

In the Name of the Almighty

The 18th Meeting of the Council of Ministers

(Tehran, 9th March, 2009)

Statement by His Excellency Mr. Manouchehr Mottaki,
the Foreign Minister of the Islamic Republic of Iran

**Excellencies;
Honorable Ministers
Distinguished Guests**

I extend a warm welcome to all esteemed colleagues in this council of ministers. As the host of this council, I am very delighted that a suitable ground has been developed to discuss the most important issues in regional cooperation and to exchange views on common interests of the Member States. I hope, through strong presence of the honorable ministers and representatives from Member States, the council will open up new horizons for expanding varied forms of cooperation and increasing organizational understanding so that, by active and serious participation of the esteemed delegations, we could adopt and implement key decisions on realizing ECO goals and objectives.

This meeting is being organized while the critical region of the Middle East is undergoing major upheavals. Such upheavals, in some Member States like Afghanistan and some neighboring countries like Iraq and Palestine, could definitely have important impacts on the stability and security in our region. After several-year occupations of two important countries of the region, all colleagues would admit that sustaining occupation policy and transregional interventions have proved to be futile and stability and security of countries will not happen but through establishing a democratic government supported by national power and domestic elites. I hope this could be achieved by full reference to public votes and establishment of national entities so that these cherished nations of the Islamic world could experience peace and tranquility. Unfortunately continuing suppression policy by the occupying Zionist regime in Palestine and intensifying unprecedented aggressions and violence against Palestinians have begun a new phase of instability in the region. In the meantime, the Zionist Regime has obviously failed to impose expansionary policies and defeat the Palestine democratic government in Gaza, despite the recent aggression, imposing continuous sanctions and economic pressure, and now it's known now that unfair and inhuman policies will fail when confronting with resistance and bravery shown by nations. Emergence and appearance of resistance as a phenomenon and its astonishing impacts on repelling antidemocratic have been so broadly based that the supporters of these regimes have been made to revise their unlimited support from the Zionist Regime's crimes. It's undeniable that expansionary and one-sided policies, adopted by transregional powers, have constantly tried to hinder reaching understanding and stability at micro and macro levels. Therefore, independent states would vitally require constructive interaction and mechanism to harmonize their positions and regional activities so that under the auspices of such organizational cooperation they could resolve problems arisen from egocentric policies. The world and our region are undergoing a change whose consequences ??????. [The Farsi sentence is

meaningless]. In addition, since there's a possibility to turn global financial crisis to opportunity for ECO Region, it is necessary to hold continual contact and consultations among member states more than ever.

Distinguished Participants
Ladies and Gentlemen:

Coordinated efforts by the countries of the region within the framework of Economic Cooperation Organization, in addition to having positive and effective impacts in political arena, have contributed to improvement of welfare and development of Member States through expanding cooperation and economic growth. At the same time, we could learn from valuable historical experiences that sharing capacities and capabilities of our countries in form of regional cooperation, while facilitating our job to access economic variables and determinants, could boost our bargaining and competition power in order to progressively increase our share in world economy. In this direction, ECO, thanks to its prime geostrategic features, abundant natural resources and efficient manpower, is a fruitful and favorable option that has the potential to reach its real and decent position in the global and regional economic arena. Although ECO rather young, considering its year of establishment, in practice it has proved that, through strong political will shown by the heads of its Member States, principle of integration and regional cooperation are being strengthened and all member states have reached consensus to bring it to completion and development. So far a number of important agreements and documents in various areas have been concluded and implemented, having prepared the practical ground for adopted projects in Member States. Important understandings have been reached in various areas of cooperation especially such as Transit Transport Framework Agreement, Agreement on Simplification of Visa Procedures for Businessmen, Investment Promotion Agreement, establishing ECO Trade and Development Bank, ECO Reinsurance Company. Also cooperation documents on agriculture, industry, environment and infrastructural communication have prepared the required grounds for expanding cooperation among the Member States. Drawing up ECO 2015 Vision has clearly drawn the map of our direction toward future.

Distinguished Colleagues, Honorable Delegates

In recent years, we have been witnessing major success and advances in priority areas of cooperation in ECO. Successful organization of the 7th Ministerial Meeting of Transport in Antalya and the adopted decisions concentrating on developing transit communication among member states are among these positive events. In addition to organizing specialized working group meetings in transport sector, ECO has reached valuable outcomes in formulating rules and regulations governing its areas of cooperation. There also have been positive initiatives conducted to eliminate barrier to implement Almaty - Istanbul railway project and its linkage to the cross point of China. We hope to shortly witness the outcomes of the above agreements and eventually the facilitation in communication among our countries through providing required funds for the projects.

Ratification of ECO Trade Agreement by the Islamic Consultative Assembly and having its documents deposited by the Islamic Republic of Iran were important

measures conducted last summer. Fortunately the quorum of signatory states to ECOTA has reached and it was taken into effect and implemented. We hope that, through finalizing the implementation of the agreement and conducting technical and specialized measures by the relevant authorities of the Member States, we will witness development of intraregional trade in near future. Successful organization of the 3rd Ministerial Meeting of Finance and Economy (Tehran, 23 December 2008) and hosting the 1st Meeting of Heads of Trade Promotion Organizations by the Islamic Republic of Iran on 19 January 2009 were among promising gestures which led to adoption of important decisions affected by the consensus of the member states.

Major developments have also been taken place in tourism sector among which the most important one is successful organization of the 1st Ministerial Meeting of Tourism (Tehran 20 October, 2008). Substantive decisions were taken, through cooperation of Minister, to promote cooperation on tourism among Member States, establish Tourism Development Fund and paving the way for having the maximum share in the tourism market.

Successful organization of the 4th Ministerial Meeting of Agriculture (Baku 9 September, 2008), realizing ideas of ECO-FAO cooperation on enhancing production and supply for seed in the region are harbingers of strengthening Regional Biotechnology Network, and we hope the outcomes of such important activities could be achieved by trilateral cooperation among ECO – FAO – IDB. Cooperation in other specialized areas of the Organization such as industry and standardization, human resource, border and customs, fight against illicit drug trafficking maintains a progressive trend. The Regional Cooperation Strategy on Fight against Drug Trafficking and Organized Crimes, adopted by the 2nd Meeting of the Interior Ministers in Ashgabat June 2009, and institutionalizing cooperation within the framework of the decisions by the 1st Meeting of the Heads of the Blood Transfusion Organizations of ECO Member States in Tehran, February 2008 are among these achievements.

In energy sector, which is among ECO's high priorities, huge capabilities and potentials of the region heighten expectations for a big leap forward. Since a rich energy zone, known as Oval of Energy, is situated at north and south of ECO region, the ground for cooperation is prepared, and experts and officers are expected to fulfill these expectations by studying, analyzing and submitting the document of guidelines for energy cooperation to the 2nd Ministerial Meeting of Energy and Petroleum in Tajikistan, making considerable efforts to boost activities in this sector.

Honorable Ministers

We all believe that growth and prosperity of an organization depends on strengthening motivations among its Member States and eliminating shortcomings and barriers of cooperation. Considering status of our region, all achievements in various fields of cooperation are appreciable and valuable; however, reaching the final destination requires more diligence and effort in order to optimally utilize the existing capabilities and practically implement adopted projects whose valuable outcomes will benefit and encourage our nations. Eco Member States could have more effective roles in this field through timely fulfilling their commitments, organizational duties and more active participation in ECO activities and events. It's appropriate if

arrangements could be made to identify problems, causing lack of active function of some fields of cooperation, and to resolve them accordingly. In order to eliminate such shortcomings, it could be effective to revise regulations and operational mechanisms of the Organization and to make some fundamental changes in the process of decision making and implementation. For the majority of the cases, lack of financing is the major obstacle which leaves decisions suspended, therefore, it is recommended that required mechanism could be predicted to absorb funding. Efficiency will be achieved when all areas experience growth at the same time and when Member States pursue the implementation of projects and initiatives enthusiastically.

**Distinguished Colleagues
Ladies and Gentlemen**

The Islamic Republic of Iran, as usual, is willing to improve its capabilities and facilities for economic development and growth and expanding political and cultural interactions within ECO Organization and its sub-sectors and as a founding member, while welcoming accession of its brotherly and friendly country, i.e. Iraq, to this organization, once again embrace developing cooperation with China and Russian Federation.

We as the host of the ECO Secretariat, attach great priority to cooperation within ECO framework, and announce our readiness to devote our sources and facilities to contribute to development and prosperity in the region as we did in the past.

In conclusion, I hope that the discussions and deliberations of this meeting along with the constructive decisions could bring economic growth and flourishing for our region. While expressing thanks to all delegations, I wish you a pleasant stay in Tehran.

I thank you, Sir