

Message of
H.E. Prof. Ekmeleddin Ihsanoglu, Secretary General of OIC
(Herat, Afghanistan – 20 October 2007)

**MESSAGE OF H.E. PROF. EKMELEDDIN IHSANOGLU, SECRETARY
GENERAL OF THE ORGANIZATION OF THE ISLAMIC CONFERENCE
AT THE 17th MEETING OF THE COUNCIL OF MINISTERS OF FOREIGN
AFFAIRS OF THE ECONOMIC COOPERATION ORGANIZATION**
Herat, Islamic Republic of Afghanistan, 16-20 October 2007

Bismillahi Arrahmani Arrahim In the Name of Allah, Most Compassionate, Most Merciful

Mr. Chairman,

Excellencies, Distinguished Delegates~ Ladies and Gentlemen,

Assalamu Aleykum Wa Rahmatullahi Wa Barakatuh.

I would like to extend my sincere thanks and gratitude to His Excellency Dr. Rangin Dadfar Spanta, Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan, for graciously inviting me to take part in the 17th Meeting of the Council of Ministers of Foreign Affairs of the Economic Cooperation Organization (ECO).

I would also like to extend my greetings to the Governments of ECO Member States.

I regret the fact that, due to very important previous commitments, I will not be able to personally participate in the work of this important Council and that my message will be delivered by Mr. Tori Limangana, Assistant Secretary General for Economic Affairs of the OIC.

I would also like to congratulate the Government of the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan for hosting the 17th Meeting of the Council of Ministers of Foreign Affairs of the ECO in the beautiful and historic city of Herat.

Holding this Session in Herat is an eloquent testimony of the important role that Afghanistan plays on the international scene as an emerging country and of its support for international cooperation.

The Islamic world abounds with human and material resources and, at the same time, it is a huge market. This makes it rich in economic opportunities of all kinds and vast space for joint economic cooperation. Despite these potentials, the

Muslim world is still facing many challenges. The most important of which is to alleviate poverty and ensure sustainable development of the Muslim world.

The OIC Third Extraordinary Summit Conference held in Makkah Al Mukarramah in December 2005, has adopted the historical Makkah Declaration and the OIC Ten-Year Programme of Action with a view of preparing the Muslim Ummah to face the challenges of the 21st century.

As you know, the first and most important pillar for the development of OIC Member States is the expansion of Intra-OIC trade.

The "OIC Ten-Year Programme of Action to meet the challenges facing the Islamic Ummah in the 21st Century" has set two main objectives in the trade field to enhance the share of intra-OIC trade in the overall trade from 14% to 20% by the year 2015, and to explore the possibility of establishing an intra-OIC Free Trade Area.

Since the adoption of the OIC Ten-Year Programme of Action, the COMCEC, under the chairmanship of the Republic of Turkey, the OIC General Secretariat and its institutions are working tirelessly to achieve the rapid expansion of intra-OIC Trade.

As you know, the Trade negotiations which started in 2004 under the Trade Preferential System among the OIC Countries (TPSOIC) have been considered as an important instrument to achieve the intra-OIC trade goal of 20%. The First Round of negotiations has produced the Protocol on Preferential Tariff Scheme for TPSOIC (PRETAS), a trade agreement with specific targets and a timetable for tariff reductions. The Second Round hosted also by the Government of Turkey, was launched on November 24th 2006. The Fourth (last) Meeting of the Second Round of Trade Negotiating Committee of the Member States was successfully held in Ankara, Republic of Turkey, from 10 to 12 September 2007. The Meeting adopted an Agreement on TPS- OIC Rules of Origin which was signed by 5 Member States namely, Guinea, Jordan, Tunisia, Turkey and United Arab Emirates.

Other important measures which will contribute to the expansion of intra-OIC Trade are enhancing production capacity and competitiveness of member countries as well as trade facilitation, improvement of investment climate in Member Countries and promotion of joint ventures. The 34th ICFM which took place in Islamabad, Islamic Republic of Pakistan, on 15-17 May 2007, welcomed the efforts undertaken by the COMCEC for the establishment of the Trade Preferential System among the member states of OIC (TPS-OIC) as of January 1st, 2009, as a very concrete and important step for the liberalization of trade among the OIC member countries as well as the ultimate goal of the Islamic Common Market.

The Makkah Summit has underlined the pivotal role of the private sector in the development of economic and commercial cooperation among Member States. The strengthening of relations between Muslim businessmen will contribute to the development of member states to invest in OIC Member States and to develop partnership relations with their counterparts in OIC Member States. We have also to develop tourism exchange between OIC Member States and Muslim communities in non- Muslim countries.

As I have already indicated, tourism is a factor in economic development that has become an equally important factor in bringing people closer. Therefore, tourism sector is considered by a number of arc Member States as one of the most important pillar of their economy, which generates foreign currency and job opportunities, develops the private sector, especially as it is closely linked with other economic sectors, such as transport and handicraft. Besides, tourism attracts important investments in infrastructure and historical and cultural sites as well as recreation places. Given their rich and diverse natural geographical, historical and cultural heritage assets, the OIC Member States have, in fact, a vast potential for the development of a sustainable tourism sector.

I would like to ensure you that the OIC General Secretariat will spare no effort to develop relations with the ECO to achieve development on the above mentioned economic fields. We will continue to work closely with the ECO to achieve also the noble goals of our two organizations and to strengthen the Islamic solidarity and ensure the welfare of all our member countries.

I thank you all for attention and wish you total success in your deliberations.

Wassalamu Alaikum Warahmatullah Wabarakatuh.