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**Statement by Ambassador Shamil Aleskerov, Secretary General of the
Economic Cooperation Organization (ECO) at the
71st session of the Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific**

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**Madam Executive Secretary,
Excellencies,
Distinguished Delegates,
Ladies and Gentlemen,**

It is a great honor for me to address this august gathering at the 71st Session of the Commission. At the very outset, I would like to express my sincere appreciation to the ESCAP for organizing this session and inviting the Economic Cooperation Organization to share its perspectives. I also wish to bring on record my gratitude to the Government of Thailand for their warm hospitality. As the largest and most inclusive intergovernmental platform for regional consensus building, ESCAP continues to make invaluable efforts for promoting sustainable development in the large Asia Pacific region.

(Before I move any further, I would like to express my heartfelt condolences and sympathies to the people and Government of Nepal on the loss of precious lives and property in the wake of the earthquake of 25 April 2015. Such natural disasters remind us of the urgent need to build resilient and sustainable societies through collaborative efforts).

The theme for this year's session: **"Balancing the three dimensions of sustainable development: from integration to implementation"** has been aptly defined and addresses a crucial factor in achieving a more sustainable future for the Asia-Pacific region and beyond. As we prepare to

define and adopt a new global development agenda, it is of utmost importance to promote a balanced approach towards the economic, social and environmental aspects of sustainable development, with due emphasis on recognizing their interdependence and inter-linkages.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

It is encouraging to note that the Asia and the Pacific region has performed better than others in making progress towards the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs).

Nevertheless, there still exist daunting challenges ahead of us. Many people in the region are still living in extreme poverty; they do not have access to clean drinking water and are still without basic sanitation. Moreover, infant and child mortality rates are considerably high in some countries of the region.

In order to close the development gaps and to achieve our development goals, it is vital that sustained growth should benefit all strata of our societies. This growth should be sustainable, inclusive and employment-generating and should be based on the interconnected goals of economic development, environmental sustainability and social inclusion in a balanced and effective manner.

The existing regional growth levels are inadequate to eradicate extreme

poverty and to address the emerging complex challenges of the region. To address the broader development concerns requires focusing on all aspects of sustainable development and in this context, the theme of the 71st session of the Commission offers a useful opportunity to exchange views and ideas for achieving a balanced approach towards sustainable development.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Let me now dwell on our Organization. The ECO represents a regional intergovernmental organization that is endeavouring to promote sustainable development of the member countries through regional cooperation. It may be of interest to you to note that ECO started as an organization working to promote economic cooperation among its member states. However, it has now expanded its scope of activities to include the environmental and social dimensions of development in its framework, and as such the theme of this year's session is very pertinent to ECO. Through measures to enhance and deepen cooperation in various sectors, ECO is making efforts to promote a balanced and effective integration of the three dimensions of sustainable development.

Enhancement of regional trade and investment cooperation leading to economic integration of the member countries is central to the working of ECO. At present, the ECO region is in the process of implementing the ECO Trade Agreement (ECOTA), which is its flagship preferential trading arrangement and provides for reducing tariffs in the region to a considerably low level.

Measures are also being taken to reduce and eliminate non-tariff barriers (NTBs) and enhance the member states' trade competitiveness. A regional project for enhancement of trade capacities is being undertaken that aims to develop a regional quality policy and provide guidelines for national quality policies.

The ECO is also in the process of coordinating and developing common policies with regards to trade and investment, finance and economy, tax and customs administration and trade promotion.

The ECO region has a significant potential to become more integrated through trade liberalization and facilitating movement of goods among the member countries. The ECO also strives to assist its Member States in strengthening private sector cooperation, trade promotion activities, establishing the required infrastructure for regional connectivity, and providing finance for regional trade through operations of ECO Trade and Development Bank. Through various initiatives, the ECO is taking necessary steps to enhance regional trade and investment leading towards better quality growth and shared prosperity for the member countries.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Enhanced regional connectivity for a balanced growth and it calls for establishing economically and technically efficient transport networks that

meet the highest possible safety and environmental standards, and also take full account of the social dimension. In this context, it is to be noted that ECO has a good record of utilizing a corridor-based approach as a means of promoting transport connectivity and is moving increasingly towards upgrading safety aspects and integrating environmental considerations in its development strategies, in all areas, including the transport sector.

With a fast growing energy demand, the member states in the ECO region require adequate, efficient and equitable provision of energy services for which regional energy trade arrangements are vital.

While a number of large scale energy projects have been implemented in the ECO region, the member states are endeavoring to exploit synergies within various frameworks for promoting and facilitating regional energy cooperation. Greater focus is being laid on renewable and alternative sources of energy as part of the ECO's efforts in line with the global drive towards sustainable energy.

The ECO also serves as a regional platform for exchange of experiences and coordinating policy measures with regards to the environmental and climate change issues. Environment as a cross-sectoral issue is being accorded increasing focus within the ECO framework. Steps are being taken to identify options for building future resilience in tackling regional environmental challenges. In collaboration with its international and regional partners, the ECO is adopting measures to build more resilient

economies and societies that are able to withstand natural disasters and recover from them in an effective manner.

Given that health is a key determinant of socio-economic growth and development, the ECO Ministers of Health are in the process of developing a Plan of Action for health cooperation. This Plan which is in line with the emerging global health agenda aims to improve the health conditions in the member states and enhance the wellbeing of people.

During the past years, ECO has given increased attention to promoting cooperation for eradicating the menace of illicit drug trafficking – which jeopardizes the economic and social gains and adversely impacts the regional economies.

Additionally, ECO has initiated cooperation with relevant partners in the area of legal and labor migration, which has the potential to create greater opportunities for employment and thus improve the well-being of the people, especially the vulnerable groups in the member countries.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Despite the achievements made for the promotion of sustainable development of the region, there still exist key challenges to inclusive and sustainable economic and social development, which I would like to briefly highlight as seen from the ECO's perspective.

There exist serious challenges which are impacting the region's growth. Gaps in infrastructure, lack of financial resources, insufficient production capacities and technological gaps, environmental degradation and growing inequality are some of the challenges that must be addressed in order to ensure enhanced inclusive and sustainable growth.

Extreme poverty cannot be eradicated; neither can the emerging challenges be addressed by relying solely on current growth levels. In order to address the wider development concerns, there is a need to foster new drivers of economic growth and to promote a more balanced approach focusing on all three dimensions of sustainable development.

Gaps in infrastructural connectivity prevent the benefits of development from being shared with the more vulnerable groups. This gives rise to inequality that impacts the social cohesion and stability of societies. There is a need to increase the regional investment in infrastructure development. We encourage the ESCAP to continue promoting public-private partnerships for financing infrastructural development, particularly for countries that face funding gaps.

In the ECO region, its member states, especially the landlocked ones have yet to fully benefit from the opportunities arising from enhanced connectivity. It is vital to ensure that these countries with special needs are connected to the rest of the world and receive commensurate share of the

region's growing prosperity and wealth.

They are only some of the challenges facing us. The cooperation and partnerships among the regional and sub-regional organizations in the Asia Pacific region should be enhanced.

The ESCAP's membership is a diverse collection of nations with varying stages of development. This diversity should enable the regional members to benefit from others' strengths for achieving higher growth and shared prosperity. The ESCAP remains a valuable partner in promoting intra-regional collaboration to advance our common goals, with which the ECO will continue to engage constructively in order to achieve the goal of a more connected and prosperous region.

Let me conclude by saying that ECO has enjoyed good cooperation with ESCAP for many years. We are hopeful that in the coming years we will continue and enhance our cooperation to jointly address the common challenges we face today.

Thank You for your attention.