

**Inaugural Statement by H.E. Dr. Seyed Abbas Araghchi,
Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Islamic Republic of Iran
at the 24th Meeting of Regional Planning Council
(23-26 February, 2014 – ECO Secretariat)**

بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمَنِ الرَّحِيمِ

**Distinguished Heads of Delegation,
Honorable Secretary General,
Dear Participants, Ladies and Gentlemen,**

It gives me an immense pleasure to address this opening session of the 24th Meeting of the ECO Regional Planning Council. At the outset and on behalf of the Government of the Islamic Republic of Iran, let me extend a warm welcome to distinguished delegates of the ECO Member States and wish you all a memorable and pleasant stay in Tehran. I would also like to extend my heartfelt thanks to ECO Secretary General, Ambassador Shamil Aleskerov and his colleagues in the Secretariat for their excellent preparatory contributions to this RPC Meeting.

Regional Planning Council is an annual exercise to ensure that Organization's activities are technically viable and regionally justifiable; where an aggregated technical and planning expertise helps ECO in coping with the complexities of its yearly programme of work. Planners from different Member States are expected in RPC meetings to choose from amongst alternative programmes based on the availability of resources and the priorities of the membership. Evidently, the ultimate goal is to increase the overall efficiency and consistency of the Organization and its components. We are hopeful and confident that this 24th RPC Meeting will serve the same purpose.

Dear Colleagues,

We are in the third decade of expanded cooperation in the framework of the Economic Cooperation Organization. In the last two decades or so, ECO has been developing patterns of regional cooperation in different areas with varying degree of inclusiveness and maturity. Experiences from two decades of collective partnerships provide solid basis for helping the Organization better fits its purpose. ECO Region enjoys immense potential to ensure successful regional cooperation and integration. A big trading market, an exquisite geographical location in terms of transit, a huge human resource capital as well as abundant energy resources are among those contributing factors to make ECO a success story in regionalism. All these need a new architecture for cooperation. The RPC can play a pivotal role in this regard.

The 21st Meeting of the ECO Council of Ministers, held in November 2013 in Tehran, promisingly acknowledged the imperative of making some shifts in paradigm in the Organization. The COM meeting gave its political support and endorsement for the urgent need for necessary changes and reforms in the Organization in order to make it

more responding to the needs and merits of the Member States and people of the region. The same has been reflected in “Tehran Communique”. Accordingly, the Organization is now conducting a reform process built on the experiences of the last two decades. The recommendations of the Eminent Persons Group (EPG) will provide platform for further actions in the reform process which, as mandated by COM, may involve regulatory, structural and institutional changes in the Organization. Let me reiterate again that RPC can play an important and decisive role to ensure the ultimate goals that reform process pursue.

Given the technical nature of the planning exercise, RPC is expected to help reform process through developing a reform-friendly annual programme for the Organization. RPC’s contribution should entail more focused and result-oriented annual programme, elevating the ECO profile from within and outside Region perspectives.

Dear Participants,

Development is still a major preoccupation for many countries in the World. ECO countries are not exceptions. Sustained national economic growth and development, in one way or another, necessitate cooperation and interaction with other countries on bilateral, regional and international levels. Trade viability, energy security, environmental sustainability, transit reliability, food security, human and financial capitals availability, and industrial complementarity cannot be ensured unless effective cooperating arrangements among countries get momentum. As I referred to earlier, ECO has developed some arrangements for regional cooperation which would help Member States in their national development strategies. Accordingly, ECO Trade Agreement (ECOTA), ECO Transit transport Framework Agreement (TTFA), ECO Decade for Enhanced Energy Cooperation (2013-2022), ECO Plan of Action on Environment Cooperation and Global Warming (2011-2015), as well as ECO programmes and activities on trade facilitation, industrial standards, food security, health and other areas of collective benefit shall be given due attention and priority.

One of the important issues of critical value is effective participation of the private sector in the ECO activities. Private sectors in the Member States should be further involved in ECO programmes and projects and RPC meetings are the right place to make corporate planning.

Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen,

We are gathering annually in the occasion of the RPC meetings to harmonize our individual and collective planning processes and programmes with a view to exploring ways and means to ensure the ECO noble objectives. I would like to emphasis that the ECO work program should rather take a project and action oriented approach than a meeting oriented one. This certainly requires new collective approaches and the RPC Meeting is an appropriate forum to examine this Approach and concentrate on the substantial issues and programmes.

**Excellencies,
Dear Participants,**

The Islamic Republic of Iran is strongly committed to support ECO and its activities. We consider ECO-sponsored regional cooperation frameworks as the best possible cooperation arrangements among neighboring and regional countries. "ECO Advocacy Policy" is an integral part of Iran's foreign policy. The Islamic Republic of Iran will continue to render all needed support to ECO, including during this reform period, with a view to enhancing the already existing, economic, cultural, religious, historic and friendly relations among Member States. I am confident that this RPC Meeting would hold focused and constructive deliberations. I wish you total success.

I thank you
