1st Conference of
1st Parliamentary
Assembly of Economic Cooperation
Organization (PAECO) Countries

10-13 February, 2013
Islamabad, Pakistan

13th February, 2013

1st GENERAL CONFERENCE OF PAECO CONCLUDES WITH AGREEMENT ON PROMOTING TRADE AND ECONOMICAL DEVELOPMENT

The maiden conference of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Economic Cooperation Organization (PAECO) concluded here Tuesday with speakers suggesting unified legal standards for ECO countries to tackle issues of insecurity and poverty to bring peace and prosperity. The House held discussion on 'Parliament's oversight role in promoting intra-regional trade and investments to ensure sustainable socio-economic development in the ECO Region' that was opened by Dr Fehmida Mirza, Speaker National Assembly and President of the PAECO.

Founding President Hon'able Dr. Fehmida Mirza said; I am extremely grateful for the vote of thanks, proposed by Excellency Naematullah Ghafari, the Vice President of the Association and the 2nd Deputy Speaker of Afghanistan, which was seconded by all other distinguished Speakers and leaders of the delegations from ECO Parliaments, present here. The sentiments expressed by each one of you have indeed humbled us and on behalf of the National Assembly of Pakistan, I whole-heartedly thank you for your kind appreciation.

I also consider the successful signing of the PAECO Charter and the holding of our 1st Conference the joint achievement of all Parliaments of the ECO Region. I warmly acknowledge the personal interest of each one of you in making this possible and also congratulate you for your valuable contributions. The wisdom and foresightedness, reflected in the keynotes and interventions of worthy Speakers have identified crucial vistas of enhanced cooperation. I am sure that under our collective leadership, the newly-established PAECO will foster strong intra-regional linkages.

The topic of the 1st Conference of the PAECO "Parliaments' Oversight Role in Promoting Intra-Regional Trade and

Investments to Ensure Sustainable Socio-Economic Development in the ECO Region" generated a healthy and target-oriented debate.

Honourable members spoke on this key subject in the two sessions today and invited our collective attention to some of the burning issues. All these esteemed speakers were unanimous in their conclusion that the full potential of the ECO, in the fields of trade and investment had not been harnessed. This could be increased to 8 folds if properly undertaken. They also pointed to the fact that although concrete plans and tangible institutions were floated but in the absence of active participation by all member states, these remained largely dormant. The crucial ECO Trade Agreement has only been signed by 5 countries while the rest of the 5 countries are out of its fold. Even those, who are signatories to ECOTA have not endorsed it so far. This is also the case with ECO Trade and Investment Bank, which is only participated by 4 member states.

Therefore, the foremost task before PAECO should be to push our respective governments, through our legislative and oversight role to fully activate these forums. We must also engage into a constructive dialogue through PAECO to ensure 100 per-cent participation of all member states in all agreed ventures.

Another area of our focus should be facilitating the private sector through supportive legislation and removing numerous barriers, which create hurdles in intra-regional trade and investments. The importance of building reliable road and rail links in the ECO region hold the key for sustained economic activity. The projects like the North-South and East-West Railways and opening of all-weather road systems are essential for the integration of our Region.

As PAECO takes its initial steps, it is important for all of us to realise that the prime objective of this forum is to further the ideals of economic cooperation. We must, therefore, identify and agree on realistic targets. Let us not forget that long journeys always start with small steps. The convergence of ECO Region is only possible by respecting and recognising the diversity of our respective member countries. We must, therefore, work in a spirit of mutual respect, trust and confidence. And before I conclude, I would especially like to stress that sustainable socio-economic development is not possible if it does not address the needs of our women and children.

The Millennium Development Goal indicators of our Region show that almost all Members states lag behind on issues, pertaining to women's empowerment or mother and child health. The PAECO can make useful headways in this area by strengthening the forum of ECO Experts Group on MDG through a combined parliamentary initiative. A Parliamentary Committee in the National Assembly of Pakistan, as constituted by me, is already working for speeding up the pace in this important direction. We will be happy to share this experience with our PAECO colleagues. The holding of the first meeting of the Women Parliamentarians of PAECO yesterday is also an important milestone. This forum must be strengthened on long-term basis and converted into a dynamic platform under PAECO.

The need now is to sustain this meaningful parliamentary dialogue. As the President of this Conference for 2013-14, I will be working on finding ways to increase the momentum of parliamentary exchanges among member Parliaments. Through PAECO, we will be organising parliamentary seminars, workshops and discussions on mutually agreed issues on regular basis. I am confident that with the able support of all distinguished Speakers of the ECO Parliaments, we will succeed in taking the PAECO to another level.

As I conclude, I once again, whole-heartedly thank all of you for your support to my idea of PAECO and in the holding of this Conference..

I also express my sincere appreciation to each one of you for your valuable contributions. Some of you travelled long distances and I hope that your brief stay was comfortable, which enabled you to benefit from this Conference. The Parliament and people of Pakistan will eagerly wait for your return, as and when you may desire to visit your second home, Pakistan. I am deeply grateful to our President Mr. Asif Ali Zardari for his kind patronage in carrying the PAECO idea forward. My sincere appreciation is also due to Government of Prime Minister Raja Pervez Ashraf for all the needed support, which was made readily available to the National Assembly through the allied departments in the organisation of this important Conference. The Secretary and his entire staff in the National Assembly Secretariat deserve our joint accolade for their tireless efforts in making this Conference a success from start to its end. I also thank our friends in print and electronic media, who remained keen partners in all events of this Conference and provided amicable coverage to the deliberations and decisions taken here.

With these words --- and with immense pleasure --- Ladies and Gentlemen --- I declare the 1st Conference of the Parliamentary Assembly of the ECO Countries formally closed. Wish you all safe return back home.

Hon'able Dr. Ali Larijani Speaker of the Shoura-e-Islami Iran said; The capacities of the ECO member states, whether it is energy, oil and gas, mines, or technology specially advance technologies and skilled human resources, they have come to a point at regional levels that they themselves can come together, be integrated and have a convergence and become influential and solve their own problems in the region. The ECO member states have different wealth and they are rich in many areas. It means that we have decided to become an influential body and institution in the region so that we can utilize each others' resources. So, this Assembly that has been established, by the friendly and brotherly country of Pakistan, has clear foundations. The first foundation is the cultural convergence. We are all Muslim countries, of course. And we do believe that this is a foundation that we can rely upon.

Hon'able Cemil Cicek Speaker Grand National Assembly of Turkey said; The Parliaments not only have the role of legislative and representation but they also have an important role as oversight. In brief, oversight is to get information about the activities of the executive and to follow upon these activities and its very important to know parliamentary systems in different legal and political systems. This mechanism can be manifested in different ways but it can be described as guiding the government following up on the things that have not been done by the government and to promote and encourage the government for betterment. At this point, as the parliamentarians of ECO members States, our role should not only be limited with the follow-up on implementation of the trade agreements by the governments but also we should have a proactive role in terms of following up on the economy targets of our countries and parliamentary Assemblies' friendship groups and mutual contacts can help the socio-economic development of our region.

Taking advantage of this opportunity, I would like to express my sincerely gratitude to Speaker of National Assembly of Islamic Republic of Pakistan to Dr. Fehmida Mirza for arrangement of today's high level meeting. I am fully confident that current event as a mechanism of integration processes plays an important role in ECO "s contributions in the region. It will create reliable foundation for further consolidation of efficient cooperation in field of trade, as well as determination of spheres in economic cooperation.

I have to emphasize that one of the ancient world civilizations had arose in this region and its members made a significant contribution to development of culture and science. Just across this territory passes the Silk Road which is after many centuries still did not lose its commercial and economic magnitudes. Consolidation of integration processes and development cooperation of Tajikistan with ECO have created favorable conditions in cooperation consolidation in industrial structures in countries of the region and have provided a positive effect in the field of output of products and also political achievements of states, reduction of poverty level and maintenance of well- being of the people.

All ECO members states, particularly PAECO member states would be whole heartedly welcome to Kabul, Afghanistan. I would like to reiterate and congratulate honourable Dr. Fehmida Mirza, Speaker National Assembly of Pakistan for this wonderful, great and unique initiation of this assembly and congratulate all PAECO members. God willing in the future the blessing of this assembly will benefitted by our region and that it will look into the different issues which were raised and by different delegations. I hope that various working groups will be set up in their secretariat because the parliaments are very important and they can encourage the governments to be involved in fundamental work that can change the situation in the region.

BILATERAL MEETINGS

On the sidelines of 1st Conference of Parliamentary Assembly of Economic Cooperation Organization (PAECO) countries, Speaker national assembly Dr. Fehmida Mirza held bilateral meeting with Speakers and Parliamentary heads of Afghanistan, Azerbaijan and Tajikistan at a local hotel in Islamabad. Speaker National Assembly, Dr. Fehmida Mirza underscored the need for closer contacts and cooperation among the ECO countries. She said that member states are confronted with common challenges and there was a dire need to work together to over come the issues and work jointly for the welfare of the people of ECO region. She thanked the member states for their active participation in the conference and expressed the hope that the forum would provide an opportunity for interaction and dialogue on matters of mutual interests.

The delegates who called on the Speaker National Assembly included Chairman of Milli Majlis (Parliament) of Azerbaijan H.E. Sabir Asadov, Deputy Speaker of Wolesi Jirga of Afghanistan, H.E. Neamatutallah Ghauffari and Speaker of Majlis-i-namoyandgan of Majlis - Oli of Tajikistan H.E Shukur Jon Zuhurov.

Reciprocating, the leaders of the parliamentary delegations agreed with views of Speaker National Assembly and lauded efforts of Dr. Fehmida for taking concrete steps in bringing the regional allies closer to each other. They said that the forum will provide an opportunity to share experiences on regional and international issues.

PARLAIMENT'S OVERSIGHT ROLE IN PROMOTING INTRA REGIONAL TRADE AND INVESTMENTS

Hon'able Faisal Karim Kundi, Deputy Speaker of Pakistan said: ECO has developed into a vibrant regional organization which is evident from its growing international stature. PAECO can play an important role in advancing ECO agenda. We have witnessed that guidance through Parliamentary forums can boost the performance of existing regional organizations. ASEAN and European Union are success stories of regional Integration. The establishment of Parliamentary Assembly to enhance the effectiveness of ECO is a very welcome step. The PAECO can be instrumental to develop harmonized approach for participation in the regional and global arrangements.

Parliamentary Oversight is an important democratic process. Parliament being the legitimate authority can hold the government to account on behalf of the people. All the ECO countries have functional Parliaments. ECO Parliaments can guide the executives in formulating and promoting sustainable development policies. Sharing of Parliamentary experiences can help us achieving collectively, our goal of sustainable development through increased Intra-Regional Trade.

Pakistani Parliamentarians Senator Nuzhat Sadiq, Riaz Fatyana, Dr. Tariq Fazal Chaudhry, Sheikh Allauddin, Syed Asif Hasnain, Sheerin Arshad, Shahnaz Wazir Ali, Khurram Jahangir Wattoo and Shakeel Awan while taking part in discussion said

Trade has a central place in the economic cooperation among states as it holds the potential for the economic development of a region. But question of the hour is if, we have achieved the required economic cooperation in ECO region or have we been able to play our Parliament's oversight role in increasing the intra-regional trade?

The answer may be "NO" because the trade with in ECO region is far below its potential. Existing trade structures of the 10 member states are oriented towards the West or the East, not towards one another. Intra-regional trade has not changed much from the pre-ECO level of six to seven per cent of their total trade. Lack of Parliamentary involvement is the missing link in achieving the desired Economic Integration in ECO. Many of today's short comings in the field of economy, can in large be ascribed to lack of representation, participation and oversight of our respective parliaments. Regional blocks like the European Union and ASEAN continue to deepen their regional linkages. But the ECO continue to speak only of potential, rather than results. We must ask ourselves, why this is so. We must challenge ourselves to do better constantly.

Parliamentary oversight is crucial in checking excesses on the part of the government. Nowadays, parliamentary oversight extends to every field of Endeavour. The security sector, for instance, is no longer a taboo area for parliament. Governance, both nationally and in international decision-making, can only stand to gain from the growing prominence and scope of parliamentary oversight. There can be no democratic system of government without transparency and accountability. The primary responsibility in this field falls squarely on the shoulders of parliament. Terrorism and extremism is not only a threat to our trade but to our present and coming generations.

- Improve Coordination on Counter-Terrorism Operations
- Address apprehensions regarding Terrorists' safe havens
- Parliamentarians to adopt their own political approach (people-oriented) in enhancing relations between the member countries
- Narcotics and terrorist-financing: The need to install effective control on growth and supply of drugs fueling terrorism in the region
- Enhancing Border management for secure trading
- Liberalizing Visa Regimes and
- Enhancing Communication Networks: Air travel, Road and Rail network & telephony.

We are defined by love. We are defined by togetherness. We are defined by Rumi and by Iqbal. We are defined by the beauty and grace of our daughters. We are defined by Shaheed Mohtarma Benazir Bhutto.

HON'ABLE NAEMATULLAH GHAFARI ELECTED AS VICE PRESIDENT OF PAECO

The Deputy Speaker of Afghanistan Hon'able Naematullah Ghafari in his concluding remarks said *"At the out set please allow me to express my whole hearted gratitude and appreciation for hosting the First PAECO Conference with excellent arrangements and management. We are pleased and honored to announce that Afghanistan would be hosting the Second PAECO Conference in Kabul.*

In the mean time, we would be honored to welcome Hon'able Speakers of the ECO Member states and their distinguished delegations. The exact date and time of the Second PAECO Conference would be announced later in collaboration and in cooperation with PAECO Secretariat in Islamabad, Pakistan."

HON'ABLE DR. FEHMIDA MIRZA MEETS SPEAKERS OF IRAN AND TURKEY

On the sidelines of 1st Conference of Parliamentary Assembly of Economic Cooperation Organization (PAECO) countries, Speaker National Assembly Dr. Fehmida Mirza held separate bilateral meetings with Mr. Cemil Cecek and. Dr. Ali Larijani, Speakers of Turkey and Iran, respectively along with their delegations today.

Speaker National Assembly, Dr. Fehmida Mirza underscored the need for closer contacts and cooperation among the ECO countries specially making the PAECO Forum more effective so that it ponder issues and common challenges confronted by the Member States and find solutions, thereof. She said that the ECO region was a huge repository of human resource and economic potential which if properly exploited could usher in era of progress and prosperity in the region. She also underlined the need to work together to over come the issues and work jointly for the welfare of the people of ECO region. She said that all the Trade and other agreements of cooperation between ECO Member States should be accomplished specially the establishment of Trade and Investment Bank in Turkey. She said that all the Members states should sign the Banking agreement so that the Bank could commence its operations. She thanked her Turkish and Iranian counterparts for their unflinching support for making her initiative into a reality. She expressed her gratitude to them for their active participation in the conference and expressed the hope that the forum would provide an opportunity for interaction and dialogue on matters of mutual interests.

DINNER AND CULTURAL SHOW

CHAIRMAN SENATE URGES FOR ENHANCED COOPERATION BETWEEN ECO COUNTRIES

The Chairman Senate Syed Nayyar Hussain Bokhari held a reception in honor of Speakers of Parliamentary Assembly of ECO countries. Large number of delegates from ECO countries and their Ambassadors attended the reception. Speaker Dr. Fehmida Mirza and Deputy Speaker Faisal Kareem Kundi were also present on the occasion along with parliamentarians from Pakistani side.

Talking at this momentous occasion the Chairman said that it is a great privilege and honor for Pakistan to witness this unique and historical confluence of Speakers, Parliamentarians and friends from ECO member states in Islamabad. The Chairman acknowledged the proactive role played by Dr. Fehmida Mirza, Speaker National Assembly of Pakistan for pioneering the idea of Parliamentary Assembly of ECO. The Chairman said that he was glad that her vision, foresight and determined endeavours were reciprocated with equal enthusiasm by political leadership in member states' parliaments which resulted in holding the first ever General Conference of Parliamentary Assembly of ECO.

Talking about enhancing greater integration and cooperation using the forum of PAECO, the Chairman said that we must work together for realizing common ideals concerning democracy, economic uplift and lasting peace and prosperity for people of the region and our future generations.

DEPARTURES