

**Valedictory Address of
Dr. Fehmida Mirza
Speaker National Assembly of Pakistan
&
the President
1st Conference of the Parliamentary Assembly of the ECO Countries
February 12, 2013**

BismillahIrrRehmanIrrRaheem

**Excellency Dr. Ali Larijani
Speaker of the Shoura-e-Islami of the Islamic Republic of Iran**

**Excellency Shukur-jonZuhurov
Speaker of the Majlisi Namoyandagon of Majlisi Oli
Republic of Tajikistan**

**Excellency JamilChe-Chek
Speaker of the Grand National Assembly of Turkey**

**Excellency Neamatullah Ghaffari
Second Deputy Speaker of the Wolesi Jirga of the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan**

**Dr. Shamil Aleskerov
Secretary General of the ECO**

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

Guests, Ladies and Gentlemen!

Assalam-o-Alikum and good day to all of you!

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.

Distinguished delegates!

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.

The 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 legislations 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.

Ladies and Gentlemen!

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 beorganising 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..

Distinguished Delegates!

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 1th Conference of the Parliamentary Assembly of the ECO Countries formally closed. Wish you all safe return back home.

Pakistan Zindabad