

3rd Ministerial Meeting of the TPS-OIC Trade Negotiations Committee

Opening Speech by Prof. Dr. Ömer BOLAT, Trade Minister of the Republic of Türkiye

Esselamu aleyküm ve rahmetullahi ve berekatuhu

Distinguished Ministers, Deputy Ministers, Directors General, Undersecretaries, Ambassadors, Distinguished Delegations,

- I welcome you to Türkiye and Istanbul. I welcome you and note that you honored us to participate the 3rd Ministerial Meeting of the TPS-OIC Trade Negotiations Committee.
- I ask Allah Almighty to ensure that our meeting provides us fruitful and productive results. I would like to thank you all for your participation. I pray to Allah Almighty that this meeting, in which we will reaffirm our determination to develop trade cooperation and economic relations between our countries, will produce successful results.

Distinguished Member State Representatives,

- There are participants from 42 member countries. Thank you very much. There is a strong participation at the level of President, Vice President, Deputy Secretary General from the Organization of Islamic Cooperation, Islamic Development Bank, SESRIC, ICDT, GCC, D-8, ECO, all integration organizations and related organizations of the Islamic World.

- At the beginning of my remarks, I would like to express my condolences to the brotherly people of Iran and wish Allah's mercy to the President of the Islamic Republic of Iran Mr. Ibrahim Reisi, Foreign Minister Mr. Hossein Abdullahiyan and other brothers and sisters who lost their lives in a helicopter accident a few weeks ago.

Dear Brothers and Sisters,

- We are here as trade ministers; representatives of the member countries and we will negotiate in detail about how we can increase our trade between us. I will start my speech by saying a few words about Palestine, which is the first item on the agenda of all of us.
- We all know that since October 7 last year, the Israeli government has been carrying out one of the most brutal massacres of this century, first in Gaza and then in Rafah, in front of the eyes of the whole world.
- Gaza, which was already an open-air prison due to the blockade, has now turned into a gigantic cemetery for women and children. They have lost their humanity so far that they kill babies in incubators, bomb hospitals, places of worship, schools, mosques, even churches, trucks carrying aid, and rain bombs on innocent civilians waiting in line for food.
- The Israeli government and army must be stopped and forced into a permanent ceasefire immediately, before more bloodshed, before more children, women, elderly and civilians die, before more hopes for humanity are lost.

- This time, unlike other crises, our Islamic world has shown an exemplary attitude of unity and solidarity. At the Arab League Summit held shortly after the attacks began, at the Leaders' Summit of the Organization of Islamic Cooperation hosted by Saudi Arabia in Riyadh in November, at the extraordinary Foreign Ministers' Council Meeting in March, at the 15th Islamic Summit, and finally at the D-8 Foreign Ministers' Summit held two days ago, the Islamic World made clear its support for Palestine and Gaza.
- We must also show our support for Palestine as trade ministers. In this context, we believe that we must show our reaction clearly in the Declaration we will adopt today. As Turkey, although we have an annual foreign trade of 9.5 billion dollars between us, we have stopped trade with Israel. We will do what we can together, we will continue to do what we can by respecting the reasons and we call "The victory only comes from Allah Almighty."

Honorable Ministers, Distinguished Delegations,

- Many international uncertainties and risk factors, such as recent geopolitical tensions, rising protectionism and regionalization trends in international trade and industrial policies, the global inflationary trend, and tight monetary policies implemented by central banks that have suppressed consumption, production, and investment, are putting downward pressure on the global economy and world trade in 2023.
- In contrast to the strong recovery in 2021 and 2022 following the Covid-19 pandemic, there was a significant

decline in global production and trade in 2023, with global growth well below historical averages. World trade has also been in decline.

- According to the World Trade Organization's April "Global Trade Outlook and Statistics" report, world goods trade volume is expected to grow by 2.6% in 2024, below the historical average of 5%.
- In its April 2024 "Global Economic Outlook" report, the International Monetary Fund (IMF) raised its global growth forecast for 2024 to 3.2%. The 2025 global growth forecast was left unchanged at 3.2%.

Dear Brothers and Sisters, Distinguished Participants,

- Unfortunately, the member countries of the Organization of Islamic Cooperation also suffered from this decline. In 2023, total exports of the Organization of Islamic Cooperation member countries declined by 1.9% compared to 2022.
- This decline is not very large, thank Allah, but there is another important statistic that concerns us greatly: Over the past five years, our trade rate among member countries of the Organization of Islamic Cooperation has fluctuated around 20%. However, in the 2025 Action Plan of the Organization of Islamic Cooperation, we aimed to increase the ratio of trade between member countries to their total trade to 25%. We regret that we are still far from achieving this target.

- The General Secretariat of the Organization of Islamic Cooperation has launched preparations for a new 10-year action plan. In the new plan, we believe that we should set a target beyond 25%. Because in the founding convention of the Organization of Islamic Cooperation, we have a very clear aim to create a common market. Certainly, setting a high target is just the beginning; we need to take and implement concrete steps together to achieve this target.

Dear Brothers and Sisters,

- Our most important tool to increase trade between our countries is the preferential trade agreement.
- As you know, the Preferential Trade System among the Member States of the Organization of Islamic Cooperation, shortly known as TPS-OIC, was put into practice as of July 1, 2022, two years ago. This was of course a very important and positive step. However, if we want to increase the intra-trade between the member countries of the Organization of Islamic Cooperation to more than 25% - which is what we all aim for - we cannot achieve this with a preferential trade agreement with only 13 member countries and a limited number of products.
- The simplest solution is to increase the number of countries party. But we also need to face reality. For the last 20 years, member countries have been invited to become parties to the TPS-OIC Agreements at the COMCEC Meetings and currently 13 member countries are parties to the agreement. This means that the existing Agreements are not attractive enough for our member states.

- We have to bear in mind that some member states have customs unions and may not be keen on any kind of agreement on trade in goods. So, we need to explore possibilities for cooperation in commercial areas that do not prejudice the obligations of the customs union.
- It is precisely for this reason that at the working breakfast I hosted in Istanbul in early December 2023 for the heads of delegations attending the 39th COMCEC Ministerial Meeting, I proposed that the product scope of the System be expanded and that it be transformed into a new generation trade agreement by adding new disciplines.
- I stated that new rounds of negotiations should be launched for this and that we could organize a ministerial meeting in our country in 2024. Our proposal was well received and reflected in the Resolutions of the COMCEC Ministerial Meeting.
- We are gathered here today, after 17 years, to discuss with you the future of TPS-OIC and possible new areas of cooperation. At this point, we would like to emphasize something we consider important.
- Since all believers are brothers and sisters, and one does not exclude one's brothers and sisters, the negotiations process on the future of the Convention should not exclude any country; it should be open to all member states.
- In fact, we had prepared a document as the host to serve as a basis for discussions during the negotiations process. However, after the discussions at the senior officials'

meeting yesterday, we understood that member states want the issue to be addressed in all its aspects.

- On the other hand, we were also very pleased with the interest shown by the countries. As a matter of fact, we are very much in need of it in our work. Within the framework of the discussions at yesterday's meeting, our belief that we will establish very good cooperation in the future has strengthened, thank Allah.
- I would like to leave the floor to Mr. Ahmet Kawesa Sengendo, Deputy Secretary General for Economic Affairs of the Organization of Islamic Cooperation to read the message of Mr. Hussein Ibrahim Taha, Secretary General of the Organization of Islamic Cooperation. As I conclude my remarks, I would like to thank you all for coming to our country and for attending the 3rd Ministerial Meeting of the TPS-OIC Trade Negotiations Committee, I wish you all a pleasant meeting and I would like to give the floor to Mr. Ahmet Kawesa Sengendo, Deputy Secretary General. Floor is yours, Mr. Ahmet.