

## The 17<sup>th</sup> RPC Meeting

**Statement by H.E. Mr. Manuchehr Mottaki,**  
Minister for Foreign Affairs of the Islamic Republic of Iran at the inaugural  
session of the  
17th Regional Planning Council (RPC) Meeting  
(ECO Secretariat, Tehran, 19 February, 2007)

**Annex. II**

*In the name of the Almighty*

Distinguished Heads of the Delegation,  
H.E. Khurshid Anwar, Secretary General of ECO,  
Honourable Ambassadors,  
Ladies and Gentlemen,

This is my pleasure to welcome Dear Guests to the I.R. of Iran on the occasion of the 17<sup>th</sup> ECO Regional Planning Council. This Council, along with the Council of Ministers, Council of Permanent Representatives and ECO Secretariat, constitute main pillars of the ECO. Therefore, regular conducting of RPC annual meetings, as the main body for drawing and introducing plans of action in order to realize ECO objectives, reviewing the ongoing projects and evaluating past performance and achievements, is an indicator of dynamism and ever-growing trend of ECO and incessant efforts of all member states to achieve the predicted goals.

Assessment of ECO performance and plans during the last year and ensuring that the major part of the agenda and plan of action of ECO's various committees have been accomplished are among main objectives of the Regional Planning Council, so as to embrace plans and programs that could be better put into function in the ECO agenda for the next year. Indeed, the RPC Meetings are so determining and important in the ECO process of decision making and planning due to the key expert deliberations of various committees including Trade and Investment, Transportation and Communication, Energy-Mine and Environment, Agriculture-Industry and Tourism, Human Resources and Development, Economic Statistics and Research, as well as participation of the Heads of Planning Organizations or their counterparts from ECO member countries.

Dear participants,

At the age of convergence, one of the signs of evolution and development of mankind's visions is to ignore inauspicious experiences of war and isolating rules, and appealing to more cooperation at regional and international levels, the concrete outcomes of which would be ensuring security for all communities and prosperity in all aspects of life.

Since in today's world, one of the main concerns of governments is how to boost up economy and to better organize people's livelihood as a result of countries' economic conditions, the regional organizations with economic objectives are of particular importance since their activity profile is richer and more vivid. Also, the performances of these organizations directly reshape people's lives. The role of such institutions and organizations is so critical in the South-South Cooperation and so meaningful for the

countries that are still facing numerous economic crises, where the short-run monopolistic interests have been overlooked for the sake of medium and long-term interests through more cooperation.

Hopefully, our region enjoys several privileges from geopolitical point of view, which further facilitate creation and reinforcement of regional convergence. Unique geographical situation, vast extended territories, abundant natural endowments, ecological and environmental variety, active and viable manpower are among the most important assets for reaching out our organizational goals, which in light of political will of the leaders of our respected countries, the ground will be laid out for an all-out and sustainable development.

The Economic Cooperation Organization (ECO) in its new arrangement after accession of fresh members since fifteen years ago has extended its scope of activities into Central Asia, Caucasia and Afghanistan. Now in view of the past performance, it could be boastful about invaluable achievements gained in different domains of activities such as:

- Drawing up ECO Vision 2015, which incorporates most of ECO objectives in order of priority.
- Establishment of ECO Fund for Construction of Afghanistan, initiated by Islamic Republic of Iran.
- Finalizing ECO Trade Agreement (ECOTA) in 2003, according to which the ceiling of tariffs for 80% of commodities will be decreased down to 15% at most within a period of 8 years.
- Entry into force of transit Transport Framework Agreement (TTFA) since May 2006 as an extensive document including provisions on all sectors such as road, railway, marine and air transportation as well as foreseeing organization of four Insurance, Railway, Road and Legal Committees.
- Ratification of Agreement on Promotion and Protection of Investment and startup of ECO Trade and Development Bank with an initial capital of \$100 million since July 2006. It will undoubtedly reactivate implementation of development projects and trade interactions among member countries.
- Project of ECO Interconnection of Power Systems and IDB financial assistance to follow up of ECO feasibility study on this project.
- Holding successful Ministerial Meetings, High Expert Meetings in various sectors including industry and mine, environment, statistics and economic research, bearing positive incomes and the approvals of which are being followed up.

These achievements and other evidences are all in all denoting that the Economic Cooperation Organization was rather thriving within the past decade, particularly in terms of hardship the region had to tolerate during the first years of accession of new members to the Organization with regard to the independence process that countries of the Central Asia had to go through, also the civil war in Afghanistan, Tajikistan and the crisis in the Caucasian Region. Luckily, today we are witnessing more and more stability in the ECO region and ever-increasing endeavour of all members for realization of the ECO objectives and enhancement of cooperation.

Also, due to the importance of the ECO Vision 2015 and in order to accomplish most important goals drew up in this document, fast-track measures and moves should be made including gradual reduction of tariffs and removal of non-tariff trade obstacles, establishment of a free trade zone in the ECO region, facilitation of passenger and goods transit in the region, expedition of petroleum and gas pipelines development, coordination of monetary and financial policies by member states and speeding up industrial development, process by countries of the region that should be further underlined.

Among members of the Economic Cooperation Organization, the Islamic Republic of Iran, as one of the main founders and host country, is so optimistic about the performances of the Organization. We believe that establishment and growing of ECO is a treasured experience. A cherished experience considering the priority which is given to the regional cooperation by the I.R of Iran as well as the fact that the ECO Secretariat is based in Iran.

However, the success of such experience depends on uninterrupted cooperation of all members. We should never fail to remember that the goal of this Organization, as stipulated in the ECO basic documents, is to promote and enhance cooperation in all relevant fields of action, resulting in concrete tangible outcomes that may help economic growth of ECO member countries.

In line with this goal, we need to identify defects and flaws of the Organization and try to tackle them by a realistic approach. For instance, some of members still hesitate to join key ECO agreements: or the Economic Cooperation Organization is not yet regarded as an authentic information and data center to project its activities. Undoubtedly, we will encounter more unpredicted problems if we fail to have access on genuine and reliable information and figures in the field of economy that is the pivotal requirement for planning and continuing of these activities. On the other hand, it is expected that the ECO Secretariat takes expeditious guidelines to reanimate existing cooperation capacities in priority areas such as trade, transport and energy, and set up an efficient agenda and plan of action for accelerating projects through acquiring technical and expertise of concerned national officials.

Furthermore, we assume that implementation of agreements signed by member states at national level, as well as their dedication towards commitments they make in different meetings, will reinforce the position of ECO and guarantee its growth.

I would like to draw your kind attention to the fact that the Islamic Republic of Iran, as in the past, is ready to cooperate for further strengthening Economic Cooperation Organization and to present services that may help this goal. The Islamic Republic of Iran will eagerly provide assistances in any area that is required by ECO to promote its present position and to fulfill its objectives. As it was reminded earlier, the future of the Economic Cooperation Organization is promising enough and we hope that soon it turns to a preferable example among other regional organizations in terms of realizing its high aspirations and objectives. This is not only our wish but in line with the principle policy of the Islamic Republic of Iran in which development of friendship and cooperation with neighboring and Muslim countries is placed high on agenda.

We have faith in the Economic Cooperation Organization that is able to attain such status through expanding its scientific, technical and financial capabilities. To this end, attraction of financial and technical contributions of other international and regional organizations and practicing sound management for such resources are considered as a useful functional instrument. Expansion of ECO cooperation with other international organizations within the framework that ensures interests of ECO will undoubtedly bear fruits for the Organization.

In conclusion, I would like to reemphasize that the Islamic Republic of Iran is ready to fully support goals and programmes of the Economic Cooperation Organization. I hope through fruitful and productive deliberations of all participants, the Organization attain valuable results. I wish dear guest a pleasant stay in the beautiful city of Tehran. May the Almighty Allah bless you all with health and success.

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