

STATEMENT

**by H.E. Mr. KhusravNoziri, ECO Secretary General
at the 36st Ministerial Meeting of the Near East Regional Conference
(NERC-36)
(7-8 February 2022, Hybrid, Baghdad, Iraq)**

**Honorable chairman,
Distinguished Ministers, Honorable Delegates,
Ladies and Gentlemen,**

It is indeed a privilege to address this significant 36st Ministerial Meeting of the Near East Regional Conference. Let me extend my sincere gratitude to the FAO and the host for inviting contribution of Economic Cooperation Organization (ECO) to this August event. I wish lively and fruitful deliberations for the current meeting which is dealing with a subject of prime importance to the contemporaneous human life specifically as concerns the impact of the pervasive Covid-19 pandemic.

Distinguished participants,

Food security, characterized as access to safe and sufficient food, is affected by economic crises. Pandemics can cause damage to the global economy and the COVID-19 pandemic has short and long-term effects on food security and human health worldwide. It appears that the economic consequences of the COVID-19 on food security have affected developing countries more severely. The economic and social disruption caused by the pandemic is devastating, tens of millions of people are at risk of falling into extreme poverty, while the number of undernourished people have increased dramatically.

The pandemic has been affecting the entire food system. Restrictions on movement within and across countries have hindered food-related logistic services, disrupted entire food supply chains and affected the

availability of food. Border closures and trade restrictions have been preventing farmers from accessing markets, thus jeopardizing food security for all people, especially for poor people in different countries.

Excellencies,

ECO is a regional inter-governmental organization comprising 10 Member States, whose populations count above 460 million inhabitants and whose geographies span over eight million square kilometers.

ECO is hence committed to the Sustainable Development Goal 2, Zero Hunger, the accomplishment of which will lead to greater food security, health and welfare. Given the magnitude of the above mentioned problems and while acknowledging that the improvement of the situation, globally and regionally requires pervasive and multi-faceted action at all levels, ECO Secretariat in cooperation with ECO Regional Coordination Center for Food Security (ECO-RCC) and FAO updated the ECO Regional Program for Food Security (ECO-RPFS) according to the pandemic situation and will accordingly make its utmost to facilitate moving towards the implementation stage aimed at improving and enhancing ECO Member States resilience to future shocks.

Distinguished colleagues,

As the pandemic slows down economies, access to food will be negatively affected by income reductions and loss of employment as well as availability of food in local markets. Accordingly, investment is needed to accelerate recovery efforts and build resilience of vulnerable populations, inter alia through coordinating our efforts with all partners and regional and international organizations, including with the UN framework for the immediate socio-economic response to COVID-19.

In this situation, countries need to work together to strengthen cooperation during this pandemic that is affecting all regions of the world. It is important to ensure that policies, such as short-term measures to restrict

trade, do not distort global markets. Decisive collective action is needed to ensure that the pandemic will not threaten food security and nutrition more, and to improve resilience to future shocks.

To conclude my remarks, I would like to express my firm belief that your active engagement and fruitful brainstorming at this meeting will inevitably contribute to its overall success.

Thank you.