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Statement by  
**H.E. Dr. Mahdi Safari**  
**Distinguished Deputy Foreign Minister**  
**for Economic Diplomacy**  
at the  
**27<sup>th</sup> Meeting of the ECO Council of Ministers**  
Shusha, Republic of Azerbaijan- 10 October 2023

بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمَنِ الرَّحِيمِ

**Honourable Chairman, Minister Jeyhun Bayramov,**  
**Distinguished Ministers,**  
**Distinguished Secretary General,**  
**Ladies and Gentlemen,**

Allow me to begin with expressing my pleasure to attend the ECO Council of Ministers meeting. I would like to extend my gratitude to the Government and people of Republic of Azerbaijan for warm hospitality extended to my delegation. My words of appreciation also go to Honorable

ECO Secretary General Ambassador Khusrav NOZIRI and his colleagues in the Secretariat for excellent preparations for this meeting.

**Distinguished Ministers, Ladies and Gentlemen,**

Three decades after its expansion, ECO is still the most relevant and the promising regional arrangement for economic cooperation among our countries. We firmly believe that the shared culture, religion and values have provided a strong foundation for our regional organization to deliver a successful model of cooperation in all its aspects and dimensions.

We have been quite successful in identifying areas of collective interests and have established necessary foundations for regional cooperation. However, the achievements in the ECO have been mixed. While we have been successful in making the ECO ever more relevant for our economic integration, we have rendered less than needed support to make the ECO cooperation frameworks fully operational.

For instance, the ECO transport and transit corridors have proved their value for our traders while no intra-regional trade regime is yet functioning in the ECO. The ECOTA lagged far beyond expectations in the last two decades. No single good has been traded among our traders as per ECOTA rules and preferences. We are regionally inter-connected but our trade exchanges are totally bilateral. Huge regional trade potential is still untapped in the ECO Region.

This is also the case in other areas such as energy trade and security, energy efficiency, renewable energy resources, food security, disaster

management, tourism promotion, climate cooperation, multimodal transport, and clearing and payment system where massive potential and capacities exist within the ECO Region and among our countries.

### **Distinguished participants,**

Since last meeting of Council of Ministers, ECO continued its regular activities while it needed an accelerated pace to cope with the requirements for a post-covid economic recovery of its Member States and the Region as a whole. Moreover, the global economic and environmental challenges have had direct impacts on our countries and our region. The prospect for new and emerging challenges such as Corona Virus in the future requires extra-ordinary national, regional and global efforts for resilience – building. The ECO regional arrangements for cooperation promisingly constitute workable platforms not only to address these challenges but to harness the opportunities and realize the huge potential in the Region.

The “ECO Vision 2025” is still a workable roadmap for our Organization. We are approaching the process of final review of the “Vision”. The new Vision for beyond 2025 shall incorporate necessary adjustments in line with existing opportunities and possible emerging challenges. We may need to reset the ECO agenda and relocate its focus. Our Heads of State and Government will soon convene their Summit in Tashkent. We are very much confident that their instructions and

guidelines will shed light on the way ahead, including on the components of an optimal new agenda and Vision for the ECO.

**Mr. Chairman,**

We are grateful to all previous ECO chairs for their roles in advancing ECO agendas. We admire chairmanship of the Republic of Azerbaijan during the 2023. As the upcoming ECO chairman in 2024, the Islamic Republic of Iran will be committed to play an effective role in the Organization in line with its noble goals and objectives. Cognizant of the critical role of trade for regional growth, integration and development as well as its impacts on regional resilience-building, we have opted **“Enhanced and Resilient ECO Region through Expansion of Intra-regional Trade”** as the theme for our chairmanship.

As mentioned above, the ECO still awaits for realization of its trade targets, including those set by the “ECO Vision 2025”. ECO needs to reset its Agenda and give trade the priority it deserves. Enhanced trade among the ECO Member States will bring our Region closer to more durable, sustained and reliable economic growth and development.

To achieve trade expansion to the maximum extent, we need to reset our existing architectures and infrastructures. At the national level, the Islamic Republic of Iran is committed to conform to the internationally and regionally accepted trade rules and practices. At the ECO level, all Member

States need to lend support for smooth and low-cost flow of trade among our countries. This requires, among others, to collectively:

1. Agree on maximum coverage of trade preferences among Member States,
2. Work towards an ECO Free Trade Area in a reasonable period of time,
3. Utilize new and emerging technologies for digitalization of trade-supporting and facilitating processes,
4. Enhance multi-modal transit and transport within the ECO Region and between the ECO Region and the outside markets,
5. Invite international investors to contribute into the construction of missing links in the ECO corridors,
6. Establish new and alternative trade financing and payment systems, including clearing systems and local currencies systems,
7. Increase the share of energy trade and swap among Member States in the ECO trade profile,
8. Operationalize the trade-supporting agencies and institutions in the ECO, including RISCAM, ECO Re-insurance Company, etc.
9. Support and facilitate private sector's critical role in intra-regional trade,
10. Engage in exchange of experiences and best practices in trade liberalization domain with successful regional trade blocs.

**Mr. Chairman, Distinguished Ministers,**

Enhanced sense of ownership among ECO Member States is an important element of meaningful engagements. We have been witnessing

encouraging measures by all Member States which attest to the fact that all Member States are on board now. We also support to abandon the distinction between founding and non-founding Member States. This means that all Member States are considered on equal footing. We are confident that deeper, more comprehensive and full-fledged engagement by all Member States in all ECO activities and programmes will be emerging.

**Dear Participants,**

Afghanistan is an important country in the ECO family. The Islamic Republic of Iran has been one of the main supporters and sponsors of the “ECO Advocacy Programme for Afghanistan”. We have repeatedly emphasized on the need for full and effective implementation of this Programme, benefitting people of this brotherly country.

To conclude, I would like to reiterate the crucial role of the Secretariat for the ECO and its agenda. We are grateful to Secretary General Ambassador Noziri for his excellent leadership of the Secretariat. As the host country and the upcoming chair, the Islamic Republic of Iran will continue its full support to the ECO Secretariat.

**I thank you for your attention.**

