

**Statement by H.E. Dr. Asad M. Khan, ECO Secretary General
At the Informal Meeting of the ECO Council of Ministers (COM)
UN Headquarters - New York
September 2024**

**Honorable Chairman, His Excellency Mr. Abbas Araghchi, Foreign
Minister of the Islamic Republic of Iran,
Honorable Ministers,
Excellencies,**

السَّلَامُ عَلَيْكُمْ

It is a great honor to join the honorable Ministers for this informal ECO Council of Ministers meeting as Secretary General.

I fully recognize the importance of my new role and I assure you of my unstinted resolve to fulfilling my duties to the best of my abilities. I do count on your continued support and guidance in this regard.

I would also like to respectfully recall the tragic loss of Iranian President H.E. Mr. Ebrahim Raisi and Foreign Minister H.E. Dr. Hossein Amir-Abdollahian, whose visionary leadership and commitment to ECO and to a stronger neighborhood continue to inspire our efforts and activities.

Excellencies,

Despite being a natural geographic, historic, cultural and religious fit, we have yet to transform into an integrated economic fit. We are the pioneers in regional cooperation for development in the world. We must move from being a constant under-achiever to an outfit capable of fully realizing its promise and potential.

For this, we need greater and closer political attention at the leadership level to shake up the inertia surrounding our bureaucracies in dealing with ECO related issues, which is reflected in insufficient quorums for meetings, lukewarm interest in signing or ratifying ECO agreements, and above all, in paying budgetary contributions.

Learning from past, we need a comprehensive reform to overhaul our procedures, and substantive focus to enable ECO to efficiently respond to the rapidly changing geopolitical and economic landscape. Now is the

moment that ECO fully realizes its promise and potential in the greater interest of our region.

Excellencies,

As we approach the conclusion of the ECO Vision 2025, I must emphasize the significance of this strategic document. A mid-term review of ECO Vision was conducted and endorsed by you, Excellencies, at the 25th COM meeting in Ashgabat in November 2021.

In 2024, the ECO Vision 2025 Review Committee prioritized key projects for implementation. We now enter the final phase of implementing these initiatives.

In this context, I wish to highlight the upcoming first meeting of the High-Level Committee of ECO Deputy Foreign Ministers. Alongside reviewing the report of the ECO Vision Committee, our Deputy Foreign Ministers are expected to discuss, inter alia, comprehensive Organizational reforms and make recommendation thereon.

Excellencies,

As regards trade, in July this year, the 9th ECOTA Cooperation Council Meeting in Islamabad secured encouraging outcomes to break the deadlock on establishing a Free Trade Area in ECO. We have committed to start a new process. I would urge all ECO Member States to now join this process to contribute and benefit from it.

On environmental cooperation, I commend Azerbaijan's leadership as President of COP29, particularly in advancing the global climate agenda. ECO will actively support this process through key events on the sidelines of COP29 in Baku, including the inauguration of the ECO Clean Energy Centre, and an ECO Ministerial Meeting on Circular Economy. I encourage Member States to engage in these initiatives and expedite the operationalization of the ECO Clean Energy Centre.

Excellencies,

Looking forward, I eagerly anticipate the 28th Meeting of the ECO Council of Ministers in Iran this December, where I will present a

comprehensive report on ECO's sector-wise activities made over the year. To this end, your support and insights will be crucial as we chart our path ahead.

To further bolster our collective efforts, I strongly encourage more robust and regular interactions between the ECO Secretariat and the highest levels of ECO leadership. Particularly, I would like to extend a standing invitation to Your Excellencies, as well as to our esteemed heads of state and government, to visit the ECO Secretariat during your bilateral visits to Iran.

In conclusion, I extend my sincere gratitude for your steadfast support and unwavering dedication to advancing the ECO agenda. As we confront increasingly complex geopolitical and economic challenges, increased regionalism has never been more crucial.

Let us move forward together with renewed energy and a spirit of collaboration, ensuring that ECO continues to serve as a beacon of regional integration.

I thank you all.