

**Remarks by H.E. Mr. Mohammed Yahya Maroofi,
ECO Secretary General at the International Conference on Afghanistan
(December 5, 2011, Bonn)**

H.E. Ms Angela Merkel, the honourable Chancellor of the Federal Republic of Germany

H.E. Mr. Hamid Karzai, the honourable President of the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan

Excellencies, Distinguished Delegates; Ladies and Gentlemen,

It is my great privilege to participate in this International Afghanistan Conference here in Bonn. At the outset, allow me to place on record my profound gratitude to the Governments of the Federal Republic of Germany and the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan for their joint invitation to the Economic Cooperation Organization to be part of this event in which the international community has gathered to renew its firm commitment and reemphasize shared interest to support the Afghan people in building secure, stable, peaceful and prosperous society. I must congratulate the international community for expression of its overwhelming support for Afghanistan as demonstrated in today's event.

I wish also to express my felicitations to the co-Chairmen of this historic event under whose sagacious guidance and stewardship, I am certain, the Conference would succeed in reaching a landmark outcome to effectively respond to the expectations and aspirations of the Afghan people.

Excellencies

Realization of peace, stability and sustained socio-economic development in Afghanistan constitutes common objectives for the regional and global communities. There is no denying the fact that Afghanistan and its partners have come a long way in realization of these goals. Nonetheless, while the Afghan people are gradually assuming greater reasonability and lead role on internal reconciliation, security, rebuilding and economic revitalization, there remain myriad of challenges for them, ranging from security to socio-economic dimensions to cope with. These challenges include the scourge of extremism, menace of illicit drugs trafficking, combating human smuggling, fighting transnational organized crimes and strengthening Afghan national institutions to stimulate socioeconomic development.

We are indeed at a critical juncture. During this phase of transition, support of the international community for Afghan people is as vital as it was a decade ago. This Conference offers an opportune occasion for all the stakeholders to reflect on the past gains, take a fresh review of the challenges, build on previous efforts and generate fresh momentum for accelerated, concerted, well-coordinated and result-oriented cooperation on Afghanistan.

Excellencies

ECO shares the notion that a peaceful and prosperous Afghanistan is indeed a prerequisite to harness the potential of regional integration. We

have been participating in various regional and international initiatives including the recently held International Conference on Afghanistan in Istanbul. ECO subscribes to the principles of cooperation and supports the specific objectives especially those in the fields of economics, security, culture and education as identified in the Istanbul Declaration. We are confident that effective follow-up on the commitments made at the occasion would ensure that the benefits of the Istanbul Process reach peoples of Afghanistan and that political will generated at the Conferences translate into tangible actions on the ground. In this regard, the ECO shall continue to extend, within its means, support to regional and international partners in realization of common ideals.

Excellencies

Economic Cooperation Organization is committed to foster regional economic integration to contribute to peace, sustainable socioeconomic development and uplift of the people within its region. In order to build a robust architecture for regional integration, the Organization endeavors to forge ahead, among its membership, institutional linkages in the sectors of trade, investment, transport & communications, energy, food security, environment, human resource development and drugs control etc. In order to fully capitalize on the geo-political and geo-economic significance of our region, we have taken a number of successful measures. Afghanistan is actively participating in ECO agreements and programmes.

Distinguished Delegates

ECO region holds vast potential of both intra and inter regional trade. According to a study, intra-regional trade potential of the region is around US \$ 320 billion. In order to benefit from the promising prospects of trade liberalization for Afghanistan and the region, the Organization would soon embark upon negotiating ECO Free Trade Agreement (ECOFTA) to establish in the region a Free Trade Area by 2015. We would welcome collaboration with relevant partners to harness the trade potential of the region.

Appreciative of ECO's potential as a land-bridge between different regions especially between Europe and Asia, the Organization is pursuing several projects and programmes to promote both intra and inter-regional connectivity. Special efforts have been expended to revitalize the historic Silk Route in the region. The ECO Silk Road Truck Caravan launched in 2010 was a notable achievement in this regard. ECO appreciates Afghanistan's potential as a critical transit linkage. We seek collaboration with regional and international community and donors to launch priority road and railway construction projects to assist Afghanistan revive its historical role as the heart of several important transit corridors.

Excellencies

With respect to other important sectors of socioeconomic development like energy, industry, environment, food security, health and narcotics control, the Economic Cooperation Organization is pursuing an

ambitious agenda with a special focus to the needs of Afghanistan. The Organization has also established with the assistance of its membership a Fund to finance small-scale projects in Afghanistan. We are willing to share our experiences and explore opportunities for collaboration with the UN system and international donors to identify and undertake more joint projects.

Excellencies

In conclusion, this Conference holds an extraordinary significance for Afghanistan as well as for the global community. As the Secretary-General of the Economic Cooperation Organization, I feel obliged to particularly highlight the importance of promoting trade, attracting investment, building efficient road and rail linkage, providing access to ports, development of energy, and capacity-building of the Afghan people. These challenges would require a committed and long-term partnership with Afghanistan. I am glad to note that most of these elements are envisaged to be part of the outcome document of this Conference.

We had made a promise to the Afghan people; to ourselves to make Afghanistan a peaceful, secure and prosperous country. Now is the time to make another promise that the international community would remain firm in its commitment to realize these common ideals in partnership with Afghanistan. On behalf of the Economic Cooperation Organization, I reiterate our readiness and keen interest to promote concerted efforts for the realization of our common goals.

Thank you.