

Statement by H.E. Mr. M Yahya Maroofi, ECO Secretary General  
At the  
17<sup>th</sup> Informal Council of Ministers meeting  
(Sep 27, 2010-New York)

**Your Excellency Mr. Manouchehr Mottaki, Foreign Minister of Iran and the  
Chairman of the ECO Council of Ministers,  
Honourable Foreign Ministers of the ECO Member States  
Distinguished Ambassadors/Permanent Representatives  
Dear Colleagues**

I am honoured to welcome you to the 17<sup>th</sup> Informal meeting of the ECO Council of Ministers (CoM). It is heartening to note such an encouraging presence of our distinguished members of the ECO CoM today. This gathering demonstrates the abiding faith in our Organization and reaffirms our unwavering commitment to its aims and objectives as laid down in the Treaty of Izmir.

I would like to take a moment to express my deepest gratitude to H.E Mr. Manouchehr Mottaki, the honourable Foreign Minister of Iran for gracing the occasion in his capacity as the current Chairman of the Council of Ministers as well as the distinguished Foreign Ministers/Representatives for their participation. Special thanks are in order to the Permanent Mission of Iran to the United Nations for their cooperation in putting this meeting together.

**Excellencies**

This annual event of the ECO presents us an opportunity to take stock of the ECO's progress and to deliberate its direction and orientation.

Before I present my report, I would like to brief the Council on ECO's response to the floods in Pakistan: In the aftermath of the deadliest floods in Pakistan causing precious loss of human life and devastation of unprecedented scale in living memories, the Council of Permanent Representatives held an extraordinary session in July 2010 to express solidarity and to deliberate its response. Despite the modest means at the Organization's disposal, the Council approved contribution of US \$ 200,000/- to Pakistan for relief efforts in aid of the flood-victims in addition to agreeing on sending five trucks of relief goods from each member state to proceed in Caravan under the banner of ECO. The CPR suggested that the matter for additional funds for assistance to Pakistan be brought before the Informal CoM for consideration.

**Excellencies**

A concomitant development of these floods has been a change in venue and dates for the ECO Summit. I am pleased to inform that Turkey has offered to host the 11<sup>th</sup> ECO Summit preceded by the 19<sup>th</sup> meeting of the CoM in Istanbul on Dec 20-23, 2010. The Secretariat has started the necessary preparations for the two events.

**Mr. Chairman**

Now, in accordance with the draft Agenda as well as the format of our Informal CoM meetings, I would like to present an overview of the activities of the Organization focussing primarily on the period from Oct, 2009 to date highlighting developments in different areas of our activities as well as the status of future programmes and projects. I shall begin with Trade.

Trade constitutes the centrepiece of ECO's strategy to achieve sustainable socioeconomic development in the ECO Region and regional integration. In the period following the global financial crisis, the region did not fare well in implementing its initiatives and undertaking promotional activities recommended for a quantum jump in intra-regional trade.

**Mr. Chairman, Distinguished Representatives,**

On ECO Trade Agreement (ECOTA), a flagship agreement aimed at creating favourable environment to expand trade and investment cooperation in the region, some notable progress has recently been made after a long spell of inaction. Pakistan and Turkey have announced to offer ECOTA tariff concessions bilaterally. Also with the submission of Positive, Negative and Sensitive lists by Afghanistan, it is hoped that the process of preferential tariffs would gain further momentum. However, we are far from its full scale implementation. I hope that Iran and Tajikistan would soon provide trade concessions lists agreed under ECOTA. The successful implementation of ECOTA will take the region closer to its cherished goal of establishing a Free Trade Area as envisaged in the ECO Vision 2015. I request the member states which have not yet signed and/or ratified this Agreement, to accede to it on priority basis. I would urge a similar action on other important agreements and institutional arrangements like the 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.

**Excellencies**

In another equally important and complimentary sector, we have managed to put in place the necessary elements to assure full implementation of the Transit Transport Framework Agreement (TTFA), effective since May 2006. Further progress has been made in rail transport. In 2010 the regular operation of the ECO Container Train on Islamabad-Tehran-Istanbul route begun on schedule. In the wake of recent floods in Pakistan, this Container Train was utilized to transport the relief goods from Turkey to Pakistan. Concrete measures are being followed to streamline the operation of the ECO container trains from Almaty to Bandar Abbas and from Almaty to Istanbul. A Feasibility Study is 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 was successfully launched on 23<sup>rd</sup> September 2010 with an auspicious ceremony honoured by the participation of the high-ranking officials of the Iranian Government.

To further strengthen our capacity in the Transport sector, we finalized MoUs with Intergovernmental Organization for International Carriage by Rail (OTIF) on railway cooperation and TRACECA on regional corridors development in 2009. Before my departure for New York, we exchanged a similar MoU with the International Railway Committee (CIT), which would facilitate mutual cooperation between the ECO and CIT in developing the ECO rules and regulations for transit transport by rail, and in implementing other projects and activities of mutual interest. The Secretariat is also working on a trilateral MoU between the ECO, IDB and UNECE.

### **Excellencies**

Cooperation in Energy figures among ECO's top priorities. To carry our cooperation forward in this sector, the 2<sup>nd</sup> 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. Also in accordance with the decision of the 20<sup>th</sup> RPC, the Secretariat prepared a project proposal on ECO Regional Energy Trade arrangements submitted to the IDB for financial assistance in May. A Feasibility Study on the establishment of a web-based system of unified and valid "ECO Geosciences Database (GD)" has also been completed. Efforts have been made in Geosciences database of ECO Member States for the most suitable way to access information.

In the area of Environment, the 4<sup>th</sup> ECO Ministerial Meeting on Environment preceded by the Senior Officials Meeting is scheduled to be held in Iran in December 2010.

### **Excellencies**

In Agriculture, ECO Regional Programme for Food Security (RPFS) is our flagship programme. Republic of Turkey was elected by the 20<sup>th</sup> RPC Meeting as the Coordinating Country for the implementation of the ECO-RPFS this year. The implementation of the programme particularly in the seed sector and in national projects has gained considerable momentum. We are also working with FAO on a Broad Technical Assistance Project for the whole programme for submission to the World Bank Global Agriculture and Food Security Programme (GAFSP).

### **Excellencies**

Economic Research and Statistics are essential tools for evolving prudent policies and devising effective strategies and Plan of Actions to attain desired goals. ECO's performance in these sectors is on the rise. We are to reinforce ECO's capacity. Efforts are under way to establish an ECO Statistical Network (ECOSTAT) providing member states access to common data & information database.

### **Excellencies**

I am pleased to report that 1<sup>st</sup> ECO Health Ministers Meeting held in Baku, Azerbaijan last February has outlined 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. An analytical regional report on Health Related Millennium Development Goals i.e. Goal 4: Reduce Child Mortality,

Goal 5: Improve Maternal Health and Goal 6: Combating HIV/AIDS, Malaria and other diseases has also been finalized. The report introduced recommendations for each Member State and suggestions for their implementation at regional level. We are also working on establishing an ECO Blood Safety Network and Drug Regulatory Network.

### **Excellencies**

Drug production and its trafficking and associated issues constitute a challenge that no single country or region can tackle on its own. The complexity and the scope of this challenge require partnerships across national and regional boundaries. To fight Drug control, counter terrorism and fight against human smuggling and money laundering issues ECO has developed a Joint Regional Strategy. A number of activities are planned under the Joint Strategy to agree on collective measures to counter such threat. Notable, in this regard is a Plan of Action on Combating Trans-National Organized Crime prepared recently.

The ECO-EU project on “Combating Illicit Drug Trafficking to/from Afghanistan” is being implemented.

### **Mr. Chairman, Excellencies**

Afghanistan is an important member of the ECO family. The Organization has endeavoured to contribute to the country’s reconstruction efforts. 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 will play an active role in that Core Group.

### **Excellencies**

The 20<sup>th</sup> Regional Planning Council meeting was held in Feb, 2010 in Antalya, Turkey and approved the Work Programme for the year 2010. The Secretariat has already started necessary steps for its implementation.

### **Excellencies**

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. Our relations with the United Nations, its Specialized Agencies have been growing. The United Nations General Assembly would be adopting a biennial resolution this year on ECO-UN cooperation. Over the last year, the Secretary General represented ECO at the 3<sup>rd</sup> Summit of Conference on Interaction and Confidence Building Measures (CICA) held in June 2010 in Istanbul, the 42<sup>nd</sup> Consultative Committee Meeting of the Colombo Plan held in Feb, 2010 in New Delhi, India and the 37<sup>th</sup> OIC Council of Foreign Ministers meeting held in Dushanbe in May 2010.

The Organization has enjoyed increased attention and interest in the region and beyond. Today this august meeting would consider and approve the draft revised Terms of Reference for establishing Contact Groups of Ambassadors of ECO member states at important World Capitals. It would represent yet another milestone in our endeavours. The establishment of the Contact Groups would enhance the image of the Organization; forge sustainable and long-lasting relations with UN Agencies and other relevant Regional Bodies to mutual advantage. I am fully aware that establishment of these Contact Groups must not be an end in itself but a means to an end, and one whose success would essentially depend upon the support of the member states and their respective Missions in the Capitals where ECO Contact Groups are to be set up. I therefore seek your Excellencies personal support in ensuring the success of these Contact Groups.

### **Mr. Chairman**

While we have made progress on some fronts in the past year, regrettably our achievements have been well below the desired mark and disproportionate to our vast potentials. The graph of ECOs progress is uneven in the different sectors of its activities. In areas such as Trade and Transport we need to accelerate our efforts, especially in fully implementing such vital agreements as ECOTA and TTFA. In others such as Energy etc, we need to redouble our efforts and add substance in our cooperation and set clear benchmarks for assessing our performance. At this point, I would like to draw attention to another challenge confronting the Organization. Default on financial contributions constitutes a major concern to our modest budget. It is unfortunate that one of our esteemed members, Uzbekistan has not cleared its financial arrears for the past many years. Despite repeated attempts made to raise the issue with relevant high-ranking officials, the matter has not been given favourable consideration and acknowledgement. In order to allow the Organization perform its functions efficiently, it is paramount that the member states be regular in fulfilling the financial commitments to the Organization. I would therefore, request this august gathering to unanimously urge the concerned member state to meet its financial obligations.

### **Excellencies**

ECO is more than a regional block. We represent not only a shared history marked by our common culture, geography and faith, but represent also an important symbol of shared destiny defined by our common objectives and collective will. We have to live up to the expectations of the people of this Region and deliver on our promise. Our performance must be more pronounced. We need to be more proactive, more focussed and better equipped to tackle the challenges before us. As we approach the coming 11<sup>th</sup> Summit and the 19<sup>th</sup> CoM, it is my earnest hope that the meetings will provide the forum to review ECO's performance and generate the necessary political will on the part of all the member states to determine the pace for the future and establish concrete benchmarks and strategies for the Organization's development. I am confident that under the able guidance of our political leadership, we shall surmount challenges and achieve our ideals.

I wish your Excellencies a pleasant stay in New York and success in your Agenda and look forward to welcoming you in Istanbul, Turkey near the end of the current year.  
Thank you.