

**Report on
ECO Secretary General's Visit to New York to participate in the 65th Session of the
United Nations General Assembly, the 17th Informal Meeting of the COM, and Bilateral
Meetings on the sidelines**

(23-28 September, 2010)

In accordance with the ECO's approved Calendar of Events (CoE) for the year 2010-2011, the Secretary General visited New York from 23rd to 28th September 2010 to participate in the 65th Session of the United Nations General Assembly and the 17th informal meeting of the ECO Council of Ministers. During his visit, the Secretary General also held bilateral meeting with the UN Under-Secretary General/High Representative for LDCs, LLDCs and SIDCs to discuss matters of mutual interest.

Participation in the 65th UN General Assembly Session:

2. The Secretary General represented ECO as observer Organization to the United Nations at its 65th Session of the General Assembly.

The 17th Informal Meeting of the COM:

3. The 17th informal meeting of the ECO Council of Ministers (CoM) was held on 27th September over a working lunch arranged by the Permanent Mission of Iran to the United Nations at the United Nations Building. H.E. Mr. Manouchehr Mottaki, the Foreign Minister of Iran, chaired the event in his capacity as the current Chairman of the ECO CoM.

4. The meeting was attended by six ECO member states; five at the Ministerial level – Afghanistan, Iran, Pakistan, Tajikistan and Turkey and one at Ambassadorial level from Turkmenistan.

5. The draft Agenda of the meeting prepared by the Secretariat and endorsed at the 162nd meeting of the ECO Council of Permanent Representatives (15th Sep, 2010-Tehran) was adopted unanimously without any amendment. A copy of the Agenda is placed at **Annex-I**.

6. The Chairman inaugurated the meeting extending warm welcome to the distinguished Foreign Ministers/Representatives. Thereafter he made his opening statement. At the outset, he stated that over the past year the world has witnessed some extraordinary events which influenced many countries both individually and collectively and expected coordinated action. He added that Muslims had a responsibility to pay special attention to news regarding plans of desecration of Holy Quran, Zionists attack on the flotilla carrying the relief goods to the victims in Gaza and the devastation caused by floods in Pakistan. He expressed gratitude to Turkey on sending relief assistance to Gaza and also on its response to the attacks on flotilla carrying humanitarian aide.

7. While referring to the devastation caused by floods in Pakistan, he expressed sorrow and grief over the loss of human life and infrastructure in Pakistan and appreciated the timely steps taken by the ECO Council of Permanent Representatives (Extraordinary Session) to authorize US 200,000/- from its Feasibility and General Purposes Fund (FGPF), agree on sending 5 truck from each member states carrying relief goods and to dispatch an ECO

delegation comprising the Secretary General and a representative of Iran to show solidarity with the people and the Government of Pakistan. The Iranian Foreign Minister mentioned that Iran has sent tons of humanitarian assistance along with the medical teams to Pakistan in the aftermath of the floods. The Supreme Leader of Iran in his address at the Eid-ul-Fitr congregation termed the flood situation in Pakistan the most urgent problem of Islamic world and made a call for assistance. The Foreign Minister added that Iran would continue to extend assistance in this regard.

8. Referring to the crisis situation in Kyrgyzstan, he appreciated the approval of US \$ 100,000/- by the ECO CPR and its decision to send a Mission to show solidarity. He said that Iran would provide further assistance, if required, and would welcome any further initiative of the ECO CPR in this regard.

9. Commenting on the progress of the Organization, the Iranian Foreign Minister further stated that ECO has taken some important decisions at the 10th ECO Summit and 18th COM held in March 2009 in Tehran. Some of those decisions have been implemented through cooperation but some needs further action and follow-up by all the member states. Each member state must attach highest priority to the decisions of the Organization to carry forward its Agenda and to benefit from the vast potential of the Region. He expressed that Transport and Transit were the priority areas envisioned in the ECO Vision 2015. He requested the Secretary General to make efforts for full scale implementation of such agreement as Transport Transit Framework Agreement (TTFA). He termed ECO Truck Caravan and the launch of regular train service as important initiatives and hoped to see further progress in this sector. He also urged the Secretary General to enhance the role of ECO Trade and Development Bank and to step-up its role to that of a major financial institution in the region.

10. The Chairman expressed that cooperation with UN system, and regional/international organizations constitutes a priority for ECO. The Regional organizations have a key role to play in World Affairs. With the establishment of ECO Contact Groups, ECO would register further progress in achieving its goals. He requested the Secretary General to make efforts to attract financial assistance from international agencies for the national projects having regional impact in the ECO Region. He also appreciated Turkey's offer to host the next ECO Summit and the COM meeting in Istanbul.

11. Subsequent to his statement, the Chairman, invited the Secretary General to deliver his report/statement.

12. In his statement, the Secretary General gave an overview of the activities of the Organization focussing primarily on the period from Oct, 2009 to Sep, 2010 and highlighted developments in different areas of its activities as well as the status of future programmes and projects. He also briefed the Council on the steps taken by the ECO CPR to help Pakistan in its relief and rehabilitation efforts in the wake of recent floods.

13. On Trade, it was informed that some notable progress has recently been made in implementation of tariff concessions under ECOTA. Pakistan and Turkey have announced to offer ECOTA tariff concessions bilaterally. Afghanistan has also submitted its Positive, Negative and Sensitive lists. The Secretary General expressed hope that Iran and Tajikistan would soon catch up and offer trade concessions. He stated that implementation of ECOTA would take the region closer to its cherished goal of establishing a Free Trade Area as envisaged in the ECO Vision 2015. He requested the member states which have not yet

signed and/or ratified this Agreement, to join it on priority basis. He urged a similar action on other important agreements and institutional arrangements like Revised Protocol to the Agreement on Simplification of Visa Procedures for Businessmen and Transit Drivers, Customs cooperation, Investment Promotion, ECO Trade & Development Bank and ECO Reinsurance Company.

14. The CoM was informed that in the Transport sector, the regular operation of the ECO Container Train on Islamabad-Tehran-Istanbul route has begun on schedule. Concrete measures were being followed to streamline the operation of the ECO container trains from Almaty to Bandar Abbas and from Almaty to Istanbul. A Feasibility Study was under way to identify and remove all impediments in the way of regular services of these trains by the late 2010. In Road Transport sector, the ECO Demonstration Truck Caravan has been launched on 23rd September 2010.

15. In the Energy sector, the 2nd Ministerial Meeting on Energy/Petroleum will be held from 29 September – 1 October this year in Dushanbe to review the Plan of Action for Energy/Petroleum Cooperation. Furthermore, to carry cooperation in this sector forward, the Secretariat has prepared a project proposal on ECO Regional Energy Trade arrangements and submitted it to the IDB for financial assistance.

16. The Secretary General briefed that Republic of Turkey was elected by the 20th RPC Meeting as the Coordinating Country for the implementation of the ECO-Regional Programme for Food Security (RPFSS). He added that the implementation of the RPFSS especially in seed sector and in national projects has gained considerable momentum. ECO was working with FAO on a Broad Technical Assistance Project for the whole programme for submission to World Bank Global Agriculture and Food Security Programme (GAFSP).

17. The CoM was informed about the progress in cooperation in the Health sector. It was mentioned that the 1st ECO Health Ministers Meeting held in Baku, Azerbaijan last February has specified ways for achieving joint cooperation in the health sector, particularly in the fields of health related Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), Blood Transfusion and Pharmaceutical affairs.

18. While referring to the progress in the Drugs Control, the Secretary General stated the ECO-EU project on “Combating Illicit Drug Trafficking to/from Afghanistan” is being implemented. On Afghanistan, he mentioned that in recognition of the growing role of ECO, the Secretariat was invited to the International Conference on Afghanistan in Kabul held in July this year preceded by a Meeting of the Regional Bodies. The Meeting of the Regional Bodies decided to establish a high-level Core Group of Regional Forum Secretaries General to better coordinate their activities in Afghanistan. The Secretariat would play an active role in that Core Group.

19. The CoM was briefed that development and promotion of mutually beneficial relations with relevant International partners is fundamental to ECO’s approach to achieve its goals and objectives. In the sphere of external relations, continued efforts aimed at enhancing ECO’s stature, increasing its standing and expanding its presence has been made. ECO’s relations with the United Nations, its Specialized Agencies and relevant Regional/International Bodies have been growing. The United Nations General Assembly would be adopting a biennial resolution this year on ECO-UN cooperation. The establishment of the Contact Groups of ECO Ambassadors at important World Capitals would help enhance

further the image of the Organization, forge sustainable and long-lasting relations with UN Agencies and other relevant Regional Organizations to the mutual advantage.

20. The Secretary General also highlighted that the graph of ECO's progress was uneven in the different sectors of its activities. In areas such as Trade and Transport there was need to accelerate efforts, especially in fully implementing such vital agreements as ECOTA and TTFA. In others like Energy etc, efforts must be redoubled to add substance to cooperation and set clear benchmarks for assessing performance. He also observed that it was unfortunate that one of ECO's esteemed members, Uzbekistan, has not cleared its financial arrears for the past many years causing great strain on the modest budget of the Organization. Despite repeated attempts to raise the issue with relevant high officials, the matter has not been given any favourable consideration and acknowledgement. In order to let the Organization perform its functions without any difficulties, it is paramount that financial commitments be fulfilled in timely manner. He requested the meeting to urge the concerned member state to meet its financial obligations.

21. In concluding, the Secretary General stressed the need to make ECO more active, more focussed and better equipped to tackle the challenges before it. He also emphasized the significance of greater political support and increased participation by the esteemed membership. Copy of the Statement made by the Secretary General is placed at **Annex-II**.

22. The Foreign Minister of Pakistan, in his remarks, congratulated the Secretary General on presenting a comprehensive report on ECO's activities and for raising pertinent points therein. He expressed his gratitude to the Secretariat for showing solidarity with the flood-victims in Pakistan and also for providing assistance to needy victims. With reference to the scale of devastation wrought by the natural calamity, he termed the damage as unprecedented in the history of the country. He informed that around 20 million people have been affected and 8 million have been displaced internally. With the support of international community and prayers of its friends, Pakistan would overcome the challenge of achieving rehabilitation soon. In this regard, he informed about his forthcoming visit to Brussels to participate in a high-level meeting with international partners to deliberate on reconstruction/rehabilitation phase. He also thanked his Turkish counterpart for sending an experienced Turkish diplomat to Pakistan to coordinate UN assistance.

23. The Foreign Minister termed establishment of ECO Contact Groups at important World capitals as a welcome step and expressed his support to its proposed activities. He suggested that among other issues, cooperation in 'Climate/Environment Change' may also be discussed in such forums. He emphasised the need to accelerate progress on ECOTA and TTFA. He added that implementation of these agreement would serve as a catalyst for prosperity and deepening of cooperation in the region. He also underscored the importance of early establishment of ECO Science Foundation. He informed the Council that the Representative office of the ECO TDB has commenced its operations in Karachi. He also appreciated the launch of ECO Silk Road Truck Caravan and the container-train service on Islamabad-Tehran-Istanbul route. While commenting on importance of cooperation in the Energy sector, he stated that Pakistan was facing worst energy crisis. He referred to the progress on an Energy cooperation agreement between Pakistan and Iran which he stated would help overcome the energy deficit.

24. The Foreign Minister of Pakistan further stated that cooperation in the Drug Trafficking and related issues would benefit all the ECO member states. On reconstruction efforts in Afghanistan, he informed that Pakistan has pledged and contributed to the ECO

Reconstruction Fund for Afghanistan. He added that reconstruction efforts would undoubtedly contribute to promoting peace and stability in the region. He termed cooperation in the health sector important to achieving Millennium Development Goals (MDGs).

25. The Turkish Foreign Minister at the outset thanked the Iranian foreign Minister for hosting the meeting and expressed appreciation on the comprehensive report of the Secretary General on ECO's activities.

26. With reference to the relief efforts in Pakistan, the Turkish Foreign Minister underscored the need for ECO to show solidarity with Pakistan. He termed the recent floods in Pakistan one of the worst tragedies in the recent history. He informed that United Nations Secretary General has appointed Ambassador of Turkey as Special Envoy to Pakistan to help in coordinating the relief assistance to Pakistan. Turkey was proud to serve the brotherly country of Pakistan. He stated that "Serving Pakistan is like serving Turkey". He also sought support of all ECO member states for the Turkish Special Envoy to Pakistan.

27. The Turkish Foreign Minister expressed that ECO enjoyed central position as a link between Euro-Asia and many other significant regions of the world. It holds the potential to change the strategic balance in the world. ECO needs concrete steps to realize its vision of achieving essential economic development and integration in the region. He underlined the need to undertake concert projects to realize ECO's goals and objectives. Appreciating the launching of container train service on Istanbul-Tehran-Islamabad route as a notable progress, he opined that the route can also be utilized by the countries outside the region as a safe corridor without any fear in context of piracy in Somalia. However to fully realize its potential, its frequency must be increased. The feasibility of this train depends on enhancing trade in the region. On trade we need to expedite progress on implementing preferential trade system, on trade liberalization and establishing free trade area. He hoped that the member states especially Iran would take concrete steps to implement ECOTA. He added that with the establishment of Free Trade Area in the region, the transport sector would receive further boost and that the comparative advantages of the region in the transport sector would be utilized. He also expressed satisfaction on the functioning of the ECO Trade Development Bank.

28. He expressed support for the establishment of Contact Groups of ECO Ambassadors and stressed the need of sending proper instructions by the political leaders to make them efficient. He appreciated the member countries for electing Turkey as coordinating country for implementation of ECO Regional Food Security Programme at 20th RPC. Commenting on the situation in Kyrgyzstan, he stated that US Dollars 100,000/- allocated by the ECO CPR was a small amount. He stated that there was need to work together to help the country overcome its problems. He also informed about his upcoming visit to Kyrgyz Republic to review the situation and sought advice from the Informal CoM. In response, the Foreign Minister of the Islamic Republic of Iran stated that he would be accompanying the ECO Secretary General to Kyrgyz Republic in the near future. The Turkish Foreign Minister in the end underscored the need to support ECO Secretariat and its programmes and projects.

29. Foreign Minister of Afghanistan commented that ECO has made noticeable progress in the recent past. He referred to the establishment of an ECO Cultural Centre and signing of an MOU between ECO and TIKA. He stated that the national economic plans must be linked with the regional economic plans. Pakistan, Turkey, India and Afghanistan have signed an agreement on energy. He also referred to the Transit Trade Agreement signed recently between Pakistan and Afghanistan. He informed about the upcoming RECCA meeting in

November in Turkey. He informed that a Centre for Regional Cooperation has been established in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Afghanistan to coordinate various regional cooperation initiatives. He also thanked the Secretary General for supporting establishment of a Core Group at the meeting of the regional bodies held on 19th July 2010 in Kabul. Afghanistan Foreign Minister supported establishment of ECO Contact Groups and conveyed approval for the draft resolution for the ECO-UN cooperation. He also expressed solidarity and sympathies with the people and Government of Pakistan and stated that Afghanistan has made a humble contribution in the relief efforts. He reaffirmed the continued support of Afghanistan to the Treaty of Izmir, ECO Vision and activities of the Organization.

30. The Foreign Minister of Tajikistan in his statement appreciated the progress highlighted by the Secretary General in his statement. He stated that ECO has an important role to play in the region. It holds the future of the region. He also underlined the need of enhancing transport and communications network and infrastructure in the region. He expressed that Tajikistan has surplus energy potential which could be exported to Pakistan and Afghanistan. While referring to an ECO transport project proposal for linking China, Kyrgyz Republic and Tajikistan to Bandare-abass, he termed it an important project and stressed the need to engage financial institutions like ADB and IDB, for feasibility and construction of this and other similar projects. He also stressed the need to enhance cooperation in the field of ecology-related issues and climate change. He concluded by stating that Tajikistan would actively participate in all ECO activities, initiative and projects.

31. After the exchange of views on Secretary General's statement and reviewing the progress made by the ECO, the CoM held discussion on the draft revised Terms of Reference of Contact Groups of Ambassadors of ECO member states. The meeting appreciated the initiative terming it an important step to achieve its goals and objectives. The CoM unanimously approved the draft revised Terms of Reference as endorsed by the ECO CPR at its 162nd meeting held on 15th Sep, 2010 in Tehran. The approved revised Terms of Reference are placed at **Annex-III**.

32. The draft Resolution on ECO-UN Cooperation was also discussed by the meeting. As regards to Para 17 of the draft Resolution related to establishment of a Regional Coordination Unit in Turkey to implement the ECO Regional Food Security Programme (RPFS) on which Iranian delegation has requested the Secretariat at the 162nd CPR (15th Sep, 2010-Tehran) to reformulate its wording, the Iranian Foreign Minister stated that his delegation would agree to the present formulation as was placed before the 162nd CPR provided that an agreement was reached at the informal CoM to establish ECO Veterinary Unit/Commission in Secretariat/Tehran. The meeting agreed to the proposal in principle and tasked the Secretariat to discuss and finalize the modalities at expert level consultations in this regard. Consequently, the CoM approved the draft text as endorsed by the 162nd CPR authorizing the Permanent Mission of Iran to table it before the United Nations General Assembly for adoption on behalf of the ECO. A copy of the draft Resolution as approved by the Informal CoM is placed at **Annex-IV**.

33. The Informal COM while appreciating the offer of Turkey to host the 11th ECO Summit and the 19th ECO COM meeting in Istanbul, approved the dates/venue proposed by Turkey.

34. At the end, the informal CoM adopted/approved the Communiqué/press release placed at **Annexure-V**.

Meeting with the UN Under-Secretary General/High Representative of LDCs, LLDCs and SIDCs:

35. In his meeting with H.E. Mr. Cheick Sidi Diarra, the Under-Secretary General of the UN and High Representative for LDCs, LLDCs and SIDCs, the Secretary General at the outset gave an overview of ECO's activities highlighting developments in key sectors of cooperation in particular Trade, Transport, Drugs Control, and Reconstruction of Afghanistan. He informed that the ECO Trade Agreement (ECOTA), is a flagship ECO agreement aimed at liberalization of trade in the region. Three of the ECO member states- Afghanistan, Pakistan and Turkey- have provided Negative, Sensitive and Positive lists as required under the ECOTA and soon the process of implementation of tariff concessions would commence. The ECOTA was a step towards establishing a Free Trade Area in ECO region by the year 2015. He mentioned that ECO was also helping its membership in their accession to the WTO.

36. The Secretary General informed that in partnership with UNIDO, ECO has successfully implemented 2 phases of a joint project for "Trade Capacity Building of the ECO Region." The third and final phase of the project would commence soon focusing on inter alia such areas as building Standardization, Metrology, Testing and Quality (SMTQ) infrastructure in the region. He further informed that to help the smaller economies of ECO, a special integrated market Plan has been developed for the relevant ECO member states.

37. The Secretary General mentioned that Transport assumed a significant importance in the ECO region due to its strategic significance of the Region as a link to various regions. Over the past year, ECO has made noticeable progress on its initiatives in Transport sector. The Secretary General referred to the launch of regular operation on Islamabad-Tehran-Istanbul container-train service and the inauguration of ECO Silk Truck Caravan organized in partnership with the International Road Transport Union (IRU) and ECO Trade and Development Bank (ECOTDB).

38. The UN Under-Secretary General was told that efforts were being made to expedite progress on operationalizing other routes such as Almaty-Bandar Abbas and Istanbul-Almaty. The Operationalization of road and rail links would be of tremendous benefit for the ECO region especially for its Landlocked and smaller economies as the network would provide efficient transport linkages and greater market access to the member states both within and with outside the region. There was a growing interest in the projects of ECO by the countries outside the ECO. Moreover, many an organizations were expressing interest to undertake joint activities with ECO.

39. The Secretary General referred to the project proposal on "Trade & Investment" sent by the Secretariat to the Office of the Under-Secretary General and reiterated readiness and interest of ECO to implement the initiative. He also expressed interest to have collaborations with the Office of Under-Secretary General in modernizing the Transit Trade Systems for helping the economies of the Land Locked ECO member states. Commenting on the importance of the Regionalism, he mentioned that successful completion of projects of regional dimension would contribute to regional harmony and peace.

40. The Under-Secretary General stated that ECO Region has huge potential to establish linkages between Asia and Europe and between other important regions of the world. Given its potential, the Region would thrive in the years to come. He added that his Office would very much like to undertake joint studies in such areas as Transit Trade and Transport with

ECO. He stated that there were some financial limitations, but small-scale studies could be initiated. In this regard, he nominated Mr. Andre Nikwigize, Senior Programme Officer, Office of the High Representative for the LDCs, LLDCs and SIDCs as a focal point to work with the ECO Secretariat to proceed further. The Assistant Director, International Relations of the ECO Secretariat stated that the Secretariat would soon nominate its Focal Point and forward his details to the Office of the High Representative.

41. The Under-Secretary General informed about a Conference on Least Developed Countries scheduled for May/June, 2011 in Turkey and stated that it would bring together 6000 participants and around 20 Heads of States. He also informed about his participation in forums like OSCE and others focusing on transit trade and transport to present view-points of his Office and to give policy recommendations on such important areas.

42. The Under Secretary General stated that he has particular interest in the Central Asian Republics. In collaboration with Kazakhstan, his Office was organizing a high-level event in 2011 as a follow-up to the implementation of Almaty Plan of Action. Certain projects proposals have been prepared on Trade Facilitation and Transport. He added that both ECO and his Office could work together and undertake some studies on transit trade and transport for consideration at the subject event.

43. The Secretary General invited the UN Under-Secretary General to the upcoming 11th ECO Summit and the 19th Council of Ministers Meeting scheduled for Dec 20-23, 2010 in Istanbul, Turkey. The Under Secretary stated that he would be pleased to participate in the Summit and CoM meeting. He however added that a decision to this effect would be taken by the UN Secretary General.
