

Statement by

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The Honourable President of the Islamic Republic of Iran

At the

17th ECO Summit

4 July 2025, Republic of Azerbaijan

In the Name of Allah, the Compassionate, the Merciful

Your Excellency Ilham Aliyev

Honourable President of the Republic of Azerbaijan

At the outset, I would like to express my gratitude to you and the distinguished people of the Republic of Azerbaijan for hosting the 17th Summit of the Economic Cooperation Organization (ECO) as well as for the generous hospitality. I would also like to thank the distinguished ECO Secretary General and his team for preparations for this event.

Honourable Presidents and Prime Ministers,

Esteemed Guests, Ladies and Gentlemen,

On 13th June 2025, in the midst of nuclear negotiations with the United States, the Israeli Zionist regime launched aggressive, terrorist, and unlawful attacks against the Islamic Republic of Iran. These actions, continued and supported by the U.S. aggressive army, flagrantly violated all norms and principles of international law, including Article 2, Paragraph 4 of the United Nations Charter. Over 12 days of brutal aggression, a series of criminal operations targeted off-duty military personnel, university professors, ordinary civilians, peaceful nuclear facilities under IAEA supervision, and public infrastructure, causing significant human casualties and material losses. As expected, and in accordance with Article 51 of the UN Charter, our armed forces exercised their legitimate right to self-defense, protecting the decent

people of Iran, our national sovereignty and territorial integrity. They taught a strong lesson to the aggressors and prevented the spread of war in the region.

The Zionist regime, enjoying the support of the United States and its Western allies, has taken the fate of the Middle East hostage. Through its illegal and dangerous actions and expansionist intentions, it remains the main source of threat, instability, and insecurity throughout the region. The continued inaction of the international community, particularly the UN Security Council, and the impunity enjoyed by the Zionist regime for its numerous and systematic violations have exacerbated these threats. If this situation continues, it will undoubtedly inflict irreparable damage on efforts to deepen cooperation and economic integration in West Asia and neighboring regions.

I am obliged to thank the countries in the region, including ECO Member States, for their responsible positions during the recent crisis. Many regional and global organizations and blocs, including the recent meeting of Foreign Ministers of the Organization of Islamic Cooperation, took strong stances in condemning the attacks on the Islamic Republic of Iran. The 17th ECO Summit constitutes another opportunity to once again voice to the world the condemnation of the recent aggressions and regional and global threats therefrom.

Dear Colleagues,

We are in the final year of implementation of the “ECO Vision 2025.” Unfortunately, due to various reasons, including the COVID-19 pandemic, the Vision has not achieved its defined objectives. Regional cooperation within the ECO framework over the past decades has offered valuable lessons that should be taken into account when the new ECO Vision 2035 is developed. ECO’s cooperation is rooted in strong foundations established in 1964 by Iran, Pakistan, and Türkiye under the Regional Cooperation for Development (RCD). In fact, ECO is the oldest multilateral economic cooperation mechanism in the developing world. In recent years – especially since seven new countries joined the ECO in the early 1990s – solid structures and frameworks have been created for regional cooperation in various economic fields.

In our view, one major reason why expected results have not been achieved in key areas, such as intra-regional trade, is lack of effective means, tools and guarantees for implementation of the agreements. This issue must be a central consideration in drafting the new 10-year vision and its implementation mechanisms. No agreement should be made, no structure should be created, and no partnership should be designed without prior assurances that enough and effective tools and guarantees for their implementation are available.

The good neighborhood policy remains a priority in the economic diplomacy of the Islamic Republic of Iran. For us, ECO is “Organization for Cooperation of Neighbours” and therefore stands at the forefront of our

multilateral economic diplomacy. We believe in the strength of the ECO and its vast potential – both latent and active. ECO can enhance growth, prosperity, robustness, and resilience of its Member States and the entire region.

Having said so, and without delving into the specific capabilities and potential of the ECO region – which we are all aware of – I would like to share my thoughts and proposals for achieving more effective cooperation and the emergence of a “stronger ECO” over the next decade. The “ECO Vision 2035” must outline clear and attainable horizons. Some of the key visions are as follows:

1. ECO Trade Vision 2035

Undoubtedly, one of the ECO’s most important Key Performance Indicator (KPI) is “intra-regional trade”, which unfortunately remains one of the Organization’s failures. An 8% intra-regional trade level cannot be justified and overlooked. One of the goals of the ECO Vision 2025 was to establish free trade area within the ECO, but this goal is still out of reach. The ECO Trade Agreement (ECOTA), which is supposed to be re-negotiated and hopefully implemented, will not meet the Region’s needs over the next decade. Negotiations for an ECO free trade agreement must begin as soon as possible, with the goal of establishing ECO Free Trade Area by 2035. Over this coming decade, Member States will have the time and opportunity to develop and

prepare national and regional requirements for operationalization of the envisaged free trade area.

In addition to digitizing trade and customs processes, a new financial architecture for the ECO Region is essential to enhance intra-regional trade. The ECO Trade and Development Bank must undertake necessary reforms to play a significant role in financing and guaranteeing trade exchanges among ECO Member States. The proposal for creating an ECO Joint Investment Fund, discussed at the meeting of ECO national wealth funds, needs to be taken seriously. At the same time, focusing on barter mechanisms and trade in national currencies among ECO Member States will be catalyst and accelerator.

2. ECO Transit Vision 2035

Over the next decade, cooperation in transit and transportation must expand at two levels: intra-regional and inter-regional. ECO's seven landlocked countries shall gain cheaper, shorter, and easier access to open seas and global markets. The Islamic Republic of Iran and other transit countries in the ECO Region can play a vital role in this regard. New preferences, advantages and incentives should be offered at ports and border crossing points for ECO's landlocked countries. The ECO logistics hubs network need to be developed and equipped at the highest international standards at the ports and border crossings in the Region.

At the inter-regional level, ECO—with its rail, road, and multimodal transport networks—deserves to secure a greater share of global transit. ECO's

geographic location connecting China to Europe on one side, and the Persian Gulf, Sea of Oman, and Indian Ocean to Russia on the other, offers an indisputable advantage to global cargo providers and merchants. One of the key requirements to capitalize on this opportunity is a centralized and integrated management system for the ECO corridors and the design of comprehensive regional transit coordination and facilitation system.

3. ECO Digital Vision 2035

The emergence of modern ICTs, particularly artificial intelligence, is rapidly transforming societies, especially in economic fields. ECO countries have to be prepared to harness the benefits of these technologies. If we rely solely on our national economies in the digital and smart business sectors, our companies won't be able to compete with major international technology firms. A vibrant digital and smart economy in the ECO can only happen if it can afford to play a role as part of a broader economic chain within a global context. As an early measure under the new ECO Vision 2035, I propose to establish "ECO Artificial Intelligence Center" as an ECO regional and specialized body. Along its regular mandates, this center should facilitate ECO Member States' participation in and contribution to the global AI-related standard-setting and norm-setting. I also recommend that a working task force, composed of experts and specialists from Member States, is now established to develop a special programme for enhancing ECO cooperation and coordination in ICT and AI. This programme can be incorporated in the ECO Vision 2035.

4. ECO Tourism Vision 2035

Tourism industry in the ECO Region remains a promising sector that can significantly boost economic growth in the Region. Some Member States have made good progress and performance in recent years. ECO as a region can become a destination for a wide spectrum of tourists from across the globe. This goal is achievable by 2035. Establishing direct flights between cities in all Member States must be a top priority. Visa facilitation, digitizing tourism services, and developing regional tourism standards will foster sustainable regional tourism growth and consolidate relations among ECO nations.

5. ECO Resilience Vision 2035

The COVID-19 crisis and recent geopolitical developments in and around our region underscore the need to focus on national and regional resilience in the face of similar and other possible future crises. Threats such as energy insecurity, food insecurity, natural and human-made disasters, and climate change require pre-designed and preventive cooperation and coordination. ECO provides excellent frameworks for enhancing regional and collective resilience against potential future crises. The Vision 2035 must address these topics seriously.

The ECO Vision 2035 and its annexed documents need to be developed with inputs from all stakeholders from Member States, including governments,

private sectors, academia, and civil societies. In this regard, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Islamic Republic of Iran will soon organize a “National ECO Conference” to receive views from national stakeholders on optimal ECO directions and cooperation over the next decade. The results of this conference will be shared with the ECO Secretariat and Member States.

Distinguished Participants,

As mentioned earlier, the success of any vision or plan of action depends on the availability of implementation means, tools and guarantees. Therefore, the ECO Vision 2035 has to pre-address these issues. The ECO Secretariat, in consultation with Member States and external partners, should identify the needs and requirements for achieving the Vision’s goals and objectives, which to be met by the Member States.

In conclusion, I would like to inform this august Summit that the Islamic Republic of Iran will be honoured to host the distinguished heads of State and Government of the Member States at 18th ECO Summit.

I wish our today’s Summit every success.

Thank you for your attention.