

Please check against delivery

Statement by

**His Excellency Dr. Hossein Amir-Abdollahian,
the Honourable Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Islamic
Republic of Iran**

**At
26th Meeting of the ECO Council of Ministers**

Tashkent, Uzbekistan- 24 January 2023

بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمَنِ الرَّحِيمِ

**Mr. Chairman, my dear brother, Minister Bakhtiyor Saidov,
Distinguished fellow Ministers,
Ladies and Gentlemen**

سلام عليكم

At the outset, I would like to express my pleasure to attend the ECO Council of Ministers meeting. I would also like to express our gratitude the government and people of Republic of Uzbekistan for warm hospitality and hosting this meeting in the beautiful city of Tashkent. I would like to congratulate my dear brother His Excellency Mr. Jeyhun Bayramov, the Honorable Foreign Minister of the Republic of Azerbaijan for assuming the chairmanship of the ECO in 2023 and thank the Honorable ECO Secretary General Mr. Khosrav Noziri and his colleagues in the Secretariate for their effective efforts to advance the work of our organization and preparation for this meeting.

Distinguished participants,

Three decades has passed since 10 countries started a collective effort to reinforce regional integration in this historical and civilizational region and paved valuable grounds for multi-lateral cooperation – even though there remains remarkable gap between our achievements and the real capacities of the ECO region. On the occasion of the 30th anniversary of the accession of seven new members to the ECO, I reiterated in Tehran last December that our organization is capable to present successful models of south-south cooperation as well as collaboration between land-locked states and transit countries, between the producers and consumers of energy, people-based cooperation particularly in tourism, cooperation in science, technology, innovation and university exchanges. I firmly believe that the shared cultural, religious and

ritual values and heritage among the ECO Member States have provided a strong foundation for a brighter vision for our region.

Developments of the recent years across the globe and their impacts on our region have doubled the necessity of further convergence and alignment among the countries of the region. The Covid-19 pandemic and its devastating impacts as well as recent crises in terms of food and energy security in the world revealed clearly the vulnerability of various countries regardless of their size of economy. Therefore, for all the countries of the world and particularly our region, resilience to possible future shocks is not a choice but a necessity. Of course, for materializing such resilience, one available option is to strengthen collective cooperation within multilateral mechanisms. The ECO and the foundations established in the past thirty years could be the first best option for cooperation in this context. I would like to highlight the following in this respect:

- **Resilience through trade**

The ECO must be promoting intra-regional trade among the Member States. So far, this has not been fully materialized and trade among the members has not received sufficient support from the commercial mechanisms of our organization. I would like to propose and ask all members, and not only the five members of the ECOTA Trade Agreement, to support negotiations for free trade at the regional level and to actively participate in such negotiations. This necessity was also stressed during the Summit Meeting in Ashgabat. In spite of the unlawful and cruel sanctions, Iran will participate resolutely in this process.

- **Resilience through connectivity**

The significance of the ECO Region in terms of connectivity is undeniable and global recent developments have doubled such significance. Connectivity and transport are one of the main driving forces behind convergence and further collective

development and prosperity of economic capacity in the region during the upcoming years. The ECO as a region is itself considered a transit route which connects surrounding areas in the east and south Asia, northern and Eastern Europe and south of the Persian Gulf. Additionally, and more importantly, the ECO provides a proper ground for transit partnerships and cooperation among the seven land-locked countries and three transit member states. The objective here is to reduce economic vulnerability of land-locked countries and improve the collective development of all the Member States. Iran is prepared to further expand its contribution to this field.

- **Resilience through energy**

The energy security crisis in the world and the region exposed the vulnerability of the consumers of energy to unanticipated shocks. Also, climate change and extreme cold of recent winter just proved vulnerability of even some of energy producing countries. The ECO Region can turn into a model for interactions among the producers and consumers of energy. Undoubtedly, participation and cooperation in the field of gas and electricity which are among the ECO priorities could contribute to materializing this objective. In this respect, I would like to highlight the initiative by the President of the Islamic Republic of Iran presented to the Summit of Gas Exporting Countries concerning the “Gas for Post-covid Global Economy Recovery.

- **Resilience through innovation and new technologies**

The ECO requires further investment in new technologies, knowledge-based industries and digitization of economic activities. Without doubt, promotion of cooperation among the Member States in these sectors would result in enhanced regional resiliency and competitiveness of the ECO Member States.

- **Resilience through maximum cohesion**

The Islamic Republic of Iran seriously believes in the collective interests of maximized cohesion among the ECO Member States. We have always welcomed initiatives and proposals contributing to the enhancement of the role and status of the ECO in the economic development of the Member States. In this respect, enhanced sense of ownership to the ECO by the private and public sectors as well as the elites of the Member States and, above all, the people of our region appear to be essential. Also, we require the contribution and presence of all the 10 Member States in the ECO cooperation mechanisms and arrangements. Cohesion can and must represent one of the achievements in the fourth decade of our organization. Today, in this ministerial meeting, we have on our agenda the establishment of two new mechanisms of cooperation, namely the ECO Regional Center for Risk Management in the Islamic Republic of Iran and the ECO Clean Energy Center in the Republic of Azerbaijan. We expect all Member States to support establishment of these centers and to join them.

- Afghanistan

Afghanistan is an important member of the ECO big family. The Islamic Republic of Iran has been one of the main supporters and sponsors of the “ECO Advocacy Programme for Afghanistan and has emphasized the need for its full and effective implementation. Iran has supported the noble people of Afghanistan through bilateral assistance to prevent humanitarian crises. Without doubt, the establishment of an inclusive government in Afghanistan can facilitate aid and reconstruction programmes and reduce threats of terrorism, displacement and trafficking of narcotics in the region. We consider the Taliban move to suspend education for women and girls in contradiction with the teachings and thoughts of Islam as a compassionate and merciful religion and express our concern in this regards.

**Mr. Chairman,
Distinguished Colleagues,**

In addition to its accountability in the regional frameworks, the Islamic Republic of Iran has proved compliance to its commitments at the global level. In this respect, human rights issues are among the priorities of the Islamic Republic of Iran within the framework of its national and Islamic principles and foundations as well as its Constitution and international commitments. We consistently welcome dialog and meaningful interaction with partners within the framework of mutual respect.

The Islamic Republic of Iran has actively and responsibly contributed to regional and global initiatives and programmes to tackle environmental crises and climate change particularly its impact on water resources and natural disasters. Water management and cooperation with the countries of the region on trans-boundary rivers through water diplomacy and overcoming the impacts and root causes of dust storm in the region are among the areas we are making efforts to materialize. In 2022, we hosted a regional ministerial meeting in Tehran to come up with a regional convention to protect the environment. And we are seeking to organize an international meeting to discuss the ways and mechanisms to overcome dust storm challenges in accordance with the relevant resolutions of the United Nations General Assembly.

The foreign policy of the Islamic Republic of Iran is, among other things, based on non-intervention in domestic affairs of other states and constructive interaction with all countries of the world. We strongly condemn recent interventionist and unprecedented resolution by the European Parliament. The negative consequences of such emotional and unwise behavior could be catastrophic for Europe. To be sure, the right path goes through concentration on diplomacy, constructive interaction and rationality.

Dear Colleagues,

The Islamic Republic of Iran strongly rejects and condemns insulting of the divine religions specifically recent desecration of Holy Quran under the western countries' false pretext of supporting freedom of speech

In conclusion, I would like to once again appreciate the honorable Secretary General and his colleagues in the Secretariate for making efforts to implement the ECO programmes. The success of the ECO, like any other international organization, depends on a professional, efficient and informed secretariat. The Member States should seriously consider empowering the Secretariate to address the increasing needs of the ECO in the fourth decade of its enlargement.

Once again, I would like to reiterate full support of the Islamic Republic of Iran to the ECO.

I thank you for your attention.