

Statement by the ECO Secretary General
17th ECO Summit
Khankendi, Azerbaijan (July 4, 2025)

**Excellency Ilham Aliyev, Honourable Chairman,
Honourable Heads of State and Government,
Distinguished Special Guests, Heads of Delegations,
Excellencies,
Ladies and Gentlemen,**

It is a great personal privilege for me to address the 17th Summit of the Economic Cooperation Organization.

Our most sincere gratitude to His Excellency President Ilham Aliyev for his close personal engagement in overseeing the preparations of this historic Summit in the beautiful city of Khankendi in Karabakh, a region that stands as a powerful symbol of courage, resilience and the spirit of recovery. Thanks to your leadership and vision, Excellency, we are scoring a number of firsts at this Summit. First, we are able to not only bring together the leadership of the region **a number of Special Guests** but also the whole family of ECO organizations as part of the first ever ECO week being celebrated around this Summit.

Also for the first time at this Summit, we are engaging stakeholders beyond governments, including women, youth and private sector, to frame the new Strategic Goals of the Economic Cooperation 2035 for next 10 years. Clearly, Azerbaijan has not only set a new standard and yardstick for ECO Summit but has also taken a very important step in generating the much needed ECO

family spirit. It is our fervent hope that future Summits would uphold this practice.

Excellencies,

We meet at a time of momentous geopolitical changes around us and beyond. The threat, posed by Israeli aggression against the territorial integrity and sovereignty of the Islamic Republic of Iran in clear breach of the fundamental principles of international law and the UN charter, is a cause of grave concern for all of us. Predictably, the region came together to stand in solidarity with brotherly Iran, a fellow ECO member and host to our organization, in condemning the blatant Israeli aggression.

Excellencies,

This Summit also comes at a time of profound transformation in the global economy. We are witnessing a complex interplay of rising protectionist tendencies, weaponization of trading and financial systems, and the reconfiguration of global supply chain. The resulting uncertainty and unpredictability in the global economic system beckons us to urgently act with ever greater harmony, understanding and strategic foresight to advance our shared regional economic integration goals. This summit is, therefore, a timely opportunity to refresh our cooperative ambition with focus on solidarity, institutional cohesion and practical steps. As one of the oldest regional development organizations in the world, widely seen as the pioneer in development cooperation in Asia, ECO is fully capable of taking the lead in guiding the region into a new era of solidarity and cooperation.

Distinguished Guests,

Despite being a natural fit with geographic, cultural, historic, religious, linguistic overlaps, and centuries old economic linkages, we are still far from being a fully integrated economic community. A number of key agreements and instruments, particularly ECO Trade Agreement (ECOTA) and ECO Transit Transport Framework Agreement (TTFA), still await endorsement and ratification by all ECO member states. This will have to change, if we aspire to achieve the next level economic integration in the region. We must, therefore, work harder to make ECO a platform that achieves its real promise and potential and delivers tangible benefits to our people. For this, your leadership, close personal attention and engagement, Excellencies, remain essential to goad our bureaucracies into action to fully embrace and effectively leverage ECO's initiatives and platforms.

The newfound political momentum that we see through the successful convening of Transport and Tourism ministerial meetings this year, and the decisions to host the long awaited Agriculture, Interior and Industry Ministers meetings later this year give us the hope for a closer and more active political engagement in ECO ministerial processes in future. It is truly unfortunate that we had to postpone the sixth trade ministerial meeting which was taking place after a gap of 14 years. We do hope that we will, with your blessings, have this long awaited ministerial meeting soon to endorse and approve a number of important instruments and agreements already finalized at the expert level.

Excellencies,

Without a well-resourced and active regional development bank, we will not be able to fund and finance regional trade and connectivity, through development of new transit and transport projects, either on our own or by co-opting other International Financial Institutions (IFIs). I would, therefore, implore all ECO member states to consider expanding the capital base of bank, and those that have not, as yet, joined the Bank, to do so on priority.

Similarly, creating safe, secure and seamless financial payment mechanisms in a sanction-ridden global environment, is an imperative for expanding trade volumes. We do hope that with your blessing, our Finance Ministers will work together with the private sector to urgently develop such mechanisms and share the existing best practices to facilitate trade.

The climate change and environmental vulnerabilities of our region are widely known and well-documented. We must have regular, sustained and result-oriented engagement to tackle climate change and deal with the whole range of environmental challenges afflicting our region. We do hope that **following this Summit where we met under the overarching theme of “New Vision for a Sustainable and Climate-Resilient Future”**, our Environment Ministers will urgently meet, with your blessings, to collectively reflect on these issues.

Excellencies,

Afghanistan has demonstrated consistent interest in remaining engaged with the ECO. As a valued member State, Afghanistan's continued involvement carries significance for the region. While continuing to work towards fully normalizing interactions, we have deepened our engagement with Afghanistan by opening formal channels of communication. It is essential that we explore constructive and inclusive pathways that uphold collective interests, while maintaining the integrity of our platform.

Excellencies,

Happily, **in our internal deliberations**, we have **already** agreed on the **broad** elements of institutional reforms in ECO which remain at the heart of our future agenda. Another defining task before us is the preparation of the Strategic Goals of Economic Cooperation 2035, as ECO Vision 2025 nears completion. This new strategic roadmap will reflect our commitment to realign the Organization's priorities in light of emerging regional and global challenges. The Secretariat has already circulated the first draft for feedback of the member states. We will further enrich the draft based on the guidance received from Your Excellencies at this summit, and the important recommendations made by the business, women and youth forums during the ECO week.

We are grateful to Kazakhstan for its able stewardship of the Organization during 2025, and look forward to the upcoming ECO Council of Ministers

(COM) Meeting in November this year in Kazakhstan that will notably coincide with our traditional ECO Day celebrations.

Before I conclude I also reiterate our sincere thanks to the Republic of Azerbaijan for graciously hosting us in the beautiful Karabakh region, and to all participating Member States, partners and stakeholders who graced this 17th ECO Summit with their valued presence and contributions.

Thank you

Additional Note on Treaty Event and Next Summit

Excellencies,

As depository of the Charter of the ECO Clean Energy Center **established in Baku**, I am glad to announce that the Charter has entered into force following ratification by three ECO member states: Azerbaijan, Pakistan and Kyrgyz Republic. The entry into force of this important document and the operationalization of the Clean Energy Center mark a significant step toward enhanced cooperation among the member countries. Today, we will also have a treaty event, during which Kazakhstan's Minister of Energy - His Excellency Yerlan Akkenzhenov will sign the Charter as the sixth signatory. May I seek your attention to invite him to sign the Charter.

Let me also avail this opportunity to state that, as declared by Honourable President of the Islamic Republic of Iran, Excellency Masoud Pezeshkian, the 18th Summit will be hosted by Iran. The event's exact time will be communicated through diplomatic channels.