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Statement by
The President ECO Science Foundation, Prof. Dr. Manzoor Hussain Soomro

Excellency the Chairman of 29th RPC,
Excellency the Secretary General of ECO,
Excellencies the Ambassadors and Delegates from ECO Member States,
The Observers, Heads of Specialized Agencies and Institutions,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

Assalam-O-Alaikum and a Very Good Morning to you all!

It is indeed an honour and pleasure for me to address this august forum of 29th RPC; and at the outset, I congratulate H.E. Ambassador Dr. Hadi Soleimanpour for assuming the responsibility as Secretary General of ECO earlier this year. Indeed a challenging task but also a great opportunity to contribute towards the Peace & Prosperity of the Region and leave a legacy behind!

Excellencies, on behalf of the ECO Science Foundation (ECOSF) and on my personal behalf, I express my deep gratitude to all the Member States and ECO Secretariat for their continuous support to the Foundation. Our special thanks to the Government of Islamic Republic of Pakistan for patronizing ECOSF through its Ministries of Science & Technology and Foreign Affairs.

Ladies and Gentlemen, ECO Science Foundation fully recognizes that investment in Science & Technology builds strong foundation and helps in sustaining the economic growth, boosts community well-being and integrated development of any country or region. ECO region can also achieve global competitiveness, if it is ensured that the region has qualified and capable human resource, to develop and maintain the infrastructure and capacity, along with technology. Thus there is a convincing need to push forward to build a strong S&T base for economic development in the region. And I am pleased to report that since its inception, the ECOSF has transformed itself into a dynamic and agile vehicle to promote Science, Technology and Innovation (STI) and Science Education, to help build the capacity of its Member States to respond to the emerging challenges of the future.

Ladies and Gentlemen,
Despite financial and logistic difficulties, the Foundation undertook numerous important scientific activities during 2018. Details have been provided in the written progress report. The Foundation also circulates an electronic *ECOSF Newsletter*, issued monthly. However, I would like to present some highlights here today, since this would be my last RPC before my tenure is finished.

Excellencies, you know that ECO Science Foundation has established a "Science & Technology Fund" for financing the collaborative research projects. As per requirement, all

the modalities for utilization of this Fund had been worked out and approved in the 20th meeting of ECO COM held in October 2012 at Baku, Azerbaijan. The ECOSF BoT in its 3rd Meeting in August 2016 approved the priority areas and the criteria for funding of research projects under ECOSF S&T Fund. Accordingly, the Foundation formally launched the program and invited concept proposals for funding, over a year ago. We received 21 proposals from; Azerbaijan, Iran, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Pakistan, Tajikistan and Turkey. The proposals have been evaluated by Technical Evaluation Committee but no project could be processed further for funding, simply because there is no money in the Fund! This is mainly because no member state has so far contributed any funds to the S&T Fund of ECOSF, Governments of Pakistan, Iran and Afghanistan!

Of course, ECOSF has been able to bring funds and in-kind support from various global partners & donors including UNESCO, EU, IsDB, ISTIC, IAP SEP and CAST China, but our efforts can be strengthened only if the S&T Fund has some seed money put in by the member states.

Member States are therefore requested to either make contributions towards S&T Fund in line with 2nd and 3rd meetings of ECOSF BoT for the success of the initiative, or recommend a logical course of action, even if for its closure!

Excellencies, ECOSF is partnering with the Islamic Development Bank (IsDB) on its Reverse Linkage Programme to build the capacity and strengthen scientific cooperation amongst the ECO member states through transfer of technology and sharing of the best practices or experiences. Under this program, ECOSF and IsDB are supporting the International Centre for Chemical and Biological Sciences (ICCBS), University of Karachi, Pakistan to provide scientific support and capacity building to Al-Farabi Kazakh National University in Almaty- Kazakhstan in the field of Phytochemical Drug Development. ECOSF in collaboration with IsDB has also supported to enhance the capabilities of the Meteorological Departments of ECO Member States for better risk assessment and preparedness for natural disasters. Under this project, so far Turkey and Pakistan have joined hands.

Dear Delegates, the Foundation is of the view that Inquiry Based Science Education (IBSE) is the Root of S&T Development, we need to work together today for our future generations so that they could lead us to the real indigenous scientific development for Sustainable Economic Development. In this respect, it is great pleasure to report that with the support of our international collaborators, the Capacity Building Program on "Inquiry Based Science Education (IBSE)", launched in Astana-Kazakhstan in 2015 is continuing nicely. So far the activity is being conducted in Pakistan and Iran. The Foundation is striving hard to implement the initiative of IBSE in other Member States; however slow response from those member states, is impeding the activity.

Dear Delegates, the Foundation hosted the International Forum on Science Education in collaboration with InterAcademy Partnership Science Education Programme (IAP SEP) in Islamabad, April 2018. The International Forum was themed; "**Quality Science Education at Schools- A Must for Quality Higher Education and Economic Development**". The Forum attracted more than 200 participants including 20 international participants from 12 countries. The International Forum issued recommendations and outcome in "Islamabad Declaration", which was shared with all the member states for consideration.

I assure this august Forum that the Foundation will continue to strive for promotion of science education through IBSE pedagogy for advancement of S&T and science education at all levels in the ECO region. I invite ECO Educational Institute and ECO Cultural Institute to join hands.

Ladies and Gentlemen, ECOSF has established a strong cooperation with China under their One Belt One Road (OBOR) Initiative and signed MoU with Children and Youth Science Center (CYSC) of China Association for Science & Technology (CAST) in 2017. Under the MoU, the Foundation has been designated as a Coordinating Center for promotion of STI and Science Education under BRI in the ECO Region. Since signing of this MoU, ECOSF has been nominating and sending the experts, officials, teachers and students in a number of mega science events including Belt and Road Teenager Maker Camps. Therein, so far, 78 teenage students and their teachers from six member states were sent to Beijing in 2017 and 2018. Other activities include B&R Science Camps, China Adolescent Science and Technology Innovation Contest (CASTIC) and China Adolescent Robotics Competitions (CARC).

Excellencies, I have the pleasure to share that the Foundation is collaborating with Academy of Engineering and Technology of the developing World- AETDEW and SUGON Education China to build the capacity of universities in the ECO Region in emerging technologies; like Big Data, Artificial Intelligence (AI) and key national industry applications. Under the “Digital@Belt and Road (B&R) Double Hundred Universities Cooperation Program”, selected ECO universities will be strengthened to provide training services in emerging technologies. So far, ECOSF has nominated 10 universities from five ECO Countries; Afghanistan, Iran, Pakistan, Kazakhstan & Kyrgyz Republic under this program. Other Member States are also being pursued to nominate their relevant institutions to get the benefit of the project.

Excellencies, it is compulsory to bring to your kind notice that ECOSF has developed good interaction with numerous international science and technology organizations and Donors including; International Science, Technology and Innovation Centre for South-South Cooperation under the Auspices of UNESCO (ISTIC), Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia; *La main a la pate* Foundation, France; European Union; UNESCO, Islamic Development Bank, Korea Institute of Science & Technology Evaluation and Planning (KISTEP), The Academy of Engineering and Technology for the Developing World (AETDEW) based in Malaysia, International Science and Technology Centre (ISTC), Astana-Kazakhstan, China Association for Science and Technology (CAST), Isfahan Regional Center for Technology Business Incubators & Science Parks Development (IRIS) under Auspices of UNESCO, Isfahan Science & Technology Town (ISTT) of Iran and Pakistani organizations including Pakistan Academy of Sciences and the Higher Education Commission (HEC) of Pakistan.

However Excellencies, 2018 has been a very challenging year for the Foundation from financial point of view that has seriously impacted the Foundation, and did not allow us to perform at an optimum level; thus Foundation was compelled to cut down on its core activities and programs. It is important to mention here, that in spite of budgetary

difficulties, we are constantly pursuing our planned activities- thanks to the Governments of Pakistan and Iran but also our international collaborators for making financial and technical contributions which made those activities possible. May I request the honorable delegate's attention to look at Page # 21 of working paper on International Relations, showing the self explanatory status of mandatory budget contribution by Ratifying Member to ECOSF!

I highly appreciate the Government of Islamic Republic of Pakistan for paying their full annual mandatory budget contributions since our inception in the year 2012. We are also grateful to Islamic Republic of Iran for paying budget contribution for the year 2012 and partial payment for 2013 and for sponsoring some of ECOSF activities in Iran during 2016, 2017 and 2018; we look forward to their continued support. I very much hope that Iran will soon sort out the money transfer mechanism so that Iran can pay their remaining share of budget contribution for the last five years. I also call upon the remaining three ratifying member states- Afghanistan, Tajikistan and Turkmenistan to kindly make their mandatory contributions at the earliest to strengthen the Foundation. A stronger Foundation can contribute more actively towards the promotion of STI based economic development in the region.

I take this opportunity to urge member states that have not yet ratified the ECOSF Charter and its Additional Protocol, to kindly do so at their earliest so as to benefit from its programs and enable the Foundation to function at its fullest.

Finally, I would like to say that the Foundation is making all possible efforts to promote science, technology, innovation and science education activities in the region with the collaboration and support of International Organizations.; however, the greatest difficulty we are facing is; non-payment of Mandatory Budgetary Contributions by Ratifying Member States except Pakistan.Pakistan too used to pay total annual contribution in one go, but has lately been paying on quarterly basis which hampers to planned activities.The financial situation has impacted adversely to the Foundation's scientific and even its day to day administrative activities. So much so that full salaries and medical bills of the staff could not be paid for the last five months!

I therefore urge the Member States to pull the Foundation out of serious financial challenges on immediate basis by paying their outstanding budgetary contributions. That is the only way forward to allow the Foundation to continue its functions.

I thank you Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen for your patient listening!
