

Statement of H.E. Dr. Mohammad Mahdi Mazaheri
President of ECO Cultural Institute
At the Opening of 29th Meeting of ECO Regional Planning Council
December 17, 2018, Tehran

**Mr. Chairman, Distinguished ECO Secretary General,
Ladies and Gentlemen,**

This meeting is a great occasion for ECO Cultural Institute to present an account of its latest achievements and international activities in areas of culture, arts and literature.

No doubt the most sublime element critical to the existence of communities is culture. Culture creates identity as well as integration of the nations in a region. Utilizing effective devices such as arts, culture and literature shared by all nations of the region, inter-cultural dialogue could be encouraged and based on the collective intellect, a unique regional cultural diplomacy would be developed to bring glory and pride for people of the region in the era of globalization. ECO Cultural Institute recognizing the vital role of these numerous commonalities in strengthening bonds of friendship, makes efforts in its new chapter of activities to take effective steps towards realization of such regional diplomacy.

Through its comprehensive plan for development of cultural and regional diplomacy, ECI made a proposal at the 4th Meeting of National Libraries of the ECO Member States that the year 2018 be proclaimed as "Reading Culture" which was welcomed by the member states. To this end, a wide range of activities were organized including publication of two books titled "ECO and Cultural Security in the Member States", "Regional integration on the basis of cultural commonalities (cooperation between national libraries of the ECO Member States) by ECI and contribution to publication of two more books titled "Andromeda Script" and "Designing Organizational Identity". Also, several issues of ECI's specialized journals have been published on the themes of Sport in the ECO region, Heritage Tourism in the ECO Region and a special issue on Tabriz as Capital of Islamic Tourism in 2018. Furthermore, a series of book launch and book review sessions have been arranged in partnership with Iran Female Publishers Association. Also, the "Encyclopedia of Hafez Studies" was launched during a ceremony attended by the prominent Hafez scholars.

Over the last year, ECO Cultural Institute has arranged a variety of cultural programs and activities, including 5 international conferences on various themes including: "Visual Arts", "Assessment of Quality in Academic Systems", "Future Cities in ECO Region", "Current Issues of Languages, Dialects & Linguistics" and "Heritage

of Cities: Shahrood, Bastam and Kharghan”, as well as “Galaxy for Peace, culture building” lecture series and a ceremony on the theme of “Children and Peace”; Also, 5 exhibitions in areas of arts and culture including painting and photos and an exhibition of handicrafts from the ECO Member States on the sidelines of the 23rd Meeting of ECO Council of Ministers in Dushanbe, Tajikistan, 7 sessions of lecture series on prominent literary figures of ECO region including Hafez, Rumi and Shams Tabrizi as well as a lecture session on “Academic Diplomacy and Innovation” to expand academic cooperation among the ECO Member States, Mexican-Spanish Film Week, sightseeing tours for female diplomats in the cities of Tehran, Qazvin and Kashan, observing the International Women's Day in partnership with the United Nations Information Center Director in Iran, establishment of “ECI parliamentary fraction” in the Parliament of the Islamic Republic of Iran for the purpose of supporting the expansion of cultural ties amongst the ECO Member States, the first ECO Music Night and performance of musicians from the ECO Member States, Sino-Iranian Music Night, ‘Saryarka’ Kazakh National Music Group performance in Iran, 4 workshops on various themes including: “Analysis of Organizational Culture”, “Iranian-Islamic Geometric Patterns”, “Authenticity of Historical and Artistic Objects” and expert workshops on researching in area of music. In addition, about 50 MoUs with various organizations have been inked to conduct research projects for promotion of regional arts and culture. Also in area of Cinema, ECO Cultural Institute, Farabi Cinema Foundation and the Directorate General of Culture of Khorasan Razavi province inked a MoU and the holy city of Mashhad was elected as the center for cinematic activities of the ECO Member States.

Also great efforts in the area of sports have been made. The most important activities were the first table tennis and the first tournament for diplomats based in Tehran was held in February 2018. Also, negotiation has been made with Iranian National Olympic Committee to organize futsal, polo and horseback riding competitions in Kish Free Trade Zone which demands cooperation by the esteemed Member States. Further relevant information will be circulated to the Member States in due course and we hope to witness utmost participation from all the ECO Member States. Moreover, a MoU with the Football Federation of I.R. Iran has been concluded to promote sports in the ECO region.

Also we plan to organize the meeting of the Ministers of Youth and Sports and the meeting of the Heads of National Museums of the ECO Member States and establish the ECO Media Union in 2019.

The said activities have been successfully organized while the Institute has always been encountering non-receipt or very late receipt of the annual contribution of its member states. Due to lack of liquidity, ECI has been unable to afford its staff salaries in recent months. It should be noted that out of the 10 members of ECO family, only four countries have acceded to the Charter of ECO Cultural Institute so far. This number of

membership doesn't suffice to carry out the heavy responsibilities that the Institute has been mandated to undertake. Definitely, accession of the other ECO Member States to the Cultural Institute will help realization of goals and objectives of both Institute and its member countries.

Meanwhile, I would like to point out that the details of ECI's achievements during the past year and the agenda for the year to come shall be presented to the pertinent committee meetings for specialized agencies by my colleagues.

Relying on collective intelligence and cooperation, sympathy and participation of the Member States, we strive to expand our international outreach in the time ahead to alleviate humankind's suffering by the help of ECO region's rich culture.

In conclusion, I wish success for this international even and the participating delegates.

Thank you