

The 18th RPC Meeting Report

(Islamabad, March 3-6, 2008)

1. The Eighteenth Meeting of the Regional Planning Council (RPC) of the Economic Cooperation Organization (ECO) was held on March 3-6, 2008 at Islamabad, hosted by the Government of the Islamic Republic of Pakistan. Preparatory/Review meetings were held on the sidelines.

2. The meeting was attended by delegations from the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan, the Republic of Azerbaijan, the Islamic Republic of Iran, the Republic of Kazakhstan, the Kyrgyz Republic, the Islamic Republic of Pakistan, the Republic of Tajikistan, the Republic of Turkey, Turkmenistan and the Republic of Uzbekistan. The delegation of the ECO Secretariat was led by Secretary General Khurshid Anwar. Also present in the meeting were representatives of the Turkish Cypriot State and ECO's Specialized Agencies and Regional Institutes, including the ECO Cultural Institute, the ECO College of Insurance, the ECO Consultancy and Engineering Company, the ECO Trade and Development Bank as well as the ECO Chamber of Commerce and Industry. The list of participants is placed at **Annex-I**.

Agenda Item No. 1

Inauguration of the Meeting

3. The meeting was inaugurated by His Excellency Eng. Dr. Muhammad Akram Sheikh, Federal Minister/Deputy Chairman, Planning Commission of the Islamic Republic of Pakistan. In his inaugural address, Dr. Sheikh noted that the presence of eminent planners from member states offered a welcome opportunity to review and speed up progress in all areas of cooperation. He underlined, in particular, the significance of modern transportation and communication network, and a free trade area for effective regional economic integration. It should reflect in the improved quality of life of the people of the ECO region. The Minister reiterated Pakistan's support for various initiatives of ECO to enhance cooperation among the member states. A copy of his statement is placed at **Annex-II**.

4. Earlier, in his welcome remarks, His Excellency Mr. Ghiasuddin Ahmed, Federal Secretary, Planning and Development Division, Government of the Islamic Republic of Pakistan, said that regional cooperation had assumed a central role in the post-WTO era. It was considered as a strategic tool for economic progress. He expressed the hope that the 18th RPC meeting would further strengthen regional cooperation, and would provide a way forward to collectively deal with emerging challenges faced by the region. A copy of his statement is placed at **Annex-III**.

5. The ECO Secretary General reviewed the main activities of the organization during 2007, the progress made in some areas and the challenges that still lay ahead in others. He stated that Regional Planning Council played a key role in ECO. Its decisions would bear directly on the shape and content of ECO's policies and programmes. The Secretary General noted that ECO had put in place a useful institutional framework for

regional cooperation, and stressed that the agreements reached should be extended full backing by all Member States. A copy of his statement is placed at ***Annex-IV***.

Agenda Item No. 2

Election of the Chairman .

6. His Excellency Mr. Ghiasuddin Ahmed, Federal Secretary, Planning and Development Division of the Islamic Republic of Pakistan, was unanimously elected as the Chairman of the meeting. In his opening statement, Mr. Ghiasuddin Ahmed expressed his thanks to the distinguished delegates for electing him as the Chairman of the RPC. He emphasized the importance of the meeting and the need for appropriate decisions to help promote economic cooperation among the member states.

Agenda Item No. 3

Adoption of the Agenda

7. The Council adopted the following agenda:-

1. Inauguration of the Meeting.

- . Inaugural statement of the high dignitary from Pakistan
- . Statement of the ECO Secretary General

2. Election of the Chairman.

3. Adoption of the Agenda.

4. Statements by Heads of Delegation.

5. Consideration of the report of the Secretary General on ECO activities during 2007.

6. Reviewing progress on implementation of ECO's approved programmes of action and projects and consideration of the new programmes and projects for the year 2008 in the following areas:

- . Trade and Investment;
- . Transport & Communications;
- . Energy, Minerals and Environment;
- . Agriculture, Industry and Tourism;
- . Human Resources & Sustainable Development;
- . Project Research and Economic Research & Statistics;
- . Inter-Regional ECO Activities:
 - i. ECO Regional Institutions and Specialized Agencies
 - ii. International relations

7. Annual ECO Calendar of Events for 2008-2009.

8. Any other business.

9. Date and Venue of the next Meeting.

10. Adoption of the Report.

11. Vote of Thanks

Agenda Item No. 4

Statements by the Heads of Delegation

8. The Heads of Delegation made statements, outlining their countries' policies and views on the programmes and activities of the Organization. The Heads of the ECO Specialized Agencies and Regional Institutes also delivered their statements. Copies of their statements are placed at ***Annex-V***.

Agenda Item No. 5

Consideration of the report of the Secretary General on ECO activities for 2007

9. The Secretary General's annual report to the Council on the activities of the Organization during 2007 had been circulated to member states vide Secretariat's Note Verbale No. SG/18th RPC/2008/0217 dated 6th February, 2008.

10. The Council appreciated the comprehensive report and took note of the useful observations and suggestions reflected in the Working Papers prepared by different Directorates. These were discussed in detail in meetings of the sectoral preparatory/review committees.

Agenda Item No. 6

Reviewing progress on implementation of ECO's approved programmes of action and projects and consideration of the new programmes and projects for the year 2008 in the following areas:

- a) Trade and Investment;
- b) Transport & Communications;
- c) Energy, Minerals and Environment;
- d) Agriculture, Industry and Tourism;
- e) Human Resources & Sustainable Development;
- f) Project Research and Economic Research & Statistics;
- g) Inter-Regional ECO Activities:
- i) ECO Regional Institutions and Specialized Agencies
- ii) International relations

11. The sectoral preparatory/review meetings were presided over by representatives of different member states as shown below:

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| (a) | Trade and Investment | - | Mr. S. Anjum Bashir, Joint Secretary, Ministry of Commerce, Government of Pakistan, Islamabad. |
| (b) | Transport and Communications | - | Dr. Asad Ali Shah, Member (Infrastructure), Planning Commission, Government of Pakistan, Islamabad. |
| (c) | Energy, Minerals & Environment | - | Dr. Akhtar A. Awan, Member Energy, Planning Commission, Government of Pakistan, Islamabad. |
| (d) | Agriculture, Industry & Tourism | - | Dr. M. E. Tusneem, Chairman, Pakistan Agriculture Research Council, Ministry of Food, Agriculture and Livestock, Government of Pakistan, Islamabad. |

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| (e) | Human Resources & Sustainable Development | - | Mr. Shaukat N. Tahir, Senior Member, National Disaster Management Authority, Prime Minister's Secretariat, Islamabad. |
| (f) | Project and Economic Research & Statistics | - | Mr. Fatih Unlu, Head of Department, Directorate General of Foreign Economic Affairs, State Planning Organization of the Republic of Turkey. |
| (g) | Inter Regional ECO activities: (i) ECO Regional Institutions and Specialized Agencies (ii) International Relations | - | Mr. Behzad Khakpour, ECO Affairs Bureau, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, I.R. of Iran. |

12. The Council held detailed discussion on the programmes and proposals contained in the working papers prepared by the ECO Secretariat. These included status reports on the ECO Calendar of Events for 2007-2008, highlighting the progress made on the implementation of activities approved by the 17th COM meeting.

13. The Council noted, with appreciation, the work of the Secretariat for implementation of the decisions of RPCs and other high level ECO organs as well as the ongoing Programmes/Projects and Calendar of Events for the year 2007. A brief resume, covering the main areas of activity, is given below:

(a) Trade and Investment

14. Noting the ratification of ECOTA by five Member States, the Council welcomed the imminent entry into force of the agreement and urged signatory Member States to take necessary steps to expedite its implementation. The Council urged the non-signatory Member States to sign and ratify the agreement as early as possible.

15. The Council further welcomed the offer of the Republic of Turkey to host the 1st meeting of the Cooperation Council to be preceded by HLEG. The Council appreciated the fact that the 1st meeting of the Cooperation Council would be held at the level of the Commerce Ministers. The Council also welcomed the convening of an informal meeting of experts on ECOTA on the sidelines of 18th RPC where the Contracting Parties of ECOTA discussed outstanding technical details regarding the implementation process of ECOTA and requested the Secretariat to circulate its report to relevant Contracting Parties.

16. The Council stressed the need for early finalization of the fresh Draft Plan of Action for implementation of ECOTA submitted by Pakistan as the coordinating country.

17. Referring to Protocol for annexes of ECOTA on: (i) ECO Rules of Origin; (ii) Anti-Dumping Measures; (iii) State Aid; and (iv) Intellectual Property Rights, the Council urged the signatory states to expedite the ratification process and stressed, in particular,

that the Republic of Tajikistan sign and ratify it for the implementation of ECOTA to get underway.

18. The Council recommended that while pursuing the implementation process of ECOTA, the interested Member States resume negotiations on the draft Protocol on Fast Track Approach to ECOTA within the context of Cooperation Council.

19. The Council appreciated the offer of the Islamic Republic of Pakistan to organize the First ECO-WTO Seminar on Global Trade Challenges of ECO Countries scheduled to be held on May 7-8, 2008 and requested Member States to confirm their active participation in the Seminar.

20. The Council thanked the Republic of Tajikistan for hosting the Workshop on Potential Benefits of ECOTA and urged the Secretariat to organize such Seminars in collaboration with other Member States, particularly the non-signatory states.

21. Welcoming the recommendation of the 17th RPC for carrying out a study on Trade Regimes of ECO countries to be financed from ECO FSF, the Council noted the formal proposal tabled by the Pakistan Institute of Development Economics (PIDE) and requested CPR to consider allocation of US \$50,000 for the proposed Study.

22. The Council called for setting up a working group to take the ECO Central Banks Network (ECBN) beyond the conceptualization stage in terms of agreed Terms of Reference i.e. objective settings, functional methodologies and administrative procedures and urged the Member States to volunteer for organizing the First High Level Experts Working Group in 2008 before the 2nd Meeting of Heads of Central Banks.

23. The Council appreciated the Republic of Turkey for its financial support to (the 2nd Phase) ECO Joint Project on Expanding Intra-regional Trade and the 2nd Business Forum and Buyers/Sellers Meeting on Construction Materials organized on October 24-25, 2007 in Istanbul.

24. The Council welcomed the offer of the Islamic Republic of Pakistan to hold the 2nd ECO Trade Fair on July 23-26, 2008 in Karachi, and requested all Member States to actively participate in the Fair. The Council observed that the ECO Trade Fair should be held on regular and rotational basis each year, preferably together with some major ECO activity.

25. The Council thanked the Islamic Republic of Pakistan for its offer to organize the 3rd Business Forum and Buyers/Sellers Meeting on Auto Industry Sector back-to-back with the 2nd ECO Trade Fair on July 23-26, 2008 in Karachi.

26. The Council also appreciated the offer of the Islamic Republic of Pakistan to organize the 12th Executive Committee Meeting of ECO-CCI together with the 9th General Assembly Meeting during the 2nd ECO Trade Fair scheduled to be held on July 23-26, 2008 in Karachi. Pakistan requested the Member States to confirm their active participation in the above three events.

27. The Council appreciated the establishment of the Trade Officers' Working Group in accordance with the decision of the 125th meeting of CPR and urged active participation of all ECO Embassies in Tehran in its meetings.

28. The Council recalled that the Second Ministerial Meeting on Finance and Economy held on 5-7 April, 2007 in Antalya, Turkey, approved the amendment to para-7 of Article-9 of the Agreement on Promotion and Protection of Investment (APPI) signed during the third ECO Ministerial Meeting on Commerce/Foreign Trade, 7 July 2005 by the Republic of Turkey, the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan and the Republic of Azerbaijan. The Council thanked the Islamic Republic of Iran for the signing of APPI by its Minister for Economy and Finance on 25 February 2008 and welcomed the Islamic Republic of Pakistan's readiness to sign the Agreement shortly.

29. The Council urged all Member States to sign/ratify the Agreement (APPI) along with Protocol on Amendment for early implementation. The Council welcomed the announcement by the Islamic Republic of Iran to host the 3rd Ministerial Meeting on Finance and Economy and the 2nd Meeting of the Heads of Central Banks in December 2008 in Iran.

30. While thanking the Republic of Turkey and the Islamic Republic of Pakistan for hosting the 2nd Ministerial Meeting on Finance and Economy and the 1st Meeting of Heads of Central Banks respectively, the Council called on the Member States to expedite follow up actions on the decisions made during the meetings.

31. The Council appreciated the progress towards operationalization of the ECO Trade and Development Bank following the entry into force of the Articles of Agreement and requested the three signatory Member States, namely Iran, Pakistan and Turkey, to continue with their support so that the Bank could become fully operational as soon as possible. The Council also encouraged the other Member States to join the Bank.

32. The Council while appreciating the Republic of Turkey for offering to host the EGM on Money-Laundering scheduled to be held on 13-14 May 2008 in Ankara and the Technical Workshop on Inflation Targeting scheduled to be held on 9-10 May 2008 in Izmir/Turkey, requested the Member States to confirm their participation in those events. The ECO Secretariat urged the Member States to complete the prescribed questionnaire in time.

33. The Council expressed satisfaction at the work started for preparation of a regional trade and investment strategy, aimed at having a clear action plan for coherent trade and investment activities in the region, with the help of UNCTAD.

34. The Council called on the three Member States, namely Iran, Pakistan and Turkey, to sign the draft Articles of the Agreement for the Establishment of ECO Reinsurance Company and finalize the Action Plan for the early establishment of the Company in line with the MOU signed in March 1995 by the founding shareholders, in the coming Meeting of the relevant insurance authorities to be held in the near future. Pakistan offered to host the meeting for signing the Articles of Agreement soon after completion of formalities by respective Member States.

35. The Council acknowledged the approval of the Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) between ECO-CCI and the Islamic Chamber of Commerce and Industry (ICCI) by the 11th Executive Committee Meeting of ECO-CCI and requested the ECO-CCI to examine the possibility of its signing by the Presidents of the two organizations during the 9th General Assembly and 12th Executive Committee Meetings.

36. The Council appreciated the Republic of Turkey for organizing the 8th General Assembly meeting of ECO Chamber of Commerce and Industry (ECO-CCI) on October 26, 2007, and welcomed the decision of that Meeting to pass the Chairmanship of ECO-CCI to Turkey with its Secretariat shifted to Istanbul for a period of three years with effect from 1st of November 2007.

37. The Council thanked the ECO Chamber of Commerce and Industry (ECO-CCI) under the Chairmanship of the Union of Chambers and Commodity Exchanges of Turkey (TOBB) for organizing the 11th Executive Committee Meeting of ECO Chamber of Commerce and Industry on January 28, 2008 in Istanbul, and requested Member States to take necessary follow up actions i.e. nomination of the Chairmen of the established Committees and representatives for finalization of the revised Statute prepared by ECO-CCI. These would be considered and adopted in the 12th Executive Committee Meeting of ECO-CCI to be held at Karachi on the sidelines of the ECO Trade Fair scheduled between 23 and 26 July 2008. The meeting would also consider and support implementation of the approved Action Plan and Supplementary time-frame prepared by the Iranian Chamber of Commerce for eight years activities of the ECO-CCI.

38. The Council thanked the Republic of Azerbaijan for hosting the 6th meeting of the ECO Council of Heads of Customs Administration (CHCA) and the 2nd meeting of Sub Committee of Experts held on September 26-27, 2007 in Baku and noted with appreciation the signing of the Agreement on Establishment and Operation of ECO Smuggling and Customs Offences Data Bank by the Islamic Republic of Iran. The Council urged the signatory Member States to ratify the agreement and non signatory members to sign and ratify it. The Council requested the member countries to expedite their comments on the action plan sent by Republic of Turkey through ECO Secretariat.

39. The Council appreciated the finalization of the Draft ECO Agreement on Mutual Administrative Assistance in Customs Matters and urged the Member States to sign it during 2008, in a relevant Ministerial Meeting of ECO.

40. The Council appreciated the offer of the Islamic Republic of Pakistan to host the 7th CHCA meeting in the last quarter of 2008 and requested the Member States to host the 3rd meeting of the Sub Committee of Experts in April 2008.

41. The Council urged the Member States, except Azerbaijan, to provide details of training courses to be offered to customs officials and also called on Member States with necessary expertise to arrange such training/orientation courses on regular basis.

42. Recalling that the Expert Group Meeting on the Agreement on Simplification of Visa Procedures for Businessmen of the ECO Member States was twice postponed, the Council urged the Secretariat to hold the Working Group meeting in accordance with the decision of 132nd meeting of CPR prior to the 2nd Interior Ministers Meeting scheduled for May 2008 in Turkmenistan.

43. The Head of the Delegation of Afghanistan, during the 17th RPC, had offered to host the 4th ECO Ministerial Meeting on Commerce/Foreign Trade in 2007 which could not take place. The Council recommended that the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan be approached again to host the meeting in 2008. In case of no reply within three months, other Member States be approached for hosting the meeting.

44. Taking note of the draft Multilateral Treaty on Avoidance of Double Taxation, the Council called on the Member States to examine the draft and convey their comments with a view to signing the Treaty at the earliest possible.

45. The Council welcomed the fresh proposals put forth by the Secretariat and decided that the Secretariat should forward these individual proposals to Member States for consideration.

(b) Transport & Communications

46. The Council highlighted the significance of the strategic location of ECO region as a bridge between east and west and stressed on the need to develop a regionally integrated transport network in the ECO region.

47. The Council welcomed the offer of the Republic of Turkey to host the 7th Ministerial Meeting on Transport and Communications on 15-17 April 2008 in Antalya. The Member States were requested to confirm their participation in the meeting at the highest possible level before March 20 2008.

48. The Council welcomed the offer of the Kyrgyz Republic to host the 8th Ministerial Meeting on Transport and Communications.

49. Taking into consideration the high rate of trade and economic growth and the need for matching development of transport infrastructure in the region, the Council requested the Member States to actively participate in the preparation of the next phase of the Program of Action for the ECO Decade of Transport and Communications (1998-2007). It would cover the period 2008-2015, coinciding with ECO vision 2015. The Council requested the Member States to consider hosting the HLEG meeting in the year 2008 and to inform the Secretariat within three months. The Member States were also requested to actively participate in it. The HLEG Meeting will consider ways and means of involving Funding/donor institutions/countries in implementing projects to be envisaged in the next phase of the Program of Action (2008 – 2015). The programme will provide an opportunity to identify high impact priority areas and outline timelines, benchmarks and performance indicators for this programme. Periodic review will be undertaken to assess progress. The Iranian delegation submitted their country report on implementation of the Programme of Action.

50. The Council noted, with satisfaction, the progress in implementation of the TTFA as a comprehensive framework and legal basis for development of regional transport cooperation and appreciated Azerbaijan, Iran, Pakistan and Turkey for hosting the 2nd Meeting of TTCC and 1st Meetings of its Insurance Committee (Tehran, May, 2007), Road Committee (Islamabad, September 2007) and Railway Committee (Ankara, March 2007) respectively. The meeting also requested Turkmenistan to ratify the TTFA and Uzbekistan to sign it. Turkey informed the Council that the ratification process was nearing completion and it would be done prior to the 7th Ministerial Meeting on Transport.

51. The Council appreciated the offer of i) Afghanistan to host the 2nd Meeting of the Railway Committee and the 1st Meeting of the Transit Trade Committee, ii) Iran to host the 2nd Meeting of the Insurance committee and the 3rd and extraordinary Meetings of the TTCC, and iii) Tajikistan to host the 2nd Meeting of the Road Committee and requested

Kazakhstan to confirm hosting the 3rd Meeting of the Insurance Committee. The Council requested the Member States to consider hosting the first meeting of the legal committee in 2008.

52. In line with decisions of the 2nd Meeting of the TTCC, the RPC recommended that the Meetings of the TTCC and its auxiliary bodies be included in the list of events covered under the Special Support Fund (for air travel).

53. The Council, in line with Article 1, Annex VIII of the TTFA and the decisions of the 2nd Meeting of the TTCC, reiterated the need to establish National Inter-Ministerial Committees for border crossing facilitation and promotion of international transport as bodies responsible for implementation of the TTFA. These Committees would comprise representatives of relevant Ministries and institutions dealing with transit trade issues as well as the private sector. The Member States would convey country reports on the actions taken in this regard to the Secretariat before the next TTCC meeting. The Council appreciated the prompt response of Pakistan regarding establishment of National inter-Ministerial Committee and formulation of terms of reference. The other Member States were requested to expedite their response. The Council also welcomed the proposal that UNCTAD and Pakistan jointly submit a presentation to the 7th Ministerial Meeting on Transport and Communications on the success story of their joint project employing this mechanism in Pakistan.

54. The Council appreciated the Secretariat for preparing a Technical Assistance (TA) project for preparation of a regional program on implementation of the TTFA and submitting it to the Islamic Development Bank. It also welcomed the readiness of the Bank to include the TA project in its work program for 2008. The Council requested the Secretariat to follow up the issue and ensure that the TA project was started in 2008.

55. The Council appreciated the initiative of the Directorate of Transport and Communications to prepare and submit a TA project on implementation of transit and customs related provisions of TTFA to the IDB and requested the Bank to include the said project in its work program for the year 2009.

56. The Council noted, with satisfaction, progress towards establishing the ECO Fund for Implementation of the TTFA and recommended to the Member States to make voluntary contributions to this fund. It also welcomed the decision of the CPR to transfer \$ 50,000, from the Feasibility Study Fund to the TTFA Fund. In line with decisions of the 2nd TTCC Meeting and 17th COM Meeting, the Council recommended that an additional amount of US\$ 100,000 be transferred to the TTFA fund in two separate instalments on the request of the Secretariat.

57. The Council expressed satisfaction at the finalization of the ECO Motor Vehicle Third Party Liability Insurance Scheme (White Card) and called for expeditious measures to establish the ECO Council of Bureau for the implementation of the Scheme in 2008. The meeting welcomed the offer of the Islamic Republic of Iran to host the 2nd meeting of the Insurance Committee and Extraordinary meeting of TTCC for finalization and signing of White Card Scheme to be held tentatively on 21-22 July, 2008 in Tehran.

58. The Council highlighted the need for capacity enhancement in the Member States for efficient implementation of the White Card Scheme and requested the ECO College of Insurance to assist the Secretariat in organizing short-term training courses.

The Secretariat would help the ECO College of Insurance raise funds for the above activities, including assistance from IDB's scholarship program to cover scholarships for students from ECO Member States in the field of Insurance.

59. The RPC requested the Member States to expedite returning to the Secretariat the filled-in questionnaires on road and railway circulated in line with the decisions of the Road and Railway Committees of the TTCC. Besides helping monitor implementation of TTFA, the information would be used to set up an ECO transport database and GIS system. Another questionnaire (on maritime transport) had already been circulated among the member states. The Republic of Turkey returned the said questionnaires to Secretariat during the meeting.

60. The Council appreciated the technical assistance of the Iranian Meteorological Organization and the ECO Regional Center for Risk Management of Natural Disasters (ECO-RCRMOND) in carrying out the preliminary work to establish the GIS system for more effective management of such information. The Council recommended to the CPR to consider utilization of the feasibility Study Fund for the further development of the GIS to cover all transport sub-sectors. The Secretariat would provide background information on which Member States would nominate their focal points for the development of GIS system within three months.

61. The Council requested the Member States to expedite providing the Secretariat with the colour map of their road and rail transit routes in hard and soft copies three months after receiving the standard format from the Secretariat, as per Article 6 and Annex-II & Annex-III of the TTFA. Member States were also requested to nominate their focal points for preparation of the Transit Routes Maps. The Secretariat, in consultation with the Member States and relevant international organization, would finalize the standards to be considered in developing ECO regional transit routes maps. Pakistan delegation handed over colour map to the ECO Secretariat.

62. The Council took note of the briefings by the Representative of the Islamic Republic of Iran on measures taken for preparation of the final draft of the ECO Road Network Map and decided that, based on the views and comments received from Member States on the first draft of the ECO road map, the Islamic Republic of Iran would send the final draft version of the map to the Member States through ECO Secretariat by the end of April 2008. The Member States would send their views and comments, if any, on the final draft of the map by the end of June 2008. The Islamic Republic of Iran would publish the final version of the map based on amendments proposed by the end of June 2008. If views and comments from Member States were not received, they would be considered to have agreed to the final version of the ECO road network map.

63. The meeting requested the Member States to send the completed questionnaire circulated by Secretariat to the relevant Turkish authorities enabling them to prepare ECO Directory of Roads on the basis of ECO Road Network Map.

64. The Council noted, with satisfaction, the completion of the 1st and 2nd phases of the Joint ECO/IDB/UNCTAD Project on Multimodal Transport project in June 2007. It also requested IDB to continue its support to the next phase of the project which would include ten National Multimodal Transport Workshops, one in each Member State, with the participation of 30 to 40 experts/officials. Pakistan offered to hold the national workshop on Multi Modal Transport in November 11-12 2008. The meeting also

requested the Secretariat and Member States to help organize the 10 national workshops by the end of 2008. The Secretariat was requested to prepare a guideline for organization of the national workshops.

65. The RPC requested the Member States to provide the Secretariat with the exact dates and venue of their respective national workshop, together with the contact information of these focal points.

66. In order to expedite implementation of the MMT project, the Secretariat was asked to utilize the services of a qualified coordinating officer to be paid from the project budget on temporary basis.

67. The Council took note of the 4th Meeting of the Heads of Reference Marine Organizations of the ECO Member States (HRMO) held successfully in Tehran on 16-19 February 2008 and requested the Member States to consider hosting the 5th Meeting of ECO-HRMO in 2008.

68. Cognizant of the important role of the private sector, the Council appreciated the efforts of the Secretariat and Member States to establish the ECO Logistic Providers Associations' Federation (ECOLPAF). It expressed the hope that the Federation could start working according to the timeframe approved by the 1st preparatory meeting held in Tehran on 16-17 February 2008.

69. The Council appreciated the Republic of Turkey for setting up the ECO Marine Website (www.eco-marine.org) and seconding a fulltime officer to manage the website.

70. The Council took note of the ongoing efforts to enhance cooperation between the ECO landlocked Member States and transit ones. This issue would also be covered in the next phase of the Program of Action for the ECO Decade of Transport and Communications, with special emphasis on implementation of the UN Almaty Program of Action on Special Needs of Landlocked Countries. The meeting also welcomed the initiative of the UNESCAP to hold a regional workshop on mid-term review of the Almaty Program of Action and requested the ECO Secretariat and Member States to actively participate in it.

71. The Council welcomed the decision of the 4th HRMO Meeting regarding the proposed MOU between the ECO Secretariat and International Maritime Organization (IMO). The MOU would inter-alia, facilitate the establishment of the ECO Contact Group in the IMO Headquarter in London. The Permanent Representatives of Iran and Turkey would host the ECO Contact Group Meetings in London and assist the Secretariat in establishing smooth working relations with IMO.

72. The RPC took note of the success of 9th Meeting of the Heads of ECO Railways Authorities held in Kazakhstan in June 2007 and welcomed the offer of Pakistan to host the 10th Meeting in early 2009.

73. The Meeting appreciated IDBs' positive response and the inclusion of ECO projects for establishment of the Railway Line bypassing Van Lake in Turkey, rehabilitation of Taftan-Quetta Railway in Pakistan and the development and enhancement of the capacity of the Sarakhs Station in Iran in the work program of the

Bank. It requested the concerned Member States to approach IDB through their national channels for financing those projects.

74. The Council also recommended to the ECO Trade and Development Bank to consider financial contribution for the implementation of the above mentioned projects. The meeting decided to establish an interagency meeting with the participation of ECO Secretariat, ECOTDB, IDB and the concerned member states. The meeting requested the Secretariat to also invite ADB and World Bank to the meeting.

75. The Council welcomed the decisions of the 2nd Meeting (Astana, 12 June 2007) of the Working Group for Implementation of the Trans-Asian Railway Mainline on Istanbul-Almaty Route and appreciated the offer of Turkmenistan (based on information provided by Iranian delegation) to host the meeting of the five countries en-route the Container Train. The meeting requested the Secretariat to include the issues relating to the passenger train in the agenda of the same meeting.

76. The Council recommended a regional survey on operationalization of ECO container and passenger trains on Almaty-Istanbul route. The Council recommended to the CPR to consider using the feasibility Study Fund for that purpose. The study would be conducted with the participation of national consultants of the concerned Member States as well as competent international consultants and would made recommendations for smooth functioning of the trains including identification of relevant project proposals. The Council also suggested to launch a fact-finding mission composed of Director of Transport and Communications of the ECO Secretariat and Secretary General of ECO-CCI to find out/solve the existing problems hampering smooth running of ECO Container and Passenger Train.

77. The Council took note of the information on completion of the Kerman – Zahedan Railway in Iran in the near future. The Council welcomed the proposal to launch a demonstration train from Islamabad to Istanbul after completion of necessary construction in Iran. The technicalities of this issue would be discussed in the Expert Group Meeting to be established with the participation of ECO Secretariat, relevant regional/international donors/organizations as well as representatives of Iran, Pakistan and Turkey.

78. The Council appreciated the Secretariat for initiating contacts with China to revitalize the China-Middle East- Europe Corridor, as decided by the 9th Meeting of the Heads of Railway Authorities. The Council asked the Secretariat to continue these efforts. The Secretariat with the consent of the host authorities would invite the Chinese Railway Minister as a guest to the ECO Transport Ministers Meeting scheduled for Turkey, 15-17 April 2008.

79. As regards the Action Plan on China-Middle East-Europe Corridor, the Member States were requested to submit their views on the plan to the Secretariat as early as possible. The Secretariat would consider the said Action Plan and circulate the revised document among the member states. This issue might also be considered by the railway committee of the TTCC and the meeting of the five en-route countries of the container train.

80. The Council highlighted the importance of concerted regional cooperation to address the existing challenges in the field of air transport and reiterated that this sector

had great potential to promote tourism and transport in the region. Furthermore, taking note of the slow progress in the field of civil aviation, the Member States were requested to review the report of the First Meeting of the ECO Civil Aviation Authorities and Heads of National Airlines (Karachi – 12-14 February, 2001) and give proposals to improve Civil Aviation Cooperation in the region. In this connection the meeting suggested holding the Second Meeting of the Heads of Civil Aviation Authorities and National Airlines in the ECO Secretariat in the second half of the year 2008. The Secretariat should utilize the Special Support Fund for covering the air ticket of one participant from each country.

81. The RPC appreciated Kazakhstan and Turkey for providing the draft ECO Framework Agreement on Cooperation in the field of Air Transport. The Member States were requested to expedite conveying their comments on the draft two months before the Second Meeting of the Heads of Civil Aviation Authorities.

82. The Council took note of the briefings by some Member States on the status of implementation of the agreement on granting 50% discount to delegates of Member States and the Secretariat staff travelling to attend ECO meetings/events. The Member States who had not yet joined the agreement were requested do so at the earliest. The representative of Kazakhstan informed the meeting that Kazakhstan airline might provide the ECO Staff as well as the participants in its meetings with 50% discount.

83. The Council welcomed the decision of the 4th Meeting of the ECO Postal Authorities (Baku, October 09-10, 2007) to issue a joint ECO stamp on the occasion of the 10th ECO Summit to be held in October, 2008, in Islamabad. The meeting thanked Azerbaijan for preparing the draft logo of the common stamp. The representatives of Iran and Turkey informed the meeting that they had also sent their version of draft logo of joint ECO stamp to the Secretariat through diplomatic channels. The meeting decided that the ECO joint stamp should be finalized three months before the ECO Summit meeting.

84. The Council appreciated Pakistan's offer to host the 5th Meeting of the ECO Postal Authorities in November 2008. The Council also appreciated Iran's offer to host a workshop on privatization of postal services and cost accounting tentatively in May 2008 in Tehran. The Council welcomed the offer of Turkey to host, in 2008, the specialized committee to work out the technical and operational aspects of establishing linkages between the postal financial services and e-shopping facilities of the member states.

85. The Council decided that ECO contact group should be established on the sidelines of the next UPU congress in Geneva. Pakistan was designated as the coordinating country for the establishment of the contact group in close cooperation with ECO Secretariat.

86. The Council welcomed the offer of Pakistan to provide training facilities for the experts/officials of Member States in the Postal areas. Pakistan would convey the details of the training courses to ECO countries shortly. The meeting also welcomed the idea to develop regional cooperation in development of parcel services.

87. Noting with satisfaction that the ECO Postal Website was visited by over 40,000 users, the Council appreciated the efforts of the Postal Authority of Iran to establish and monitor the website and requested the Iranian authorities to prepare in close cooperation with the Secretariat, modalities for the Website. The modalities would be approved by the ECO Postal Authorities.

88. The Council welcomed the initiative of the Secretariat to organize review meetings and expand cooperation among the Member States on postal and telecommunication training courses through video conferences, and appreciated the readiness of the Islamic Republic of Iran to extend technical assistance to ECO Secretariat for that purpose. The 1st test video conference would be held among Azerbaijan, Iran, Kazakhstan, Pakistan and Turkey during the next meeting of the Heads of Telecommunications Authorities to be held in May 2008 in Tehran.

89. The Council took note of the briefings provided by the Member States on the status of the ECO-TAEFOS network, its operation and load among different member states. The Council requested the Islamic Republic of Pakistan to take necessary measures to be connected to the TAEFOS network in the ECO region.

90. The Council appreciated Iran's offer to host the 14th ECO Meeting of the Heads of Telecommunications Authorities and the 5th Expert Group Meeting on TAEFOS in Tehran on May 12-14, 2008. The Member States were requested to expedite confirming their participation in these meetings at the highest level.

91. The RPC appreciated the endeavours of the Secretariat to promote external relations in the field of Transport and Communications, in particular with UNESCAP, UNCTAD, IDB, UNDP, International Union of Railways (UIC), Organization for Cooperation of Railways (OSJD), International Road Transport Union (IRU), International Marine Organizations (IMO), Universal Postal Union (UPU), and International Federation of Freight Forwarders Associations (FIATA). The meeting requested the Secretariat to further strengthen relations with Asia Pacific Telecommunication (APT) as well as other regional international organizations particularly ADB and World Bank.

92. The Council welcomed the initiative of the Secretariat to conclude a trilateral agreement among ECO, UNESCAP and IDB aimed at speedy implementation of TTFA, the Asian Highway and Trans-Asian Railway network projects of the UNESCAP.

(c) Energy, Minerals & Environment

Energy

93. The Council, endorsed the Report of the 7th meeting of the Specialized Experts Task Group (7th SETG) on power held on 6-7 February 2008 in Islamabad along with its recommendations for the implementation of the feasibility study on Inter-connection of power systems of ECO member states.

94. The Council took note of the final Inception Report prepared by the Consultant, M/S NESPAK, containing the data of eight member states (except Turkmenistan and Kazakhstan). The Council emphasized that the Consultant should accelerate its work for timely completion of the study.

95. In order to maintain the revised schedule of the study as endorsed by the 7th SETG meeting, the Council requested member states to provide requisite data and any updates to the Consultant for preparation of the Interim Reports as per Data Request No.2, before 15 April 2008. The Council requested the member states to impress upon their concerned authorities, including the National Focal Points (NFPs), the need to

respond to the queries of the Consultant and the ECO Secretariat expeditiously. The member states were also requested to update, if necessary, the contact details (telephone, fax and e-mail) of their NFPs and inform the Secretariat, at the earliest possible. Kazakhstan and Turkmenistan were urged to kindly expedite nomination of their focal points along with contact details.

96. The Council appreciated the efforts of the concerned authorities of Pakistan, as the coordinating country for the interconnection of power systems, for holding the 7th SETG meeting, and took note of the Action Plan prepared by them, in cooperation with the ECO Secretariat, as recommended by the 17th COM meeting (Herat, 20 October 2007). It advised that the Plan be submitted to the CPR for consideration. The Council welcomed the offer of Turkey to host the 8th SETG meeting on power in November, 2008, in Istanbul.

97. With reference to para 75 of the 17th RPC Report, the Council appreciated the cooperation extended by the World Bank (WB) in pursuing regional energy trade including an analytical study, and noted that the first part of the study titled "*South Asia: Policy Paper for Regional Energy Trade: Trading Arrangements and Risk Management in International Electricity Trade*", had been circulated to ECO member states in July 2007.

98. The above study and related issues would be the subject of the 2nd ECO/WB Workshop on Regional Energy Trade scheduled for 8-9 July 2008 in Tehran, with the participation of International Organizations, Consultants and members of ECO/WB Advisory Working Group (AWG), who were nominated by member states. Taking note that eight member states had already nominated their representatives for ECO/WB AWG, the Council requested Afghanistan and Turkmenistan to kindly expedite nomination of two officials each for the AWG. The Council took note of the Iranian proposal to set up a web page under the ECO Secretariat's website containing information on the energy sector in the ECO Member States in order to enhance energy cooperation among member states. The Secretariat would follow the matter.

99. The Council welcomed the establishment of an interregional Working Group on Power Trade and Interconnection led by UNESCAP and ECO, with the participation of ASEAN, SAARC, PIF, and noted that the 11th Consultative Meeting of the Executive Heads of these Sub-regional Organizations (Almaty, May 2007), adopted the Terms of Reference for the above Working Group. The Council advised the Secretariat to pursue it in collaboration with UN ESCAP and other members of that Working Group to achieve tangible results.

100. The Council noted that Turkey had, since 2002, hosted six International Practical Training Courses on Energy Efficiency and Conservation attended by 57 engineers from the ECO Member States. The 6th International Training Course for Energy Managers was conducted on 19-30 November 2007 in Ankara. While appreciating this valuable contribution of Turkey, the Council requested other member states for proposals to expand cooperation in this field. The Council also welcomed the offer of the Republic of Turkey to host 7th International Training Course for Energy Managers in June 16-27, 2008 at Ankara.

101. The Council welcomed the readiness of the concerned Iranian authorities to host the 1st meeting of ECO Working Group on New and Renewable Sources of Energy in 2008 in Tehran. The Council requested the Secretariat to consider Iranian proposal to

partially support convening the meeting from the ECO Special Support Fund. The Council also welcomed Pakistan's willingness to hold a one day Seminar on this subject between 14-25 October, 2008.

102. The Council welcomed the offer of Turkey to host a Workshop on Renewable Energy Sources in 2009 with the participation of the Private Sectors of member states, including exhibition on the subject.

103. The Council recommended that the ECO Trade and Development Bank (ECO-TDB), in collaboration with other financial institutions might look into the possibility of providing financial support to the projects on new and renewable energies.

104. With reference to para 80 of the Report of the 17th RPC meeting, the Council appreciated the Secretariat's efforts to collect and place on the ECO Web-site relevant data about Oil and Gas sectors of the member states. It recommended continuing the effort, using all available data.

105. The Council was informed that the Secretariat had consultations with the member states on the extension (upto the year 2010) of the existing (2001-2005) Plan of Action for Energy/Petroleum Cooperation, as recommended by the 17th PRC meeting. The Council agreed on the extension of the existing Action Plan upto 2010. The 2nd ECO Ministerial Meeting on Energy/Petroleum would take a formal decision on this issue.

106. The Council emphasized that energy cooperation was among the three top priorities of ECO and important decisions needed to be taken to carry forward cooperation in that field. The Council stressed early convening of the 2nd Ministerial Meeting on Energy/Petroleum and invited the member states to offer hosting this important event in the year 2008. Iran was requested to reconfirm its readiness to host the meeting in 2008 and clarify its decision through diplomatic channels. In the meantime, the Council also requested other Member States to consider hosting this Ministerial meeting.

107. The Islamic Republic of Iran stressed the importance of exchanging experiences among member states in the field of refinery and proposed that member states should convey such information to the Secretariat. Iran proposed to hold a seminar on refinery in 2008. Exact dates would be communicated shortly.

Minerals

108. The Council endorsed the Report of the meeting of the ECO Heads of Geological Surveys (Tehran, 30-31 May 2007) for the establishment of ECO Geosciences Database and compilation of a Mineral Distribution Map (MDM) of the ECO Region.

109. The Council was informed that, as proposed during that meeting, the Geosciences Organization of Iran (Project Manager) was hosting a Training Course for experts involved in the preparation of ECO Geosciences Database. The Course started, as scheduled on 16 February 2008, in Karaj city for about three weeks. Twelve experts from Afghanistan, Azerbaijan, Pakistan, Tajikistan, Turkey and Turkmenistan were participating in it.

110. The Council noted, with appreciation, the valuable contribution of concerned authorities of the Islamic Republic of Iran, allocating USD 250,000/- for the feasibility

study on establishing ECO Geosciences Database. It was also noted that the 130th CPR meeting (12 December 2007) approved USD 50,000/- to help fund the Project.

111. The Council appreciated the readiness of the Geological Survey of Iran (Project Manager) to compile and print the ECO Mineral Distribution Map (MDM) and noted, to that end, that the preliminary Metallogenic Map of each member state, prepared on agreed format, would be submitted to the Project Manager latest by 1st June 2008. Azerbaijan, Pakistan, Tajikistan and Turkey had already designated their representatives to the Working Group on compilation of the MDM. The Council requested the remaining member states to follow suit at the earliest under intimation to the ECO Secretariat.

112. On the ECO Mineral Data Booklet (MDB), the Council requested Iran, Kazakhstan, Tajikistan and Turkmenistan to expedite providing the latest data, as per agreed format, to the Project Manager (Turkey). The Council welcomed information given by the representative of the Republic of Uzbekistan about preparation of their latest data to be provided to the Project Manager soon. All Member states were requested to compile their mineral data according to the agreed format and to convey them to the National Focal Point of Turkey for publishing the second edition of ECO Mineral Data Booklet as soon as possible.

113. The Council welcomed the offer of Kazakhstan to host the 4th ECO Mineral Experts Group meeting in the second half of 2008 in Astana. It would review progress on the implementation of the above projects, and consider new proposals for cooperation in the mineral field.

Environment

114. The Council called for accelerating implementation of the Plan of Action on Environment (extended upto 2010). The Council welcomed implementation of decisions and recommendations of the 3rd ECO Ministerial Meeting on Environment (30 June 2006, Almaty).

115. The Council requested the Secretariat to follow the decisions of the 3rd Ministerial Meeting on Environment regarding the Institute of Environmental Science and Technology (IEST), taking into consideration the proposed modality for the establishment of ECO Regional Centers to be approved by the Council of Permanent Representatives (CPR) on behalf of the Council of Ministers (COM).

116. The Council endorsed the report of the First ECO Experts Group Meeting on Biodiversity (Islamabad, 24-25 April 2007) and the Work Plan on Biodiversity in ECO region as well as Calendar of Events in this field. The Council welcomed Kazakhstan's offer to host the 2nd Experts Group Meeting (EGM) on Biodiversity in the second half of 2008. While appreciating the offer of Pakistan and Turkey to hosting meetings on Biodiversity in 2008/09, the Council requested the remaining member states to indicate their willingness to host meetings on Biodiversity (2008-2015). The Secretariat also called for conveying particulars of their national focal points on Biodiversity.

117. The Council took note of the outcome of the Seminars on Ecotourism and Watershed Rehabilitation held in May 2007 in Turkey. It emphasized implementing these recommendations and welcomed the adoption of the outcome of the Seminar by the First Task Force Meeting on Ecotourism (Tehran, December 2007). The Council asked the

member states to expedite providing the Secretariat with particulars of their national focal points in both fields. It also requested the member states to offer hosting the 2nd seminar/training course on Watershed Rehabilitation during the second half of 2008 in order to follow up the recommendations of the first seminar and to consider developments in the subject field.

118. The Council took note of the report of the 1st Task Force Meeting on Ecotourism (Tehran, December 16-17, 2007). It welcomed the idea of holding a Convention on Nature-Based Tourism and establishing a Data Base for collecting relevant information offered by the Iranian delegation. It also welcomed drafting a Plan of Action for developing cooperation in the field of ecotourism and emphasized implementing the recommendations of the above task force meeting. The Council requested all member states to offer their willingness to host the Experts Meeting on Ecotourism in the 2nd quarter of the year 2008.

119. As regards the ECO Bulletin on Environment, only a few member states had contributed material for the 6th issue. In view of this, the Secretariat was obliged to merge the summer and autumn issues and publish the 6th issue in March 2008 which would also be available on the ECO Website at www.ecosecretariat.org. In order to enrich the contents of the Bulletin, the Council requested all member states to submit relevant material/articles for the Bulletin on regular basis.

120. As per decision of the 17th RPC Meeting, the National Progress Report (NPR) of the member states on implementation of the Plan of Action had to be submitted, in the beginning of each year, on the agreed format. While thanking Azerbaijan, Kyrgyzstan, Iran, Pakistan and Turkey for submitting their NPR for 2006, the Council asked the remaining member states to expedite providing their NPR before the 5th Working Group Meeting in Baku on 22-23 May 2008. The member states were also requested to submit their NPR for 2007 on time (the first half of 2008) enabling the Secretariat to prepare an integrated report for circulation to member states and to submit to the next Ministerial Meeting on Environment. The Council was informed that Uzbekistan had prepared NPR which would be conveyed to the Secretariat soon.

121. The Council appreciated the offer of the Republic of Azerbaijan to host the 5th ECO Working Group on Environment in Baku on 22-23 May 2008, and requested the member states to actively participate in it. It also asked them to convey their proposals, if any, to the Secretariat for developing cooperation in the field of Environment as also for improving implementation of the ECO Plan of Action on Environment (extended upto 2010) so that they could be considered at the above WGM.

122. Kyrgyzstan, Pakistan and Turkey were appreciated for conveying their comments on the Iranian project proposals for cooperation in the field of Environment. The Council requested the remaining member states to expedite providing their views/comments, if any, not later than April 2008 so that these could be reviewed before the 5th meeting of WGE in Baku, 22-23 May 2008.

(d) Agriculture, Industry and Tourism

· Agriculture

123. The Council thanked the Republic of Turkey for its readiness to host the Donor's Conference scheduled for 7-9 May 2008 in Turkey to raise funds for the ECO Regional Program for Food Security. It thanked FAO for its technical assistance in the revision of the RPFS for the Conference. The Council called on the Member States to actively participate in the Conference by assigning high ranking officials from their ministries of agriculture, finance and planning, as requested in the Secretariat's invitation letter circulated to them.

124. The Council expressed its thanks to the FAO Headquarters and its Near East Office for preparing ten national projects for the ECO Member States and called for their early finalization and submission to IDB so that the implementation phase could commence without delay.

125. The Council noted that the Seed Conference under the FAO-ECO Technical Cooperation Programme (TCP) on Strengthening Seed Supply in the Region scheduled for June 2008 in Bishkek had to be postponed due to organizational issues. The Kyrgyz Republic expressed its strong commitment to host the Conference in the second half of 2008. The Council requested the Secretariat to specify exact dates in consultation with FAO, ICARDA and the host authorities.

126. The Council noted with appreciation that the 2nd Workshop on Harmonization of Seed Regulations was organized in Baku from 30 May - 1 June 2007. The Council also appreciated that the Training Course for Trainers on Seed Marketing and Promotion was held in Istanbul on 24-29 June 2007.

127. The Council expressed its satisfaction at the preparation by the Secretariat, in the framework of ECO-FAO TCP, of draft (i) Variety Release and Plant Variety Protection (PVP) Systems; (ii) Phytosanitary / Quarantine Measures in ECO member countries, (iii) list of quarantine and regulated non-quarantine pests common in the region on seeds and seed potato, and (iv) Regional Seed Certification Schemes. The Council stressed the need for early finalization and implementation of these documents after completing necessary procedures for approval.

128. The Council welcomed the idea of establishment of a Regional Seed Association/Forum as suggested under the FAO-ECO TCP and requested the Secretariat to follow the matter through relevant ECO decision-making bodies taking into account the ECO Rules and Regulations. The Council requested the member states to provide inputs to the ECO Secretariat for preparation of the draft Statute of the proposed forum/association and convey their readiness to host the Headquarters of the proposed association.

129. The Council thanked the Islamic Republic of Iran for hosting the 1st ECO Heads of Meteorological Organizations on 3-5 September 2007 in Mashhad and welcomed the inauguration of the Regional Center for Risk Management of Natural Disasters on that occasion. It requested the working group to expedite preparing the statute of the Center. The Council requested Turkey and Uzbekistan to consider signing the MoU establishing the Center. The Council supported, in principle, the use of the ECO Feasibility Fund for the establishment of Regional Center for Risk Management of Natural Disasters in the field of drought management, a priority in ECO agricultural cooperation. In this regard, the Council requested the CPR to consider allocating US\$50,000 as seed money to support

the activities and programmes of Center. The Council requested the Center to develop regional programmes in coordination with relevant international organizations like WMO.

130. The Council welcomed the offer of Pakistan for the establishment of Water Management Centre subject to approval by the relevant decision making bodies of ECO and in line with the proposed modality for the establishment of Regional Centres.

131. The Council thanked the Islamic Republic of Pakistan for its offer to host the 2nd Working Group meeting to finalize the draft document on the establishment of the ECO Permanent Veterinary Commission (ECO-PVECO) in last quarter of 2008, but before the 4th Ministerial Meeting on Agriculture and requested it to specify exact date and venue for the meeting. The Council requested the member states to convey their views/comments on the draft document.

132. The Council requested the member states to volunteer to host the 2nd ECO Heads of Veterinary Organizations Meeting in 2008.

133. The Council took note, with appreciation, of signing the Letter of Agreement between the ECO Secretariat and Agricultural Extension and Education Organization of the Islamic Republic of Iran for the utilization of US\$50,000 from ECO Feasibility Fund for the Establishment of ECO Agricultural Biotechnology Network (ECO-ABN). It welcomed the readiness of the Islamic Republic of Iran to host the 2nd Meeting of National Focal Points of ECO Agricultural Biotechnology Network in 2008. The Council requested the National Focal Points of Turkey and Pakistan to prepare draft Plan of Action for development/harmonization of bio-safety regulations and send regional information related to Intellectual Property Rights in biotechnology, to help establish ECO-ABN.

134. The Council thanked the Republic of Azerbaijan for its readiness to host the 4th ECO Ministerial Meeting on Agriculture in the second half of 2008 in Baku and requested the member states to actively participate in it.

135. The Council while noting that ECO cooperation in agriculture sector had further expanded and flourished, reiterated the need for enhancement of the existing capacity of the Directorate of Agriculture, Industry and Tourism of the Secretariat and called on the CPR to consider this matter taking a positive approach.

Industry

136. The Council thanked the Republic of Kazakhstan for its readiness to host the 4th Ministerial Meeting on Industry in November 2008.

137. The Council called on the member states to come up with concrete project proposals for implementation of the ECO Regional Strategy on Industrial Cooperation, the Plans of Action on Small and Medium-sized Enterprises (SMEs), Industrial Property Rights and the Establishment of Technology Transfer Center, which were approved by the 3rd Ministerial Meeting held in November, 2006, Lahore. The Council took note of the projects proposed by Pakistan in March 2007 as well as during the working session on agriculture, industry and tourism and called on member states to convey their comments to the ECO Secretariat. With regard to financing of the projects in the area of small and medium enterprises, it was recommended that SME Bank of Pakistan might formally

forward the funding request to the ECO Trade and Development Bank through the National Bank of Pakistan.

138. The Council took note that during the EGM of ECO-UNIDO Joint Project on Trade and Capacity Building of ECO member states on 18-19 December, 2007, in Tehran, the representatives of Iran, Pakistan, Turkey and Kazakhstan, being members of the Task Force, resolved outstanding issues about the Statute of RISCAM. The Council requested them (except Iran and Turkey) to convey their formal concurrence to the agreed arrangement, as intimated by Turkey, so that the Statute could be submitted to the 4th Ministerial Meeting on Industry for approval and signing. The Council took note of the observation made by Iran that it would submit a revised draft roadmap for the provisional implementation of RISCAM Statute for the consideration and comments of member states. Iran also proposed that in view of possible resolution of the outstanding issues in the draft Statute, through diplomatic channels, there was no need to organize the second Task Force on the Statute and Iran might rather host the second EGM on Standardization in the first half of 2008 to finalize the roadmap and follow up the regional Strategy on Standardization.

139. The Council thanked the Islamic Republic of Pakistan for hosting the 2nd Meeting of the ECO Heads of Privatization Administration and the 1st Meeting of HLEG on Privatization and Private Sector Development on 10-12 April 2007.

140. The Council thanked the Islamic Republic of Iran for hosting the Working Group meeting for establishing the ECO Website on Privatization which was held in Tehran on 10 December, 2007. The meeting agreed a Draft Plan of Action on establishing the website.

141. The Council requested the member states to expedite nominating their focal points in the field of privatization and take necessary steps for implementation of the Plan of Action on Privatization.

142. The Council welcomed the offer of the Republic of Turkey to host the 2nd HLEG and 3rd Heads Meeting of Privatization Administrations on 17-19 April, 2008 and requested member states to actively participate in them.

143. The Council took note with appreciation that the 1st Permanent Committee Meeting on the Establishment of ECO Technology Transfer Center was held on 30-31 October, 2007 in Tehran. The Council welcomed the agreement on four project proposals pertaining to the establishment of the ETT Center as follows:

- Identifying potential transferors and transferees in the ECO region
- Identifying supporters of Technology Transfer process in the region
- ETT Center establishment – Phase 0
- Improving the contents, form, and functions of ETT Center website

The Council requested the CPR to consider allocating US\$50000 from the Feasibility Fund for phase 1 and 2 each for their immediate implementation. The estimated duration of each project is 1 year. The Council recommended that for the implementation of phase 3 and 4, the Permanent Committee under the coordination of the ECO Secretariat would seek funding from donor organizations.

144. The Council requested the member states to fill in the questionnaires prepared by Iranian Industrial Development Research Organization (IDRO) to be used for the establishment of Technology Transfer Center and (except Azerbaijan, Iran, Pakistan and Turkey) to nominate Focal Points on Technology Transfer and Management. Since the website of ETT had been launched, member states were requested to enter their relevant data in the website to make it more useful.

145. The Council noted with appreciation that ECO-UNIDO-IDB Training Workshop on Technology Transfer would be held on June 16-18, 2008 in Tehran and called on the member states to actively participate in it.

146. The Council took note with appreciation that the 1st Steering Committee meeting, responsible for the implementation of the Plan of Action on SMEs, was held on 14-15 January, 2008 in Tehran and welcomed the work done by it.

147. The Council appreciated the efforts of the Islamic Republic of Iran for hosting the 1st Taskforce Meeting on establishment of ECO Nanotechnology Network (ECO-NAN) on 21-22 May, 2008 in Tehran and requested the member states' active participation.

148. The Council appreciated the offer of the Republic of Turkey to host the 1st Coordination Committee Meeting on Industrial Property Rights in the last week of May 2008 and requested it to specify the exact dates of the meeting in consultation with the ECO Secretariat and requested the concerned member states to fill in the questionnaire prepared by Turkey.

149. The Council recalled the decision of the 3rd Ministerial Meeting on Industry (November 2006) to contribute more actively to the reconstruction of Afghanistan through ECO programmes as well as through bilateral projects in the field of industry, especially Small and Medium Sized Enterprises, minerals, oil and gas involving the private sector. The Council requested the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan to come up with proposals to benefit fully from the assistance extended by the member states.

150. The Council requested the Secretariat to continue its efforts to enhance cooperation with international industrial organizations, including UNIDO, for holding workshops with financial support of IDB and other financial institutions.

Tourism

151. The Council expressed its thanks to the Republic of Azerbaijan for hosting the 2nd High Level Experts Group (HLEG) on Tourism on 27-28 March, 2008 in Baku. It requested the member states for active participation in it.

152. The Council thanked the ECI for preparing the questionnaire for the ECO Tourism Guidebook, and appreciated the generous pledge of the Islamic Republic of Iran to cover 80% of the cost of printing the Guide Book.

153. The Council thanked the Islamic Republic of Iran for its offer to host the 1st Ministerial Meeting on Tourism on 7-9 July, 2008 in Shiraz and the 1st ECO Tourism Festival/Fair Day on 28 November 2008. The Council requested the member states to participate in these events at the highest possible level.

154. The Council requested the member states to convey their views/comments on the draft modality of the ECO Tourism Promotion Fund circulated shortly before the 18th RPC meeting, and actively participate in the work of the task force established to finalize the modality.

(e) Human Resources & Sustainable Development

155. The Council deliberated on Millennium Development Goals, human resources development, health, natural disaster, drug control and cooperation among the Interior Ministries of Member States. All the member states pledged their commitment to achieving the MDG goals. The main points agreed upon are given below:

Human and Sustainable Development:

156. The Council endorsed the Report of the second Meeting of High Level Experts Group (HLEG) on Human Resources Development and Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) held on 11-12 February 2008 in Islamabad. The Council took note of its recommendation, especially those pertaining to determining priority areas for MDGs as well as mutual recognition of educational qualifications, and urged expeditious follow up action on them. The ECO Secretariat was asked to prepare a progress report before the next meeting.

157. The Council requested the member states to consider hosting the 3rd HLEG on Human Resource Development and MDGs implementation in 2008/2009 and urged the Member States to actively participate in it.

158. The Council called on the Secretariat to approach the relevant UN Agencies including UNFPA and WHO for a consultant to prepare a detailed report/Concept Paper on the proposed priority areas i.e. MDGs 4, 5 and 6. It would contain specific proposals for regional cooperation among member states including the best practices of member states and similar regional/international organizations.

159. The Council noted that some Member States (Afghanistan, Azerbaijan Kyrgyzstan, Pakistan and Turkey) had introduced their national focal points on human development and MDGs and urged the remaining Member States to kindly expedite introducing their national focal points.

160. The Council requested Pakistan and Turkey to consider organizing the "Regional Conference of Mayors of ECO Capitals and Metropolises: Good Urban Governance" in 2008. The Mayors of Capitals and the second largest cities of Member States would be invited to this meeting. The Council urged all Member States to confirm their participation at the highest possible level.

161. The Council welcomed the offer of Islamic Republic of Pakistan to allocate 48 seats to students from ECO member states in well established institutions of higher learning in fields such as Medicine, Dentistry, Pharmacy and Engineering as well as offering fully funded short-term courses in a range of other fields. It urged other member states to avail these courses and consider offering similar facilities to students from ECO member states.

Health

162. The Council expressed satisfaction at the increasing cooperation in health sector and requested the Secretariat to actively pursue health programmes/initiatives in general and those for Reducing Child Mortality and Improving Maternal Health in particular in the coming years.

163. The Council acknowledged the Secretariat's proposal to hold the 1st ECO Health Ministers meeting and requested the member states to consider hosting the event during the second half of 2008 or the first half of 2009.

164. The Council endorsed the Report of the 1st Meeting of the High Level Experts Group (HLEG) on Drug (Pharmaceutical) Regulatory Authorities hosted by the Islamic Republic of Iran on 13-15 November 2007. Acknowledging the importance of improving safety and availability of medicine to citizens, the Council underlined the recommendation of that meeting to establish the "ECO Drug Regulatory Authority Network" and requested the member states' cooperation to that end.

165. The Council welcomed the offer of the Islamic Republic of Pakistan to host the 2nd High Level Experts Group (HLEG) meeting on Drug (Pharmaceutical) Regulatory Authorities in 2008 and requested an exact date. Other member states were requested to actively participate in it.

166. The Council noted that since the meeting in Tehran (November 2007), no member state had introduced its national focal points in the Pharmaceutical field for increased cooperation in the field and requested the member states to do so by the end of 2008.

167. The Council reviewed the priority areas proposed by the 1st HLDA meeting including the Current Good Manufacturing Practices (cGMP), Counterfeit medicines, Drug safety (Adverse Drug Reactions), Registration of medicines, Drug testing and drug control laboratories and requested the member states' views and proposals to extend cooperation in these areas. The Islamic Republic of Iran offered to host Workshop on Quality Control of Pharmaceuticals in the November, 2008 and Workshop on Pharmacovigilance in February, 2009. The meeting also asked other member states to offer hosting relevant events.

168. The Council appreciated the four days Study Tour organized in collaboration with UNFPA and Ministry of Health and Medical Education of Iran, 9-12 December 2007, and noted with satisfaction its summary record circulated by the Secretariat.

169. The Council acknowledged that the Study Tour, aimed at exchange of information and best practices among the member states, was very successful and activities of this kind should be continued.

170. The Council requested Turkey to consider the possibility of organizing the second Study Tour in 2008/2009. It also requested the Secretariat to enlist the cooperation of relevant international organizations to make them of maximum benefit to member states.

171. The Council requested the Member States to host the Workshop on Prevention of HIV/AIDS in 2008.

172. The Council also welcomed the proposal of the Mother and Child Health and Family Planning Directorate of Turkey to provide technical support to training programs such as Training of Trainers, National Neonatal Resuscitation Program (NRP) and Safe Motherhood and Emergency Obstetric Care.

173. The Council also welcomed the proposal of the Islamic Republic of Iran to host the 1st ECO meeting of Heads of Blood Transfusion Organizations on 23-24 June, 2008 in Tehran and requested all member states to actively participate in it.

· **Cooperation with international organization on Natural Disaster Management**

174. The Council appreciated the signing of a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) between ECO and the United Nations Secretariat of International Strategy for Disaster Reduction (UN/ISDR), on 9th May 2007.

175. The Council endorsed the convening of the following meetings in 2008:

- The Third ECO Conference on Disaster Risk Reduction (Tehran);

- Workshop on Global Risk Assessment Report (Iran); and
- Workshop on Promotion of Disaster Risk Reduction (DRR) for Media (venue to be determined later).

176. The Council thanked the Islamic Republic of Pakistan for hosting the ECO International Conference on Disaster Risk Management (Islamabad, 8-10 October, 2007) organized by National Disaster Management Authority (NDMA) of Pakistan. The Council also took note of the report of that Conference and requested member states to nominate focal points to share experiences and institutionalize cooperation on disaster management as also that of the Second Workshop on “School Earthquake Safety Review” held alongside the Conference on Disaster Risk Management.

177. The Council welcomed the offer of Islamic Republic of Iran to organize the Third ECO Conference on Disaster Risk Reduction in Tehran in 2008 and urged all member states to actively participate in the meeting.

178. The Council welcomed signing of MoU among member states on establishment of the ECO Regional Center for Risk Management of Natural Disasters in Mashhad (September 4, 2007) and commending the Iranian Metrological Organization for hosting this centre, requested all member states to expedite full implementation of the MoU.

· **ECO and UN/OCHA cooperation**

179. The Council took note of cooperation between ECO and UN/OCHA to promote regional cooperation to strengthen disaster preparedness, support member states with timely and well-coordinated relief assistance, Promote regional programmes and Strengthen/establish specialized regional collaborative centres as also help with capacity building.

· **Drug Control Coordination Unit (DCCU)**

180. The Council requested the member states to regularly circulate their country reports and statistics on drug control, using the computerized network of DCCU.

181. The Council reiterated its request to member states to expedite harmonization of their legal drug combating structures in accordance with the UN Conventions that they had already signed/ratified.

182. The Council expressed appreciation for the valuable cooperation extended by the Turkish International Academy Against Drugs and Organized Crime (TADOC) to the DCCU and welcomed their offer to organize training courses including: (i) “Train the Trainers Course” (Narcotic & Custom Officers), (ii) CBT Mobile Training, and (iii) Surveillance Techniques Training Programme.

183. The Council invited the member states to volunteer holding regular training programs on drug control taking advantage of the support of Turkish International Academy Against Drugs and Organized Crimes (TADOC).

184. The Council took note with appreciation of the readiness of the Islamic Republic of Iran for organizing Anti-Narcotics Training Courses for the Member States in Tehran at the Regional Anti-Narcotics Training Centre.

185. The Council appreciated UNODC, Tehran for the revised Project Idea Document and requested the Secretariat to maintain cooperation with UNODC and other relevant International Organizations to receive necessary technical and financial assistance.

186. The Council appreciated the Paris Pact initiative for the proposed funding of the revised Project Idea, and requested the Secretariat to approach member states, particularly Iran, Turkey and Pakistan for partial funding the Project. It also urged the CPR to kindly approve US\$ 50,000/- from the ECO Feasibility Study Fund (FSF) for the Project.

187. The Council appreciated the offer of the Islamic Republic of Iran to host the Experts Group Meeting on Drug Control (EGM) on 14-16 April, 2008 at Tehran. The outcome of the EGM would be presented to the 1st High Level Expert Group Meeting (HLEG) on Combating Terrorism and Organized Crimes scheduled for 29-30 April, 2008 at Ankara.

188. The Council urged the Member States to expedite their views on the Revised ECO Plan of Action on Combating Illegal Narcotic Trade, proposed by the Drug Control Headquarters (DCHQ) of the Islamic Republic of Iran and circulated to Member States on 27th November, 2007.

189. The Council referred to the draft Statute of the "Regional Center for Drug Control and Organized Crime (RCDCOC)", prepared jointly by the ECO Secretariat and the Ministry of Interior of Islamic Republic of Iran and circulated to Member States on February 6, 2008. It urged Member States to expedite their views on the draft Statute for presentation to the EGM (Tehran, 14-16 April, 2008) for consideration.

190. The Council urged Member States to consider draft Statute of ECOPOL jointly prepared by the ECO Secretariat and the Ministry of Interior of the Islamic Republic of Iran (circulated to Member States on 18th December, 2007) and expedite sending their views on the draft Statute in time for the consideration of High Level Expert Group Meeting (HLEG) on Combating Terrorism and Organized Crimes scheduled for 29-30 April, 2008 at Ankara.

191. The Council urged the Member States to expedite their comments on the European Commission Project (concept paper) circulated to them on December 19, 2007 so that further action could be taken in coordination with the European Commission.

The First Meeting of ECO Interior Ministers

192. The Council referred to the 1st Meeting of ECO Interior Ministers in Tehran on 1st November 2006, and requested Member States to expedite follow-up action on its decisions.

193. The Council took note of the progress report on decisions of the 1st ECO Interior Ministers' meeting received from the Islamic Republic of Iran and the Republic of Azerbaijan, and urged other member states to expedite similar action.

194. The Council referred to the draft Plan of Action prepared by the Secretariat as discussed during the Ministerial Meeting and circulated to Member States on 14th October, 2007, and urged the Member States to expedite their views so that the Action Plan could be finalized by the HLEG meeting (Ankara, 29-30 April, 2008).

195. The Council appreciated the offer of Turkmenistan to host the 2nd Meeting of the ECO Interior Ministers on 26-27 May, 2008 at Ashgabat and urged member states to actively participate in the meeting.

196. The Council appreciated the offer of the Republic of Turkey to host the High Level Expert Group Meeting (HLEG) on Combating Terrorism and Organized Crimes on 29-30 April, 2008 at Ankara. The outcome of this meeting would be presented to the 2nd Ministerial Meeting in Ashgabat. The Council requested the member states to send timely information about their experiences in combating terrorism to the Secretariat for circulation among the member states. It should also cover methods being used by terrorist groups.

197. The Council appreciated the offer of the Republic of Turkey to give 5-7 days counter-terrorism course in Turkey or any other member country in 2008 in collaboration with ECO Secretariat provided financial assistance was covered by the Secretariat and/or international organizations.

198. The Council appreciated the Secretariat for holding the 1st Regional Workshop on "Irregular Migration, Human Trafficking & Migrant Smuggling in the ECO Region" on 10-11 March, 2008 at Kish Island, Iran, in collaboration with IOM.

199. With regard to implementation of the decisions of the 1st Meeting of ECO Interior Ministers, the Council welcomed the offer of the Islamic Republic of Iran to host the meeting of the border security forces/law enforcement agencies in September 2008, and also a workshop on border security issues in July 2008. It requested Iran to send detailed information to the Secretariat for circulation among member states.

200. The Council underlined the importance of realization of MDG Goals, including Goal-3 to promote women's role in economic development of the region.

(f) **Project and Economic Research & Statistics**

Project Research

201. The Council agreed to extend the ECO's Plan of Action (2003-2007) for the reconstruction of Afghanistan, until a new Plan of Action was finalised. The Government of Afghanistan was requested to inform the Secretariat of their needs and projects for mid-term or long-term period including projects of productive nature and various kinds of technical assistance (training, provision of equipment, etc.).

202. The Council appreciated Iran's pledge of an additional US\$ 600,000 to the ECO Fund for Reconstruction of Afghanistan during 2007-2008 and Pakistan's announcement to transfer an additional US\$1 million from its earlier pledge. The Council requested Pakistan, Iran and Turkey to transfer more amount from their pledged money to the Fund. The Council recalled the interest shown by Kazakhstan in Afghanistan's reconstruction during the 17th COM at Herat and appealed to Kazakh authorities and to other member states to contribute to the Fund. The Council requested the ECO Secretariat to present to the next RPC meeting a progress report on the implementation of projects financed with the ECO Fund for the Reconstruction of Afghanistan.

203. The Council welcomed the commencement of the Construction of Deh Mazang Public Park and maintenance of Kabul Zoo. A project worth US \$ 1.3 million was awarded to the State Construction Company of Afghanistan in March 2007. The first instalment of US\$ 325,000 was paid to the Company in May 2007. It was the first project financed from the ECO Special Fund for Reconstruction of Afghanistan. The Council noted that the Secretariat would not transfer any more money to the Company without the requisite Bank guarantee. It called on the Afghan authorities to ensure that the implementing agency met all the requirements of the contract for early implementation of the project. The Council also welcomed the proposal of the Islamic Republic of Pakistan to establish a Pakistan pavilion in Deh Mazang Park in Kabul and requested the Member States to consider establishing such pavilions in the Park to showcase their respective cultures.

204. The Council noted the approval by the 131st CPR of a Maternity Hospital Project in Faryab Province. The Council requested the Secretariat, in coordination with the Afghan Government, to follow-up new projects to be proposed by the Afghan authorities for the consideration of CPR provided that resources were available.

205. The Council welcomed the technical assistance of UNESCAP aimed at improved project planning, monitoring and evaluation at the Secretariat through applying results-based management (RBM) approach. The Council requested the Secretariat to invite the relevant representatives of Member States to attend the training courses on RBM approach to be organized in the framework of the said assistance.

206. The Council appreciated renewed efforts of the Secretariat to utilize the ECO Feasibility Study Fund to finance projects in the priority areas of trade and investment, transport and communications, energy, agriculture, minerals and scientific and technological research and recommended to the ECO Secretariat to expedite proposals for revision of the Functional Methodology for utilization of the ECO Feasibility Study Fund

to enhance its efficiency and effectiveness as well as smooth functioning, keeping in view the imperatives of transparency and equitable participation of member states.

207. The Council requested the Secretariat to continue approaching international donor organizations like World Bank, IDB, ADB as well as the ECO Trade and Development Bank to obtain funds and technical support for various ECO projects/programmes.

208. The Council appreciated the preparation of updated edition of the Directory of Training and Research Institutions and the Roster of Leading Experts and Consultants among the Member States, based on inputs received from Afghanistan, Iran, Kyrgyzstan, Pakistan, Tajikistan, Turkey, and Turkmenistan. The Secretariat would also make these documents available on the ECO website and provide this information to relevant focal points through e-mail. The Council noted that, while undertaking projects/programmes, preference would be given to these experts/institutions in line with the ECO Functional Methodology. The Council requested the Member States to keep sending updated information to the Secretariat for effective utilization of these documents.

Economic Research and Statistics

209. The Council noted with appreciation the adoption of the Tehran Communiqué and the decisions of the 1st Meeting of ECO Heads of National Statistical Offices held in Tehran on January 28-29, 2008. It noted with satisfaction that the meeting approved the ECO Framework of Cooperation and Plan of Action in statistics as the basis for further intensifying cooperation in statistics, and requested the Secretariat to establish an Expert Group on Statistics for implementation of the Plan of Action. In this regard, the Member States were requested to consider hosting the Expert Group meeting and convey their decisions to the ECO Secretariat within two months.

210. The Council noted the Secretariat's efforts to publish draft country-wise statistical bulletins and requested the member states to regularly provide official national statistics along with adequate metadata for such bulletins. Meanwhile, it requested the Secretariat to consider a timetable for publishing the bulletins after receiving relevant data and metadata from member states.

211. The Council acknowledged the need to regularly assess progress made in achieving ECO goals/objectives based on commonly agreed statistical indicators. To this end, the Council appreciated the Secretariat's work in preparing the ECO Countries Key Indicators, presenting the most current available economic, financial, and social data and placing these on the ECO Website. The Council requested the member states and the Secretariat to review the statistical indicators collected and published by the Secretariat, with a view to streamlining them and collecting the most relevant data in time so that the proposal in this regard be prepared and considered by the 6th NFPs meeting.

212. The Council expressed its thanks to the Islamic Republic of Iran for hosting the Workshop on Economic Statistics and the Informal Sector held on 10-13 November, 2007 in Tehran. The Council also welcomed the preparation of the training programme for statisticians from member states for the next few years by the Secretariat. The Council requested the member states to convey their training needs as well as existing training facilities which could be used for capacity-building of experts.

213. The Council appreciated the summary review of macro-economic developments, including human development indices and future prospects in the ECO member states and in the region in general, prepared by the Secretariat as part of the working paper. The Council agreed that such reports should be prepared for future RPC meetings.

214. The Council noted with satisfaction the publication of the last issue of ECO Annual Economic Report in July 2007. It urged the member states who had not provided the necessary inputs for the next issue of the Report to provide these within one month. These should include country reports as well as statistical data according to the format circulated by the Secretariat. The Council asked the Secretariat to finalize and publish the 2008 issue of the Report latest by July 2008 according to the available inputs from the member states.

215. The Council recommended to the Secretariat to continue preparing reports/papers relating to the region's economic developments for various ECO meetings, ECO News Bulletins and ECO Website. The Secretariat might promote further studies on important regional issues, such as economic perspective, trade and investment, alternative sources of energy, free and special economic zones in the region. The technical and financial assistance of international donor organizations as also the ECO Feasibility Fund might be utilized to that end.

216. The Council appreciated the idea to conduct research proposed by the Islamic Republic of Iran on "Macroeconomic Modelling for ECO Countries: An Input - Output Approach" for the ECO member countries and requested the member states (except Pakistan and Turkey) to expedite their comments within next two months.

217. The Islamic Republic of Pakistan while supporting Iran's proposal stressed that this should be implemented after adequate preparations, including necessary database for Computable General Equilibrium Model (CGEM), as also all other steps needed for compilation of input-output tables for the region. The Republic of Turkey expressed the view that since reliable and consistent input-output tables at the national level needed a high degree of capacity, particularly in the area of national accounts, the proposal should be revised to make it implementable with particular emphasis on capacity enhancement.

218. The Council requested the Islamic Republic of Iran to take into consideration the comments of Pakistan and Turkey and other member states, if any, and revise the proposal for consideration of the relevant ECO decision-making bodies.

219. The Council took note of the research proposal for conducting a study on economic strategy which had already been circulated, and requested the member states to expedite their comments. Pakistan proposed to name the proposed study as Strategy on Economic Management in Member Countries. The Council stressed that such a study was very important to ensure that ECO's economic strategy was updated and streamlined, taking into account the potential for regional cooperation, the resources of member states and the challenges of globalization. Based on the study, amendments might be proposed to the Economic Cooperation Strategy for the ECO Region. The Council requested the Secretariat to approach ECO Trade and Development Bank as well as international donors, especially UNDP and IDB, to secure financial and technical support for the proposed study.

220. The Council took note of the information provided by the Secretariat on the research project proposals identified in the framework of ECO Joint Economic Research Programme. The Council agreed that Terms of Reference for the Marketing Survey on the Selection of Potential Exportable and Competitive Goods and Products to increase intra-ECO trade would be prepared by the Republic of Turkey. The Secretariat would provide background information for it. The Council requested the leading research institutes of the Islamic Republic of Iran and Republic of Kazakhstan to finalize at the earliest the revision of research project proposals which had been identified in the framework of ECO Joint Economic Research Programme. The Secretariat would then approach the CPR as well as ECO Trade and Development Bank and international donors, to secure financial and technical support.

221. The Council requested the Secretariat to prepare Terms of References (TORs) for the scientific journal titled "ECO Economic Journal" and publish the pilot issue by end of 2008 to promote high quality scientific research papers on issues of region's economic and social development and to facilitate dissemination and sharing of research and analysis in the region. The Member States were requested to encourage relevant academic institutions/researchers to send their scientific papers to be considered for publication in the journal.

222. The Council, recognizing the importance of timely implementation of ECO projects and programmes in the field of economic statistics and project research, requested the member states to nominate researchers for secondment to the Secretariat to implement specific assignments including preparation of Annual Economic Report, Project Research, ECO Framework of Cooperation in Statistics, and Joint Economic Research Programme. The Council recommended that while proposing revision of modalities for secondment, there should be an appropriate increase in the amount of allowances provided to seconded officers to allocate an amount up to US\$ 1000 for accommodation and transportation cost in Tehran in addition to a daily allowance subject to the approval of CPR.

223. The Council also recommended to envisage a specific amount to be provided from ECO Feasibility Study Fund for outsourcing projects in Economic Research and Statistics and other fields.

224. The Council appreciated the offer of the Republic of Turkey to host the 6th Meeting of the NFPs on economic research and statistics in November 2008 in Ankara and called for the active participation of the member states. The Council requested the CPR to consider defraying the cost of air tickets of two delegates (one for Economic Research and one for Statistics) from each member state from the SSF.

225. The Council welcomed the recommendation made by the 5th meeting of NFPs to assign the theme "Prospects of intra-regional trade in the ECO region" to the 6th NFP meeting for discussion, and requested the Secretariat to invite an eminent expert/researcher to prepare background paper and make presentation during the meeting on that topic. It further requested the member states to nominate experts for participation in the meeting and to suggest policy recommendations on the theme.

226. The Council selected the title "Economic Development and Regional Strategic Vision, Challenges and Opportunities" as the main theme topic for the 19th RPC meeting and requested the Secretariat to prepare a background paper on the subject.

(g) **Inter-Regional ECO Activities:**

(i) **ECO Specialized Agencies and Regional Institutions**

227. The Council reiterated its earlier recommendation that the non-signatory Member States should sign the Charters of ECO Cultural Institute (ECI), ECO Science Foundation and ECO Educational Institute and requested the signatory Member States to ratify these Charters at the earliest.

228. All concerned Member States were requested to take necessary steps to ensure timely remittance of their share of contribution to the ECI budget.

229. The Council appreciated the presentation made by the ECO Cultural Institute and noted with satisfaction that the activities of the Institute were increasing and the programmes mandated under ECO's 3-year Plan of Action were being implemented. (ECI Presentation ***Annex-VI***)

230. The Council urged ECI to actively follow-up the decisions of the 2nd HLEG meeting preceded by the 3rd BOT meeting (May 2007 at Islamabad).

231. The Council stressed the need to further activate the Institute in mandated fields and additional areas of interest.

232. The Council appreciated the decision of HLEG meeting endorsed by the 3rd BoT meeting in Islamabad regarding establishment of an ECO Cultural Trust Fund. The Council appreciated Iran's generous contribution of US\$ 2 million and requested other Member States for similar support.

233. The Council urged Member States to cooperate in providing relevant data in the ECI Questionnaire for the 1st ECO Tourist Guidebook. The Council recommended to the ECI to provide detailed information regarding the financial implications of publishing the guide book in various languages and the sources of its funding.

234. The Council welcomed the offer of Pakistan Science Foundation to act as the adhoc Secretariat of ECO Science Foundation and requested all Member States to extend full support to the adhoc Secretariat. (ECO ESF Presentation ***Annex-VII***).

235. The Council requested the adhoc Secretariat of ESF to forward the draft documents of the ECO Science Foundation at the earliest so that the same could be finalized in the 2nd EGM/1st BOT. The 2nd EGM would be held at the ECO Secretariat not later than two months after the circulation of the basic documents.

236. The Council appreciated Iran and Pakistan for pledging US\$ 100,000 and US \$ 1 million respectively to the ECO Science Foundation Fund and requested other Member States to make financial contributions to the Fund. The Council also requested the ECO Secretariat and the ad-hoc ESF Secretariat to approach international donor agencies and IFIs, including IDB, for funding the foundation and its activities.

237. The Council requested the Republic of Turkey to convey the date and venue for holding the First meeting of the Board of Trustees preceded by the Experts Group Meeting (if required).

238. The Council welcomed the approval of the Revised Statute of the College of Insurance by 17th COM in Herat and requested for early implementation of the envisaged programs including the formation of the new BoT.

239. The Council requested Member States to send their best students to the ECO College of Insurance and to fully avail the 10 graduate/under-graduate scholarships offered by the Islamic Republic of Iran. The Council directed the College of Insurance to circulate necessary information regarding the scholarship programme to the Member States through the Secretariat. The Council recommended to ECO College of Insurance to avail/obtain funding from IDB scholarship fund for providing scholarships to students from ECO Member States.

240. The Council recommended that ECO College of Insurance organize short-term training courses and workshops in the field of Insurance and Actuarial Science and seek funding for organizing these courses and workshops from IDB, other IFIs and donor agencies.

241. The Council appreciated the involvement of the ECO-CEC in regional projects and called on Member States to accord priority to ECO-CEC while awarding contracts for projects financed from ECO resources.

242. The Council appreciated the presentation given by the ECO Trade and Development Bank and urged Member States to join the bank and support its activities. The Council recommended that the bank might initiate awareness campaigns regarding the Bank in Member States. (ECO TDB Presentation ***Annex-VIII***).

(ii) International Relations

243. The Council appreciated the efforts of the ECO Secretariat to promote relations with international and regional organizations and UN bodies. The Council emphasized the need for early finalization of a comprehensive Plan of Action on international relations and noted that it should duly prioritize the international/regional organizations with which the ECO institutionalized cooperative relations.

244. The Council noted with appreciation the signing of MOU between ECO and Shanghai Cooperation organization (SCO) for cooperation and urged the Secretariat to finalize the work programme for enhancement of cooperation mentioned in the MoU.

245. The Council requested the Secretariat to follow-up signing MoU with the Conference on Interaction and Cooperation in Asia (CICA), including the organization of joint events/meeting

246. The Council urged Member States and the ECO Secretariat to reactivate the ECO Ambassadors Contact Group in selected International Organizations.

247. The Council in particular noted with appreciation the recommendation of the 125th CPR regarding the reactivation of the relationship with the World Economic Forum /

Davos and emphasized arranging ECO events on the sidelines of the WEF on priority areas such as Transport, Trade, Energy and Environment.

248. The Council requested Member States to send information regarding international events being held in their countries to the Secretariat in time so that these could be included in the calendar of events of ECO.

249. The Council emphasized the necessity of timely finalization of the proposed draft Modalities for the Establishment of ECO Regional Centres as per the decision of the 17th COM and urged the ECO Secretariat to finalize, in collaboration with Member States, Kazakhstan's proposal for establishment of ECO Contact Groups in ECO Capitals.

Agenda Item No.7

The ECO Calendar of Events for 2008-2009

250. The Council approved the ECO Calendar of Events for 2008-9 (***Annexure-IX***) with the following observations:

i) The date and venue of all meetings/events would be fixed within three months of the 18th RPC meeting. If any new meetings/events were proposed by member states or the Secretariat, the CPR might consider revising the calendar of events accordingly.

ii) In order to avoid rush of events towards the end of the calendar year, the member states might plan the activities evenly throughout the year. If the date and venue of the meetings/events in the calendar were not determined by October, these should either be shifted to the next year or dropped from the calendar with the approval of the CPR.

iii) As per decision of the 17th COM meeting, each member state should host, at least, two ECO meetings a year from the first priorities in the calendar. The Council asked the Secretariat to follow-up implementation of this decision.

iv) The Secretariat should establish a close relationship with NFP's in different sub-sectors well in advance of meetings so that the requisite documents/working papers and necessary information about events/meetings could reach them in time, keeping in picture the respective Missions of the member states in Tehran and the MFA of Iran.

Agenda Item No.8

Any other business.

251. No issue was raised under this agenda item.

Agenda Item No. 9

Date and Venue of the next Meeting.

252. The Council agreed to hold the 19th RPC meeting at the ECO Secretariat, Tehran. Exact dates would be circulated to member states in due course. It was also noted that efforts be made for the 19th RPC meeting to be convened by the end of December 2008.

Agenda Item No.10

Adoption of the Report.

253. The Report of the 18th meeting of the Regional Planning Council (RPC) was adopted unanimously.

Agenda Item No.11

Vote of Thanks

254. On behalf of all the participating delegations, the Council expressed its appreciation and thanks to the Planning Commission, Government of the Islamic Republic of Pakistan, for making appropriate arrangements for this important meeting.

255. The Council concluded with a vote of thanks to the Chair for conducting the deliberations of the meeting in a smooth and efficient manner. The Council also thanked the Chairmen of various Review Committees for successfully conducting the business of their respective Review Committees. It also appreciated the efforts made by the Secretary General and his staff for preparing comprehensive Working Papers and other documents for the Council.