

Opening Statement

by

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at the

**Inaugural Session of
the 26th Meeting of
ECO Regional Planning Council**

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بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمَنِ الرَّحِيمِ

Excellencies,

Distinguished Heads of Delegation,

Honorable Secretary General,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

I am very pleased to have the opportunity to address the 26th Meeting of the Regional Planning Council of the Economic Cooperation Organization. At the outset and on behalf of the Government of the Islamic Republic of Iran, allow me to extend a very warm welcome to the distinguished delegates of the ECO Member States and wish you all a pleasant and memorable stay in Tehran. I would also like to extend my words of thanks to H.E. Mr. Halil Ibrahim Akcha, the honorable Secretary General of ECO and his entire team at the Secretariat for their diligence and coordination to make necessary preparations for holding the 26th Meeting of ECO Regional Planning Council.

Distinguished participants,

Over its history, the Economic Cooperation Organization has achieved many important milestones in its work for regional development through common efforts, building on the Member States' close cultural ties, shared historical past, and joint plans for the future. The idea of institutionalizing cooperation for regional development helps take a holistic look at the region, its resources and economy, business interests, and the potential for growing stronger together.

ECO Region enjoys immense potential to ensure successful regional cooperation and integration. All these need a new architecture for cooperation and the RPC can play a pivotal role in this regard. Regional Planning Council is an annual exercise that plays a crucial role in providing the high-ranking officials of the Member States with solid basis for important decisions. Needless to say, the ultimate goal is to increase the overall efficiency as well as the consistency of the Organization and its components. I trust the 26th RPC Meeting in Tehran, once again, would serve this purpose.

Excellencies,

Distinguished delegates,

ECO is now a region representing a combined population of over 440 million people that has undertaken the necessary steps toward socio-economic development of its Member States and has helped in achieving prosperity for its peoples and steady improvement in their lives. More than two decades of expanded cooperation has developed a new pattern of regional cooperation which has yielded notable achievements in a wide range of areas covering trade, energy, transport and transit, agriculture, industry, environment, human development, education, and culture. We must build upon these achievements and intensify our efforts to further attain the common goals. We should work together to strengthen the solidarity among ECO Member States, promote the visibility of the Organization within and beyond the region, and enhance the efficiency and viability of the decisions and joint plans of the Organization.

Distinguished guests,

ECO Member States need to identify their priorities and hence, national and regional resources should be mobilized in order to lead the

region towards the priority fields. To materialize the region's priorities, implementation of major regional agreements such as ECO Trade Agreement (ECOTA), Transit Transport Framework Agreement (TTFA), and Agreement on Visa Simplification has to be focused through concerted efforts of the Member States. Likewise, high priority should be given to enhancing intra-regional trade to ensure greater integration of ECO Member States into the global economy. In addition, high priority should also be attached to expanding cooperation in the energy sector, including renewables and energy efficiency, for harnessing the regional potential in sustainable energy solutions.

On the other hand, the importance of employing science and technology, alongside education at all levels need to be underlined for sustained economic growth, sustainable development and broader goal of our peoples' prosperity through regional cooperation. Science and technology priorities at national and regional levels should be identified and a meaningful linkage between science and innovation need to be made. Partnership and cooperation between ECO Member States and advanced countries need to be established and strengthened in scientific and technological fields in order to maintain sustainable economic growth. In this respect, technology transfer in the relevant fields will be a positive factor in promoting interregional relations and elevating ECO's stance at the international level.

Ladies and gentlemen,

As you are aware, the Organization is now conducting a reform process built on the experiences of the last two decades. We acknowledge the efforts made so far in this connection and urge the membership to expedite deliberations on the reform process, with a view to bring matters under discussion to a fruitful conclusion at the earliest. In this context, the Regional Planning Council is expected to help reform process through

developing a reform-friendly annual program for the Organization. The RPC's contribution should entail more focused and result-oriented annual program, elevating the ECO profile from within and outside the Region perspectives.

Distinguished delegates,

As we are approaching the end of the current ECO Vision 2015, there is a need to assess the implementation of the Vision and to determine the extent to which the targets set forth in the Vision have been achieved in various sectors. It is equally important to analyze the reasons that have impeded the implementation of the goals and objectives set in the ECO Vision 2015. Furthermore, there is a need to conclude consultations for setting the strategic direction of the Organization for the coming decade, namely a new "ECO Vision 2016-2025". In this framework, the Secretariat has prepared a draft document on "ECO Vision 2025" and shared with the Member States text of this draft, inviting the membership to reflect upon and contribute to the substance of this document. The "ECO Vision 2025" will be the main agenda of the Organization in the decade to come. My country has shared its preliminary views on this Vision with the membership and stands ready to engage in serious discussions to define the common goals and objectives in ECO Vision 2025. Once established, we commit ourselves to the realization of the objectives set forth in this Vision. We also believe that setting follow-up and review mechanisms for the ECO Vision 2025 will be necessary to ensure continued relevance and effective implementation of the strategies contained in the Vision. I realize a Brainstorming Session has been scheduled on the sidelines of the current RPC Meeting to work out the structure of the new Vision for the upcoming years, bearing in mind the results of the ECO Vision 2015, and I wish you all success in your deliberations on this topic.

Excellencies,

Ladies and gentlemen,

In conclusion, I would like to reiterate that the Islamic Republic of Iran has always been following an "ECO advocacy" policy which will continue to be our priority in the regional policy in the years to come. This unwavering support stems from our firm belief that ECO and its goals provide a unique opportunity for the individual Member States and for the region as a whole to address potential challenges ahead and to foster the collective development strategies.

This policy has been translated into action through Iran's contributions to the work of the Organization in more than two decades. A review of the ECO activities in the past years and decades shows the scale of Iran's commitment to the overall work of the Organization. We will continue to provide the support and assistance in various sectors of the Organization, looking forward to a stronger and more enhanced cooperation within the ECO framework.

I thank you for your kind attention.