

**Statement by the Prime Minister**

**At the 16<sup>th</sup> ECO Summit (Tashkent, November 9, 2023)**

His Excellency, Shavkat Mirziyoyev, President of the Republic of Uzbekistan and host of the 16<sup>th</sup> Summit,

His Excellency, Ilham Aliyev, President of the Republic of Azerbaijan, the current ECO Chair,

His Excellency, Serdar Berdimuhamadov, President of Turkmenistan and Chair of 15<sup>th</sup> ECO Summit,

His Excellency Ambassador Khusrav Noziri, Secretary General (ECO),

Distinguished Heads of States and Governments,

Honourable delegates,

Excellencies,

Ladies and Gentlemen.

**Assalam-o-Alaikum,**

It is a great honour for me to represent Pakistan at the 16<sup>th</sup> ECO Summit, in the historical city of Tashkent. Let me convey my profound gratitude to the Government of Uzbekistan for extending warm hospitality to me and my delegation. I also congratulate His Excellency Mr. Shavkat Mirziyoyev, for assuming the Chairmanship of the 16<sup>th</sup> ECO Summit.

**Mr. Chairman,**

I congratulate the Government of Azerbaijan for successfully hosting the 27<sup>th</sup> Council of Ministers (COM) in Shusha, on 10<sup>th</sup> October 2023. The “Shusha Declaration”, adopted at the end of the COM, provides us with comprehensive guidelines to promote ECO’s goals of expanding trade and connectivity in the region and enhancing energy security. We must all work together to implement decisions taken in the Shusha Declaration.

**Excellencies,**

I also take this opportunity to extend my warmest felicitations to the Islamic Republic of Iran, for assuming the ECO Chair for 2024 and for choosing a timely and apt theme, "Enhanced and Resilient ECO Region through Expansion of Intra-Regional Trade." I assure Iran of Pakistan's whole-hearted support.

**Mr. Chairman,**

Let me also extend our deep appreciation to Ambassador Khusrav Noziri, whose tenure will conclude in August 2024. This is the last Summit under his able leadership and we applaud his services in strengthening the Organisation. I am delighted that the next ECO Secretary General will be from Pakistan, and I hope that all the member states will extend the fullest cooperation to the Secretary General and assist him in furthering ECO's principles and purposes.

**Excellencies,**

The ECO region is blessed with natural resources, geographical contiguity, enterprising people, and a cultural heritage that can serve as a basis to expand trade and economic integration in this area. Nevertheless, despite our enormous potential and infinite resources, we have a share of only 2% in global trade and 8% in intra-regional trade.

In the year 2022, imports of ECO countries, within the region, were recorded at US\$ 39 billion out of their total world imports of US\$ 577 billion in the same period. Likewise, the exports of ECO countries within the region stood at only US \$ 46 billion against their total world exports of US \$ 459 billion. This shows how the region has still not been able to achieve its true potential of increasing exports from the ECO region to the world, as envisaged in the ECO Vision

2025. It is an important document adopted during the 13<sup>th</sup> ECO Summit in Islamabad and enjoins ECO to principally:

- (a) Increase intra-regional trade*
- (b) Strengthen regional connectivity*
- (c) Operationalize major ECO transport corridors; and*
- (d) Seek energy security.*

We must deliberate as to how we can expand our share in global and intra-regional trade, become more competitive, reduce barriers to promote trade integration, develop infrastructure across the ECO region, have environmentally sustainable policies and reduce poverty. There are lessons to be learnt from the countries that have miraculously reduced poverty and used regional economic integration as a vehicle in a short span of time.

**Mr. Chairman,**

We are all aware of the significance of trade and the need for an integrated system of communications and transport in promoting trade. Corridor-based approach adopted by the ECO, to maximize its potential, was a step in the right direction.

Transit Transport Framework Agreement (TTFA) as well as Fund for TTFA's implementation envisaged the following corridors:

- KTAI (Kyrgyz Republic – Tajikistan - Afghanistan - Iran)
- ITI (Islamabad - Tehran - Istanbul)
- KTI (Kazakhstan – Turkmenistan - Iran); and
- PIT (Pakistan– Iran-Turkmenistan)

Such corridors would lead to greater connectivity among the Member States and usher in an era of massive economic growth in the region.

**Excellencies,**

Re-operationalization of Istanbul-Tehran-Islamabad (ITI) corridor has been a significant development. To speed-up progress, Pakistan is upgrading its rail and road infrastructure to facilitate further flow of goods to our neighbours and beyond.

Moreover, in order to enhance intra-regional connectivity, it is imperative that more Border Crossing Points in the ECO region are notified as TIR Stations so that trade operations are facilitated.

The successful realization of the afore-mentioned projects would encourage us to spread and link up with other corridors in the region and beyond. More importantly, such ventures will facilitate an enabling environment for the private sector to widen business and investment opportunities.

**Excellencies,**

ECO Trade Agreement (ECOTA) is a landmark preferential trade arrangement. Pakistan attaches great importance to its early implementation. We urge all member states to sign ECOTA and thus help promote regional trade expansion.

I would also like to highlight the latest development in the investment landscape of Pakistan. The Government of Pakistan has established a Special Investment Facilitation Council (SIFC) that will serve as a "Single-Window" platform for multi domain cooperation in five key sections including Agriculture, Defence

Production, I.T, Energy and Mining. Headed by the Prime Minister's Office, all state institutions that are involved in trade and investment are brought together under the SIFC umbrella. This body has the mandate to give directions to any government institution and ensure policy continuation and execution.

**Mr. Chairman,**

We are all aware of the fact that Afghanistan plays a critical role in regional connectivity.

Connectivity projects such as CASA-1000, Trans-Afghan Railways, TAPI and others, are not merely economic projects, they are also strategic investments in our shared future.

Pakistan, therefore, looks forward to working closely with other ECO Member States towards the shared goal of building a peaceful, prosperous, and interconnected Afghanistan.

**Excellencies,**

As we speak, a grave humanitarian crisis is unfolding in Gaza. The incessant and lethal bombardment of Gaza by the Israeli forces is a deplorable act which calls for international condemnation. This issue needs to be addressed in accordance with the relevant UNSC and OIC Resolutions. I urge all ECO member states to push for a ceasefire in Gaza, support the call for provision of humanitarian assistance, and rally efforts to hold Israel to account.

Let me also highlight here the Indian atrocities being inflicted upon the people of Indian Illegally Occupied Jammu and Kashmir. Pakistan continues to rely on its fraternal ECO countries to support the exercise of right to self-determination by the people of IIOJK in light of the relevant UNSC Resolutions.

**Excellencies,**

The perilous issues of growing intolerance, xenophobia and violence on the basis of religious identity, which are endangering the region, also demand our due attention. I urge the ECO Member States and international community to work together to build political and legal deterrence against the abhorrent rise of Islamophobia while fostering mutual respect, interfaith harmony and peaceful coexistence.

**Excellencies,**

Pakistan reiterates its firm belief in ECO's founding values as well as its commitment to ECO Vision 2025. Let's make ECO an organization, not just of words but of action, not just of commitments but implementation. It is crucial for us, to work collectively and diligently to realise the goals and objectives of the Organization. In this regard, accelerating reforms to make ECO more vibrant and efficient is of pivotal importance. Our region, if well-connected, can bring colossal economic and peace dividends for our peoples. I am confident that with our shared commitment and coordinated efforts, we can realize the true potential of this Organization.

I thank you all.