

Statement by the President of the Islamic Republic Afghanistan
H. E. Mr. Ashraf Ghani
14th ECO Summit

Excellency Erdogan, President of Turkey and Chair of the 14th Summit of ECO,
Excellencies
President Aliyev,
President Rouhani,
President Tokayev,
Prime Minister Khan,
President Rahman,
President Mirzayev
President Japarov,
Doctor Hadi Soleimanpour, Secretary General of ECO,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Allow me to first of all congratulate President Erdogan on assuming the Chairmanship of this important summit and to thank PM Khan for his stewardship during Pakistan's chairmanship. I am confident that under your able leadership ECO will engage in meaningful and result-based deliberations and decisions.

We celebrated 100 years of diplomatic relations between Afghanistan and Turkey yesterday and it's a singular honor, Mr. President Erdogan, to congratulate you on this important milestone in our bilateral relations. The friendship and partnership between our countries is founded on a long-time horizon, without expiry or exit dates. The same applies to our relations with every member country of ECO. Bonds forged through culture, civilization, commerce, history, location and Islamic ideals and networks form the foundations of our relations. Fortunately, the ties that bind us now are driven by shared vision, common mental models and commitment of leaders to act on the demonstrated advantages of bi-lateral and regional cooperation. The mutual trust resulting from the sense of mutual interests is finding concrete expression in the implementation of transformational programs and projects- such as TAPI, TAP, CASA 1000, railways. Having renewed our conception of ourselves as a crossroad, gates of the sub-continent and a meeting ground of civilizations, cultures, ideas, and people, Afghanistan is poised to serve as a roundabout between central, east, south and west Asia and a platform of international and regional cooperation. ECO, therefore, is an important catalyst for the realization of our vision and action program.

The disruption caused by Covid-19 marks a disruption between the world of pre and post-2020. Let me express the deepest sympathies of the Afghan people and government to our brothers and sisters in ECO countries. We have been fortunate in having managed the first and second wave of Covid-19, with minimum loss of lives. The toll taken on our livelihoods, however, has been significant, which we are addressing through a national program of distribution of food packages to 90% of our fellow citizens.

Regional cooperation has been the key to our ability to minimize the adverse impacts of Covid-19. I would like to thank Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan, Kazakhstan and Tajikistan for the uninterrupted functioning of supply-chains and value chains and medical supplies, Iran for quick resumption of trade and transit and generous medical assistance to Afghan refugees, Azerbaijan and Turkey for medical supplies and advice,

and Pakistan for resumption of trade and transit after initial closure. Thanks to your cooperation and India's cooperation in keeping the air corridor operating and a generous assistance in vaccines, the Afghan people have enjoyed continuous access to essential goods and basic services.

Covid-19 is producing a reset in global assumptions and relations. First, the wave of low trust in globalization is accelerating. Second, regional cooperation is becoming more pronounced. Third, the role of the state is becoming more prominent. Fourth, digitalization is speeding up. Fifth, transnational networks of terrorism and transnational criminal organizations are changing the scale and scope of violence and the nature of warfare, forcing states, regional and global organizations to rethink the definition of security for citizens, refine the protective function of the state, and refocus on regional and international cooperation.

Early recognition of emerging patterns and shaping the direction of the positive trends and developing tools for collective action to contain or preempt the negative trends will be key to our future stability and prosperity as ECO countries. It is time for our organization to develop its plan of action for enhancing regional cooperation in the context of the Covid-19 reset, drawing on lessons learned from successes and failures of regional organizations. Two issues require particular attention: shaping the rules of the game for multi-dimensional and multi-country cooperation and formulating the systems for design and implementation of transformational programs and projects of regional connectivity, including novel financing mechanisms, insurance, and risk guarantee instruments.

Afghanistan's historic role in Asia has been captured by Iqbal, Pakistan's national poet:

*Asia is but a body of water and earth Of which
the Afghan nation is the heart
From its accord the accord of Asia
From its discord the discord of Asia*

Afghanistan is poised its role as a platform for Asia's accord for security, prosperity, stability and regional connectivity. We are in a truly historic open moment to make a just and lasting peace through a political agreement to eradicate violence by achieving the Endstate of a sovereign, democratic, and united Afghanistan, at peace within and with the world. Internationally managed and monitored elections to elect the next president is the critical criteria for ensuring a balance between constitutional continuity and orderly political change. We count on and need your support to secure international and regional guarantees for securing Afghanistan's future. Pakistan has an especially significant role to play in supporting a lasting peace process, for it is the country most likely to suffer from the adverse consequences of a failed peace process. We, the people and government of Afghanistan and our international partners, have a true sense of urgency to make and build peace. Your support for an comprehensive ceasefire to accelerate the negotiations in Doha is essential.

For forty-two years, we have been denied the foundational right to peace. It is time to stop the violence that has turned our beautiful country into a killing field. In the past 48 hours alone, three young female journalists and a seasoned Islamic scholar were murdered. Regardless of who pulled the trigger, the Taliban have a moral responsibility to condemn the violence and socialize peace to their commanders and their rank and file. When we are ready to make peace, their violence has no religious

justification, as pointed out by some of the most prominent Muslim scholars.

Afghanistan will continue to support ECO. I do hope, however, that ECO will rise to the challenge of the reset arising from the effect of Covid-19, including as a catalyst for regional connectivity for Afghanistan and a force for regional guarantees for a peaceful Afghanistan.

Let me thank Secretary General Soleimanpour for facilitating the 14th ECO summit at this very challenging time. Let us dedicate ourselves to turning ECO into a model of successful regional cooperation.

Thank you.
