

**OPENING STATEMENT BY MUKHDOOM M. AMIN FAHIM,**  
**MINISTER FOR COMMERCE,**  
**ISLAMIC REPUBLIC OF PAKISTAN**

**4<sup>th</sup> ECO Ministerial Meeting on Commerce and Foreign Trade**  
**13<sup>th</sup> July, 2011, Kabul, Afghanistan**

Excellency Mr. Anwarul Haq Ahady,  
Minister for Commerce & Industry,  
Islamic Republic of Afghanistan

H.E. Mr. Muhammad Yahya Maroofi,  
Secretary General ECO,

Visiting dignitaries,

Excellencies Honourable delegates,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Assalam-o-Alaikum

I would like to express sincere condolences on my personal behalf and on behalf of the people and Government of Pakistan on the tragic assassination of the brother of H.E. Mr. Hamid Karzai, the President of the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan. I hope and pray that the family of H.E. Mr. President and the Government and the people of Afghanistan to bear this loss. Our prayers go out to the family of the deceased and pray that the departed soul rest in peace.

It is an honor for me to be present here today to attend this august forum of the ECO Ministerial meeting of Commerce & Trade Ministers. I am grateful to the Government of the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan for hosting these meetings and making excellent arrangements for our stay.

I have no hesitation in saying that Afghanistan is our second home. I have always enjoyed my stay here and appreciate the warmth and hospitality of the people and Government of Afghanistan. Both countries have been victims of conflict and share each other's aspiration in fostering peace and stability in the region.

I would also like to place on record my appreciation to H.E. Mohammad Yahya Maroofi, Secretary General of the ECO and his able and competent team for organizing this event.

Ladies & Gentlemen,

Pakistan is one of the founding members of the Economic Cooperation Organization. We share a common history, religion, culture and traditions with the peoples of the ECO region. Our bonds have withstood the test of time and have been a source of strength and comfort for us. We give utmost importance to our relations with the ECO members and would like to see ECO emerge as an important regional block catering to the social and economic development of the region.

We believe that trade and commerce is one of the most potent instruments for economic development and poverty alleviations. We need to take steps to enhance our trade by reducing and finally eliminating tariff and non-tariff barriers within the region. Expansion in trade will not only create direct economic benefits for entrepreneurs and traders but would create a trickle down effect on large segments of the population. Pakistan, therefore attaches great importance to the early implementation of ECOTA. Pakistan is also committed to the ECO vision of the free trade area by 2015. I hope that we will be able to realize the first tariff cuts under ECOTA this year.

ECOTA has been adopted by five out of ten ECO members. Pakistan would urge the other members to join ECOTA at the earliest. We believe that it would create enormous benefits by creating increased livelihood opportunities for a large segment of the population of the region and would strengthen our economic and trade relations.

Ladies & Gentlemen,

Pakistan is the coordinator for ECO technical assistance and capacity building initiatives. We have offered our services to the member states in enhancing their capacity on trade related issues. We look forward to work collaboratively with other members in identifying the capacity gaps, which we can supplement by sharing our knowledge and resources.

Pakistan, Iran and Turkey have already joined the ECO Re-insurance Company. We believe that this initiative will help the trade and industry in getting competitive and reliable risk coverage to facilitate their businesses. We urge the other member states to join this initiative also.

Smuggling and illicit movement of goods across ECO countries poses a direct threat to the economic stability and security of the region. We believe that there is a strong nexus between smuggling and terrorism. We, therefore, have to

address this issue not only to protect our domestic industry and revenues but also save the social fabric of our societies. Pakistan believes that ECO Smuggling and Customs Offenses Data Bank and ECO Agreement on Administrative Assistance in custom Matters are important initiatives in addressing these issues. Pakistan is committed to these initiatives and is taking necessary measures on these proposals.

Pakistan believes that ECO Trade and Development Bank can play an important role in supporting the private sector in enhancing trade and investment activities. The member states need to identify priority sectors where we can increase our focus by providing necessary support through the Bank. Pakistan would also like the ECO Trade and Development Bank to support venture capital for young entrepreneurs so that they can realize their ideas into full-fledged business ventures.

Ladies & Gentlemen,

Recently, Afghanistan and Pakistan signed the Afghanistan Pakistan Transit Trade Agreement (APTTA) providing transit rights to both countries through their respective territories. The Agreement is a comprehensive document which was finalized keeping in view the best international practices. I believe that this Agreement can serve as a template for other bilateral/regional transit trade agreements. I would, therefore, propose that the ECO members may consider joining APTTA. The Secretary, Ministry of Commerce, Government of Pakistan has already written to the ECO Secretary General in this regard.

With these words, I would end my speech and would again thank the Government of the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan, particularly H.E. President Hamid Karzai and H.E. Mr. Anwarul Haq Ahady for their hospitality and making this event a success.

Thank you Sir.