

**Statement by ECO Secretary General H.E. Mr. Khusrav Noziri
at the 5th ECO Ministerial Meeting on Health
UN Office, Geneva, 24 May 2023**

**Honorable Chairman,
Ministers and Heads of Delegations,
Distinguished WHO Officials,
Dear Participants,**

It's a great privilege for me to join you at this 5th ECO Ministerial Meeting on Health. Welcoming you to the gathering, I extend my very warm gratitude to the distinguished Ministers as well as other eminent delegates for gracing the occasion with their very kind and valued participation.

I would also like to thank and felicitate the H.E. Dr. Teymur Musayev, Minister of Health of the Republic of Azerbaijan for hosting this important ministerial interaction in Geneva.

Excellencies,

Based on our mutual aims and objectives as envisaged in the ECO Vision 2025 and adhering to the fundamental principles of Izmir Treaty, the ECO is determinedly working to facilitate and support the process of sustainable development in our region. Relevantly, the continued improvement of regional health sector is placed on top of our agenda.

In association with our regional and global partners, we have been able to make some notable progress and achievements, especially for high food security and safety, boosting cooperation & collaboration with all stakeholders focusing on non-communicable diseases as well as universal health coverage system etc.

I would like to mention that within the framework of ECO-UN biennially renewed resolution, the UN has appreciated ECO efforts for expanding regional cooperation on health in collaboration with UN Specialized Bodies, most significantly WHO.

The UN further calls on its relevant agencies to enhance collaboration with ECO along with their increased technical and financial support to facilitate ECO programs and policies for improving regional health services and structure.

Last week, a High-Level Working Group Meeting on Health was virtually conducted under the Chairmanship of the Republic of Azerbaijan to facilitate the preparation of outcome documents of this ministerial forum. Also attended by delegations of the Islamic Republic of Iran, Kyrgyz Republic, Republic of Tajikistan, Republic of Türkiye, and Republic of Uzbekistan as well as Representative of World Health Organization, the meeting reviewed the

implementation status of the relevant ECO Action Plan adopted in 2021, as well as a draft Declaration on Health.

Both the documents are based on new health strategies and plans, implementation of health reforms, finding solutions in all public and health matters, critical measures during the emergency health situations, new developments as well as effective and stronger health systems and future health emergencies.

Recently, we witnessed how seriously the regional and global health sector underwent due to the outbreak of COVID-19 pandemic. Bearing such a challenging experience in mind, we are collectively required to ensure some effective and efficient regional and international healthcare system and response to be fully prepared to meet any such future issues and threats. Within this context, I would like to highlight few key issues, including vaccine equity, building resilient health systems and advance Universal Health Coverage (UHC) goals as well as bolstering health security through harnessing digital technology.

Recognizing that health system resilience is quite important and unavoidably essential to support progress towards UHC and health security, there was consensus among the strongly encouraging governments to urgently increase investment in health, including human resourcing, to strengthen the resilience of health systems and recovery plans. The digital technology tools are the key enablers to advancing Primary Health Care services. We need to explore how ECO countries can foster stronger cooperation and exchange knowledge on issues such as primary healthcare, data connectivity, and digital health governance.

Distinguished Delegates,

Reviewing the past issues as well as with a view to ensuring some preparedness for averting future emergencies, I would like to seek your consideration on the:

- a) Creation of Regional Consultation Mechanism for enhancement of technical cooperation on communicable diseases in close collaboration with WHO and other relevant international organizations;
- b) Urgent and coordinated health response for containing the pandemic's transmission and remove their roots, ensuring access to treatments and vaccines by all on immediate availability;
- c) Scaling up health capacities for testing, tracing, quarantine and treatment, while keeping the first responders safe, combined with measures to restrict movement and contact;

- d) Steady assistance to most deserving Member States on account of any medical requirements;
- e) ensuring genuine supply chains to be intact to facilitate the region's livelihood and socioeconomic activities.

Looking at many acts of kindness, goodwill and human decency throughout the world, we have every reason to be optimistic about the future and we need solidarity, hope and political will to see health related issues together.

I am confident that today's interaction will yield more productive outcomes to support our combined efforts and actions for further development and progress in regional health sector.

Thank you all for your kind attention.