since the Third Summit Meeting, ECO has continued to consolidate

and expand its international image and standing through cooperative relationships with various regional and international organizations both within and outside the UN system. ECO has also acquired observe status with the UN and OIC. The UN General Assembly at its Fiftieth Session last year unanimously adopted a Resolution on Cooperation with ECO which would facilitate direct participation and co-sponsorship of major UN agencies in our socio-economic development-related activities and programmes.

*Excellencies,*

ECO Summits are regular features now. This has enhanced the stature of ECO and given our organization continued blessings and guidance from the highest echelons of the ECO leadership. The meetings of Head of State/Government, now proposed to be held on biennial basis, provide a regular forum to our leaders not only to review progress in ECO activities but also to exchange views on all issues of common interest, particularly those having a direct bearing on the peace and harmony of the ECO region.

*Mr. Chairman,*

The Ashgabat Summit has secured a place in history. It would always be seen as a watershed in ECO's consolidation through reform and restructuring. You will be happy to know that the Eminent Persons Group (EPG) established last year with your blessing has completed its work by carrying out a thorough reappraisal of ECO's basic Charter, re-defining its goals, objectives and priorities and rationalizing its organizational and operational system. The recommendations of the Eminent Persons Group have since been given an in-depth consideration by the member Government and are now ready for implementation in realistic and phased manner. As I approach the completion of my tenure as Secretary of ECO, I feel gratified that ECO is now ready to assume its new role as a major regional organization capable of leading its Member States into the new millennium as modern, progressive and self-reliant nations.

Finally, as this is the last time I am privileged to be participating in an ECO Summit Meeting as head of this organization, may I avail myself of this opportunity to acknowledge, with a deep sense of gratitude, the assistance, cooperation and, above all, the guidance I always received from the esteemed leadership of ECO member countries in the fulfillment of my duties. I may also add that whatever modest contribution I was able to make to ECO's well-being and consolidation would not have been possible without the support and cooperation of the member Governments and understanding and encouragement of the distinguished Foreign Ministers of ECO countries. Thanks to our combined efforts, the stage is now set for a meaningful change to take place in the organizational set up of ECO and, more importantly, in the overall quality of its output.

*I thank you all.*