

**Remarks by ECO Secretary General
Ambassador Asad M. Khan
At a Pre-KISH EXPO Event
December 13, 2024**

**The Honorable Chief Guest Dr. Aghamohammadi, Head of the
Economic Group for the Supreme Leader Office**

Distinguished dignitaries, Ambassadors and delegates

Assalam Alaikom,

I extend my heartfelt gratitude to Mr. Muhammad Reza Ghaderi, Directing Manager and the Secretary of the Exhibitions, for inviting me to this important pre-Kish Expo event, bringing together esteemed representatives from both the public and private sectors to exchange ideas on making the EXPO a significant trailblazing event for trade promotion in the region.

As a Free Trade Zone, Kish Island provides a dynamic platform for regional trade promotion and cooperation. Further, the 1st International Kish Expo on January 18-24, 2025 will bring together participants from over 40 countries, fostering collaboration and innovation in trade across the region and beyond.

Distinguished participants

In 2023, global goods trade reached USD 23.55 trillion, with the ECO region accounting for around USD 1.016 trillion (4.3%). ECO imports totaled USD 568.6 billion (2.4% of global imports), while exports stood at USD 448 billion (1.9%). Intra-regional trade within the ECO region was just USD 82 billion, representing 8.05% of its trade with the rest of the world.

As one of the oldest regional development organizations in the world, with unmatched historic, cultural, economic, linguistic and religious overlaps amongst its membership, ECO seeks to promote trade and connectivity as its overarching objective. Considering this, these figures frankly are far below the promise and potential of the ECO region.

Absence or lack of business networking opportunities has been a factor, among others, in constraining the growth of trade in the region. KISH EXPO offers us that missing but important opportunity for networking. We commend its management for including diverse sectors such as industrial products, mining, agriculture, renewable energy, logistics, innovation and knowledge-based industries. This will help bring depth and diversity to region's trade opportunities.

The focus on services like banking, tourism and ICT will also stimulate the movement of people and services, essential for trade growth. As ECO, we are keen to be a partner in this important initiative for trade promotion and would like to request reserving a discounted space under the ECO banner in the two pavilions allocated for foreign companies, enabling ECO region firms to showcase their products effectively.

Dear Participants,

We also invite KISHEXPO to collaborate with the Iranian authorities to host the 3rd ECO Trade Fair in partnership with ECO CCI and the Iran Chamber of Commerce, Industry, Mines and Agriculture. The ECO Secretariat stands ready to assist in coordinating with National Chambers from the ECO countries and ensuring the event's success.

Esteemed Delegates,

Sharing a common past of trade and connectivity through the rich legacy of silk route, we have a duty and obligation to renew and refresh those centuries' old linkages by connecting our past to our

future prosperity, growth and development. This promise and potential for expansion, frankly, are unlimited. Trade, as the engine of growth, thrives on reduced costs and the efficient movement of goods, services, people and capital.

Ladies & Gentlemen,

In this regard, ECO is advancing key initiatives to boost regional economic integration. To ensure the swift movement of goods, we are working on promoting customs cooperation, tariff reduction and trade facilitation to streamline trade and reduce costs.

Our efforts to ease the movement of people include a visa facilitation agreement among seven member countries, coordinated by Iran, to enhance business travel and collaboration.

Additionally, establishing regional payment systems is our priority to reduce trade transaction costs and ensure transparency, as emphasized by leaders during the 28th COM. These initiatives aim to drive economic growth and strengthen regional ties.

In conclusion, I emphasize that Kish's Free Trade Zone has the potential to attract industry and businesses through the ECO platform by hosting trade promotion events. We at ECO are ready to partner with you to realize that potentially fully.

Thank you!
