

ADDRESS
OF
DR. FEHMIDA MIRZA AT
THE INAUGURAL &
SIGNING CEREMONY OF
THE PAECO CHARTER
Islamabad, February 11, 2013

Bismillah Irr Rehman Irr Raheem

Excellency Mr. Sabir Asad-Ov

Chairman of the Milli Majlis of Azarbaijan!

Excellency Dr. Ali Larijani

Speaker of the Shoura-e-Islami of the Islamic Republic of Iran!

Excellency Shukur-Jon Zuhur-Ov

Speaker of the Majlis-i-

Namo-yan-da-gon of Majlis-i-Oli

Republic of Tajikistan!

Excellency Jamil Chi-chak

Speaker of the Grand National Assembly of Turkey !

Excellency Neamatullah Ghaffari

Second Deputy Speaker of the (W)Olesi Jirga of the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan!

Dr. Shamil Alesker-Ov

Secretary General of the ECO!

Hon'able Parliamentarians and Delegates of the 1st Conference of the Parliamentary Assembly of the ECO countries!

Ministers, Excellences, Guests, Ladies and Gentlemen!

Assalam-o-Alikum and Good Afternoon to all of you!

It is my privilege to inaugurate the 1st Conference of the Parliamentary Assembly of the ECO Countries.

This is a momentous occasion when the ECO's parliamentary fraternity has assembled in Islamabad to turn a new leaf in the history of our Region.

I, therefore, warmly welcome all the distinguished Speakers, Parliamentarians and members of the delegations from the ECO countries, who have travelled long distances to participate in this important Conference.

The signing of the PAECO Charter marks a historic step.

It reflects the shared resolve of the people's representatives to work together for the common prosperity in a spirit of friendship, trust and mutual understanding. I congratulate all of you on this worthy accomplishment and also express my deepest gratitude to the entire political and parliamentary leadership of the ECO countries for their valuable support in turning the idea of PAECO into a workable reality.

Here, I would also like to appreciate the ECO Secretariat, especially its able Secretary General, for their valuable cooperation in seeking consensus on all related issues.

Ladies and Gentlemen!

I had proposed the concept of PAECO at Tehran in February 2011 on the occasion of the Naurouz celebrations.

Naurouz is the time when Mother Nature sparks a new beginning. As we all prepare to welcome the arrival of the spring season, let us hope that the initiation of PAECO at this time marks the political and economic rebirth of the ECO, which will reaffirm its foundations; broaden its scope and provide it with a constructive platform for a meaningful people-to-people engagement.

Since time immemorial, our common bonds of history, culture, religion and commerce have closely knit our nations together.

This joint heritage provides ideal grounds for the socio-economic integration of this region.

The ten ECO Member states combine to form the largest repository of human and natural resources in the world. With a total area of around 8 million Sq. Kilometres, inhabited by more than 400 million people, they represent over 5 percent of the world's land mass and 6% of its entire population.

This makes ECO nearly double the size of the European continent and almost equal in terms of its consumer market.

What is more, ECO's geographical position serves as a bridge between the East and the West and makes it the "trade corridor" of the world.

This great potential, however, awaits its optimum utilization from the platform of ECO.

The adverse global and regional scenarios such as challenges concerning terrorism in all its forms and manifestations, intolerance and extremism have emerged as serious threats to the region's stability, peace and security.

It is also because of these reasons that ECO has not been able to achieve its promised targets.

The ECO Ministerial Meeting passed the crucial 5-Year Plan of Action on Energy Cooperation in 2010. This awaits its implementation even after 3 years. It is an irony that there remains a wide gap between the Region's abundant energy resources and the acute needs of its member states, especially Pakistan.

Proposals like the "ECO Vision 2015", which anticipated our region as a Free Trade Area by 2015; the ECO Trade Agreement; and the ECO Trade and Development Bank have all remained off-the-mark.

The Intra-regional trade is less than US\$ 50 billion.

Despite sharing common borders, the inability to develop effective and reliable transport systems have not allowed any two of our member states to become each-other's leading trading partners.

These are the shortfalls, which have contributed to the rise of poverty, illiteracy, spread of disease, unemployment, environmental degradation and lack of opportunities.

These considerations led me to propose the parliamentary platform of the ECO countries, through which, we the parliamentarians could jointly infuse our energies and action to the ideals of regional cooperation.

The Parliaments, as the representative voices of the people, provide a platform for fruitful exchange of ideas. The parliamentarians have an important role to play in affecting the state policies for the collective good of the people. We hold the people's mandate to create consensus out of conflict by recognising and resolving the contentious issues.

Individually, our national branches can help our governments in finding solutions through supportive legislations and framing policy. Collectively, we can engage into a meaningful "parliamentary diplomacy" for understanding and accommodating each other for the realization of our mutually agreed goals.

In the forthcoming sessions of the 1st General Assembly of our newly-found PAECO, the worthy delegates will be identifying their role as parliamentarians in pursuing the agenda of sustainable socio-economic development by promoting trade and investments in the ECO Region.

I am confident their meaningful contributions will help give new dimensions to the existing level of cooperation amongst our member states.

Ladies and Gentlemen!

The plight of women and children in ECO countries is a critical area of our common concern. PAECO holds an added responsibility to address their needs for the fact that out of 10 member Parliaments of our organisation, 3 are headed by women Speakers.

This morning, the women parliamentarians from the ECO countries held their first meeting on the side-lines of our Conference in which they agreed to promote closer links by organizing themselves under PAECO. The available forum of Women's Parliamentary Caucus in the Parliament of Pakistan can provide a sustainable base for such future contacts.

Distinguished delegates!

During the last five years, the present Parliament of Pakistan has enacted a number of legislation on a wide range of socio-economic and socio-political subjects. We will be more than happy to share these statutes with our sister parliaments in the ECO.

At the same time, we also look forward to receiving the affirmative actions of your respective Parliaments in areas of our mutual concern. Keeping in view the commonality of our faith and cultural values, this cooperation in legislative business can go a long way in transforming our region into forward-looking and progressive Muslim democracies.

I am confident that this first PAECO Conference will prove to be a watershed in identifying areas of our expanded cooperation.

As I look forward to this substantive outcome, I also wish each one of you a comfortable and memorable stay in Islamabad.

As I conclude, I once again whole-heartedly thank each one of the worthy Speakers for their support and cooperation in realising the dream of PAECO.

In this age of rapid transformation, the ECO Region stands at a threshold of taking a quantum leap into:

- an unprecedented future;
- a future of unlimited opportunity and
- a future of infinite hope.

Let us combine our energies and our resources to make this dream a beaming reality.

With these words Ladies and Gentlemen! And with a sense of history, I declare the 1st Conference of the Parliamentary Assembly of ECO Parliaments OPEN!

I thank you all! PAKISTAN ZINDABAD