

Statement of the ECO Secretary General

Annex-VI

*Hon'ble Prime Minister of the Islamic Republic of Pakistan,
Hon'ble Heads of State/Government,
Excellencies,
Distinguished Delegates,*

I deem it a great privilege and an honour to have been given this opportunity to present to this august Meeting a report on the activities of our Organization since the Second ECO Summit meeting. Before I do so, I avail myself of this opportunity to join in the unanimous expression of felicitations to the Hon'ble Prime Minister of the Islamic Republic of Pakistan on her assumption of the Chairpersonship of the Third ECO Summit meeting. With her distinguished caliber and eminent political stature, this meeting is assured of an able stewardship to steer its deliberations to a successful and positive outcome. I also congratulate the Government of Pakistan for hosting this historic event with resounding success and proverbial hospitality.

Your inaugural address, Prime Minister, was remarkable for its clarity of thought and breadth of vision. You have very rightly pointed to the need for a bold and visionary new approach in pursuing our common goal for the socio-economic well-being of our region. Indeed, the guidance we receive from the ECO leadership today would facilitate our endeavours to infuse greater efficacy and substance in the working of the Economic Cooperation Organization.

Excellencies,

The Islamabad Summit takes place at a critical stage in the history of our Organization. After its transformation two years ago from a small trilateral entity into a major regional organization of ten Member States, ECO today is the focus of world attention in terms of its geo-political significance and vast combined economic potential. It also symbolizes the collective aspirations of over 300 million people living in our region whose past, present and future destinies are closely inter-linked.

The Islamabad Summit is also important in terms of its timing as it marks the completion of the first two years of ECO in its expanded framework. This has been an eventful period during which ECO has come a long way in pursuit of its goals by adopting two major plans of action, the Quetta Plan and Istanbul Declaration, as a comprehensive blueprint of our future socio-economic development strategy. Our sectoral priorities cover all vital areas of economic development but transport & communications, trade and energy are at the top of these priorities.

The project-oriented Almaty Outline Plan underscores the importance we attach to the development of a modern transport & communications infrastructure linking the ECO Member States with each other and with the outside world. Trade is an important element of regional cooperation and is receiving due priority as an ECO activity. A Protocol on Preferential Tariffs involving 10 percent reduction on selected number of commodities is already in operation as a

first step towards gradual elimination of all trade barriers in our regional trade. We now need to expand the scope of preferences under this Protocol at least by applying the present 10% tariff reduction across the board. At the same time, with the completion of Uruguay Round of Trade Negotiations, we also need to evaluate the implications of the new international trading environment for our region.

In the field of energy, which has lately become a high priority area for most of the ECO Member Governments, 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 a gas pipeline project from Turkmenistan to Europe via Iran and Turkey, Iran-Pakistan joint-venture oil refinery and several other policy measures to develop energy resources. In this connection, we specially commend the historic initiatives by the Government of Pakistan during the past year to attract massive foreign investments in the energy sector.

We had a major break-through at the recent annual meeting of the Council of Ministers in Ashgabat with the finalization and approval of the basic documents on the establishment of several regional institutions. These include ECO Trade & Development Bank, ECO Reinsurance Company, ECO Shipping Company, ECO Air, ECO Science Foundation and ECO Cultural Institute. In addition, two important regional agreements, one on transit trade and the other on simplification of visa procedures for the businessmen of ECO countries have also been finalized. All these agreements are to be signed during this Summit meeting.

Excellencies,

The most important achievement over the past two years has been the new international prominence and stature that ECO has acquired through its outward-looking approach and cooperative relationships with major regional and international organizations including those within the UN system. It has acquired observer status with the UN and OIC and established cooperative linkages with IDB, ESCAP, UNICEF, UNFPA, UNIDO, UNDP and UNDCP to benefit from their economic development-related activities and resources. ECO has also established contacts with ASEAN and European Union for mutually beneficial cooperation in areas of common interest.

All these positive developments notwithstanding, a lot still remains to be done. We have already completed the process of initial planning and should now move ahead with the implementation of the agreed plans. This requires not only mobilization of the requisite technical and financial resources on national, bilateral and regional levels but also revitalization of the Organization through renewed commitment of the Member States to its goals and objectives and rationalization of its structural and functional methodology. In this regard, I am pleased to report that the Council of Ministers has approved my proposal to constitute a Group of Eminent Persons on enhancing the Effectiveness of ECO. The proposed Panel receives its mandate from the Council of Ministers but I am sure the historic responsibility of recommending ECO's new charter also needs a direction and blessing from our leaders at this Summit. Needless to emphasize that reform is an essential and continuing process. In pursuing reform and improvement in our Organization, we should not be guided by precedents alone, however well-established these may be, but by the needs and imperatives of our own future and by the shape and content that we want to give it.

Finally, I would add that it is, indeed, heartening that ECO Summits are a regular feature

now. This has enhanced the stature of ECO and given us the blessings and guidance from the highest echelons of ECO leadership. We are confident that the Third Summit meeting in Islamabad will be an epoch-making event. It will not only be witnessing the conclusion of several concrete project-oriented agreements but also providing yet another opportunity for the renewal of the highest level commitment of ECO Member States to the goals and objectives of our Organization. We look forward to receiving a new direction at the Islamabad Summit to bring ECO in conformity with the role that it is required to play as a dynamic regional organization capable of leading its Member States into the 21st Century as modern, progressive and self-reliant nations.

I thank you all.

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