

**Statement by H.E. Mr. Jalil Abbas Jilani
Foreign Minister of the Islamic Republic of Pakistan
at the 27th Meeting of the ECO Council of Ministers (COM)
Shusha, Azerbaijan - October 10, 2023**

**Foreign Minister of the Republic of Azerbaijan
H.E. Mr. Jeyhun Bayramov,
(current Chair of ECO),**

**ECO Secretary General
H.E. Ambassador Khusrav Noziri,**

Respected Ministers,

Esteemed delegates,

Assalam-o-Alaikum!

It is a matter of great privilege for me to represent Pakistan at the august Twenty Seventh ECO Council of Ministers Meeting in the city of Shusha. I am delighted to be here at Shusha, the cultural capital of Azerbaijan. On behalf of the Pakistan delegation and on my own behalf, I would like to convey our profound gratitude to the Government of the Republic of Azerbaijan for hosting the event and for the warm hospitality extended to my delegation.

I want to express our profound appreciation for our distinguished host, the Foreign Minister of Azerbaijan, H.E. Mr. Jeyhun Bayramov, for having ably led the Organization during his Chairmanship.

I would also like to extend my appreciation to H.E. Ambassador Khusrav Noziri, the Secretary General of the ECO, for his successful stewardship of this Organization.

Excellencies,

Pakistan attaches great importance to ECO. Not only does it provide avenues for regular interaction, close cooperation, and strengthening of ties in our region, it also continues to hold promise of a brighter future for our succeeding generations in a rapidly shifting geopolitical order.

Pakistan has always played an active role in the advancement of the ideals of the ECO, and remains committed to pursue the initiatives envisaged by the Organization, in the future as well.

We wish to see ECO transform our region into an exemplary bloc that stimulates regional growth, promotes collective development, and encourages shared progress. And more importantly, it remains an integral factor to promote global peace, stability and prosperity.

Excellencies,

The ECO region, comprising 8 million square kilometers and half a billion people, representing 15% of the world population, has a share of only about 2% in the global trade. Our intra-regional trade is less than 8% of the region's aggregate trade and is in stark contrast to other regional groupings such as the EU where intra-regional trade stands above 70%. We need to change this dynamic and make determined efforts to support regional trade integration.

Let me recall here the "ECO Vision 2025", adopted during the 13th ECO Summit in Islamabad which aptly provided us a roadmap towards:

- a) increasing intra-regional trade;
- b) strengthening regional connectivity;
- c) operationalizing major ECO transport corridors;
- d) coordinating efforts to achieve energy security and sustainability;
- e) increasing inter-regional trade;
- f) increasing contribution of ECO countries in the global trade;
- g) promoting tourism.

To seize the moment, we need to make concerted efforts to meet intended targets and anticipated goals, as enunciated in the ECO Vision 2025 and set a realistic time frame for their completion to reap tangible benefits.

Excellencies,

ECO Trade Agreement (ECOTA) is a landmark preferential trade arrangement aiming to lower tariffs in our region over an agreed timeframe. In the long-term, it comprises the single, most comprehensive ECO initiative to broaden intra-regional trade and socio-economic prosperity of our future generations. Its early implementation would foster

transit and trade activity through enhanced connectivity within the ECO framework.

We urge all Member States to regard the early operationalization of ECOTA as a priority in a spirit of cooperation and accommodation so that our region may benefit from the true potential of enhanced economic interaction and trade linkages.

Mr. Chairman,

The geo-political significance of our region is enormous. Historically, the Silk Route, comprising the modern-day ECO region, has been at the crossroads of travellers and tradesmen, and served to join the Eastern and Western civilizations since antiquity.

We stand at the crossroads of North-South and East-West hemispheres. Moreover, world's strategically significant transport corridors pass through this region including International North South Transport Corridor (INSTC), China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) or the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI).

Let me reiterate here that the key to unlock the geo-economic potential of the ECO region lies in connectivity. We can achieve this objective by taking three vital steps: (i) development of road and rail projects, (ii) liberalization of visa regimes and (iii) simplification of border procedures. Such steps will not only address our regional requirements of energy and enhanced intra-regional trade, but enable us to act as a bridge to create mutual inter-dependencies for sustainable growth.

Some of the most significant contributions of ECO have been the operationalization of Istanbul-Tehran-Islamabad (ITI) road corridor, along with implementation of Transit Transport Framework Agreement (TTFA), and establishment of a fund for its implementation.

Under the TIR system, trucks of the National Logistic Cell of Pakistan have been successfully transiting cargo through Iran.

Notification of more Border Crossing Points in the ECO region as TIR Stations can further facilitate trade operations in the region. Pakistan, on its part, is working closely with partner states, bilaterally and through the

multilateral channels, toward enhancement and upgradation of transit connectivity.

Excellencies,

Global warming is an existential threat to human civilization.

Last year, Pakistan witnessed catastrophic monsoon rains and flooding, that impacted more than 33 million lives, and inflicted material losses to the tune of US\$80 billion. We had never witnessed such an unprecedented devastation before.

Let me alert you, the climate challenges ahead of us are only escalating with each passing day.

I am thankful to the Republic of Azerbaijan for designating the year 2025 as the ‘Year of Green Transition and Interconnectivity’ bringing the issue of climate change to the centre stage.

Excellencies,

Fortunately, we now have High-Level Dialogue Platform on Environmental Cooperation approved by the 26th COM at the beginning of this year. It was recommended by the Honourable President of the Republic of Uzbekistan and is aimed at addressing the issues that concern us all. I express my appreciation to Mr. President for taking this timely initiative.

Keeping in view the significance of the issue, I would reiterate the need to develop a time-bound, well-funded, and strategically robust mechanism within the region to tackle emergent environmental issues, along with timely transition to green economy in the future.

We believe that “Green and Low-Carbon Solutions” is the key to sustainable future. We need to transform ourselves into modern, resource-efficient and competitive economies, ensuring minimum net emissions of greenhouse gases. We must join hands for a long term multi-dimensional, and fundamental transformation that enables us to transition towards more sustainable patterns of production and consumption in the ECO region.

Excellencies,

Afghanistan stands at an important inflection point. After decades of conflict and instability, there is no war in Afghanistan.

The security situation in the country has improved; the Interim Afghan Government has also taken steps to improve governance, curb corruption and promote regional trade – significant reduction in poppy cultivation in Afghanistan, stands out as a major accomplishment of the Interim Afghan Government.

On the other hand, commensurate progress has not been made in addressing international concerns regarding inclusivity, rights of women and girls, and countering the threat posed by terrorist organizations based in Afghanistan.

We believe that the pathway to progress in Afghanistan leads through constructive engagement with the Interim Afghan Government. As friends and neighbours of Afghanistan, we, as members of the ECO, have a critical role to play to this end.

We must leverage connectivity as a way to achieve economic revival and growth in Afghanistan which remains a key to sustainable peace, stability and prosperity. Connectivity projects such as CASA-1000, Trans-Afghan Railways, TAPI and others, are not merely economic undertakings, they are also strategic investments in our shared future. We should devise a common vision for regional connectivity.

Pakistan looks forward to working closely with other ECO member states towards the shared ideals of a peaceful, prosperous and interconnected Afghanistan.

Excellencies,

We have come a long way with our collective and coordinated efforts from the ECO platform, particularly in the field of transit and transport connectivity. However, challenges from within and outside our region have impeded progress towards making ECO an integrated regional economic organization consistent with its earliest objectives. A sincere effort towards reform is mandatory to make the Organization more efficient and result-oriented.

On its part, Pakistan remains committed to preserve and promote the core objectives of ECO and to its vision as a well-knit and well-integrated organization destined to reclaim its historical position as the global hub of connectivity and economic inter-linkages.

We have full faith in ECO and reaffirm our commitment to the vision and for the collective progress and prosperity of the people of this region.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

In my concluding thoughts let me emphasize here that the world needs peace, development, harmony, and respect for the cultural and civilizational diversity that this planet is blessed with. We need to bring wars and illegal occupations to an end and help promote dialogue and diplomacy rather than reckless spending accentuating conflicts and divisions across the world and the people.

A world barely moving out of the throes of COVID 19 pandemic cannot face threats of breakdowns, fanatic dogmatism, inflation, recession, or disruption of global supply chains that have deepened poverty and hopelessness. We must remember that nobody is safe until everybody is safe. The world needs to learn a lot from the cultural and historical power of the ECO region and build stronger and deeper bridges to bring humanity closer and rid it off the challenges it is needlessly confronting today.

I thank you all!