

Key-Note Address
By
H.E. Mr. Hamid Karzai,
President of the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan
(Herat, Afghanistan)

No. 17th COM/2007

In the Name of Allah, the Most Gracious, the Most Merciful

His Excellency Secretary General,
Excellencies Heads of Delegations,
Ladies and Gentlemen:

On behalf of the people of Afghanistan, I welcome your arrival to this ancient city and I hope that the 17th meeting of the Council of Ministers of Economic Cooperation Organization will register a turning-point and a new chapter in the history of cooperation and togetherness among our peoples and countries.

Participation of dear guests belonging to countries enjoying common religion and culture in this ancient city has special and unique historical significance. In the history of our region, Herat has been one of the main centers and bedrock of our proud civilization. Herat, Balkh, Toos, Samarkand, Bukhara, Marv, Ganja, Konya and other cities of this region are considered symbols of a common identity. Great scholars from Islamic countries used to come to Herat to acquire the then contemporary knowledge; and eminent intellectuals like Behzad, Mir Ali, Jami, Amir Ali Shir Nawayee, Taftazani and countless others, emerging from this area, introduced the Islamic oriental art and knowledge to the world. We are inheritors of a great civilization and we ought to build jointly our present and future on the basis of this civilization.

Ladies, Gentlemen and Distinguished Guests:

I believe possessing a proud history and past is not sufficient. Our vision should focus on the future. While, in this age of globalization, different parts of the world are coming together to actively cooperate in economics, culture and politics; we, on the other hand, with all the common history and culture, unfortunately lack the necessary cooperation and closeness in economics, knowledge and culture.

For instance, in some countries, our new generation has no adequate access to the contemporary knowledge and our contribution in the discoveries and achievements of the modern technology is negligible. We can prevail over these shortcomings through cooperation and collaboration. We can open our cultural and scientific institutions for each other and utilize the existing resources for the greater benefit of our people. Our youth should have access to schools and universities and our people should enjoy the blessing of literacy and knowledge. The absolute majority of our population is comprised of young people and the future of our region will be guaranteed by their able hands. We can develop into

prosperous societies and welfare states only in the shadows of knowledge and science.

We own blessed lands. We enjoy plenty of natural resources and active human force. Our people are yearning for development, welfare and progress. I believe that our governments and statesmen have a great responsibility. We can only prevail over the existing difficulties through cooperation, unity on the basis of mutual respect and collaboration of our resources. Fighting poverty, illiteracy and overcoming the under-development problem are not issues that could be tackled alone or through refraining from cooperation. In this great region, we should cooperate more than ever with each other. The Economic Cooperation Organization is one of those effective institutions that can transform our wishes of cooperation among our countries, owing to its objectives and programs, into reality.

Construction and expansion of roads and railway tracks, improvement of transit facilities, reduction of bureaucracy and custom obstacles, provision of facilities of ports and many other areas, which unfortunately have not been utilized the way they should, are opportunities and resources that can, on one hand, bring us together and, on the other, help us prevail over our problems.

Afghanistan is the bridge between Central Asia, East and Southeast Asia and the Middle East. Our membership in the regional cooperation organizations like SAARC, CAREC and others, is a good opportunity for the countries of the region to expand and increase their cooperation.

Strengthening the regional cooperation is one of the priorities of our foreign policy. Most of the Ring Roads in Afghanistan have been built and feasibility studies for constructing railway tracks are underway. Linking Afghanistan with Iran through the railway track between Herat and Sangan with the assistance of the Islamic Republic of Iran is in progress. Likewise, projects for transmitting the Central Asian power to Pakistan through Afghanistan are underway. Projects to interconnect our power systems with the power grids of our neighboring countries of Tajikistan, Uzbekistan and Turkmenistan are being implemented or they are in the launching phase. The volume of trade and investment of the ECO countries in Afghanistan has reached the mark of four billion dollars. We ought to pay attention to these economic realities and cooperation prospects as factual opportunities.

Ladies and Gentlemen:

Our region and the world at large are facing problems that can only be resolved by regional and international cooperation and collaboration. Terrorism, narcotics, environmental issues, organized crimes, economic backwardness and poverty are some of these challenges. The combination of all these challenges is

considered the main impediment in the way of expansion of the regional cooperation.

It is almost three decades that Afghanistan has been a victim of aggression, violence and terrorism. Terrorists are abusing the religion of Islam, which is actually the religion of peace, harmony and brotherhood. As Muslims and advocates of coexistence of cultures and different civilizations, we are bound to portray the true picture of Islam to the world. However, this will not be possible unless we isolate the terrorist minority wherever they are and launch a coordinated fight against this phenomenon. It is clear that we cannot achieve development and economic welfare without realizing individual and social security. Political stability and economic security are the prerequisite for regional development. Insecurity in one country will lead, inevitably, to instability and insecurity in the region and one of the most effective ways to prevail over causes of insecurity is establishment of strong economic linkages. Regional economic integration will lead to strengthening the solidarity among the countries and direct acceptance of responsibility for each other. Therefore, it is imperative that we improve our relations in every economic aspect in such a manner that we would be able to repulse/repair every dent or damage in our economic cooperation together.

The successful world experiences, particularly the European Union, manifest that everybody has started with small steps. As I stated earlier, our region is one of the richest regions of the world in terms of strategic raw materials. On the other hand, East and Southeast Asian regions, where approximately half of the world population lives, enjoy the fastest rate of economic growth in our present world. Due to ever-increasing consumption and production levels, the regional demand for strategic raw materials and access to economic markets is also increasing.

In fact, the 21st century is the century of continent of Asia. In this century, the role of this continent in the trend of globalization will increase further. To direct and organize the participation of our people in order to better utilize the achievement of the globalization trend and, also, improve the status of our countries from being the subject of this trend to being one of its players, we need to turn the regional cooperation step by step to further economic, transit and trade integration.

Excellencies, Distinguished Guests, Ladies and Gentlemen:

We are ready to give full access to our economic and transit resources to ECO member states. Afghanistan provides the best legal prerequisites for investment and use of transit and trade facilities for its friends. I hope the geographical location and the available opportune investment prospects in our country are considered good opportunities to increase the level of investment in Afghanistan. We sincerely invite our brothers and sisters in ECO countries to participate in the good opportunities that we possess.

At the end, I hope all the success for the 17th meeting of Council of Ministers of ECO at Herat. I wish you all a pleasant stay and fruitful work/deliberations.