



**Statement by ECO Secretary General H.E. Mr. Khusrav Noziri
at the International Conference “The main directions and
opportunities of tourism development in Turkmenistan”**

March 27, 2024, Ashgabat, Turkmenistan

**Honourable Minister of Culture of Turkmenistan Mr. Atageldi Shamuradov,
Excellencies,
Distinguished Participants,
Ladies and Gentlemen,**

I am grateful for the kind invitation from the esteemed Turkmenistan Government, especially the Ministry of Culture, to attend this significant Conference. Representing the Economic Cooperation Organization, I warmly greet all of you.

At first, I would like to commend Turkmenistan for its steadfast dedication to the ECO's cooperative efforts. Two years ago, Turkmenistan hosted the 15th ECO Summit in this splendid city, where crucial decisions were made. This event underscored Turkmenistan's commitment to enhancing cooperation and dialogue among Member States and has been instrumental in advancing connectivity projects that bolster trade and economic links between Europe, Asia and the Middle East.

Turkmenistan, like other members of the ECO, owns a wealth of tourist attractions such as the UNESCO World Heritage Site of Merv, the enigmatic Darvaza Gas Crater known as the Door to Hell, the historical city of Kunya-Urgench and the charming Avaza tourism zone on the Caspian Sea. These sites are a magnet for history lovers and significantly enhance the country's cultural tourism. Moreover, Turkmenistan's varied landscape offers endless opportunities for nature-based tourism, showcasing its appeal as a diverse and captivating travel destination.

Turkmenistan has embarked on an ambitious journey to revitalize its tourism sector under the patronage of His Excellency President Serdar Berdimuhamedov. With significant investments in modernizing accommodations, streamlining transportation and enriching the tourist experience, Turkmenistan is poised for a surge in visitor numbers and an increase in service excellence. This forward-thinking approach heralds a new era for Turkmenistan's tourism appeal.

Moreover, Turkmenistan's nomination of Merv as the ECO Tourism Capital for 2027 highlights the country's dedication to preserving and showcasing the cultural

legacy of this historic Silk Road city. Merv stands as a beacon of the region's rich history and serves as a source of inspiration.

Distinguished participants,

The latest UN Tourism World Tourism Barometer indicates that last year witnessed 1.29 billion global tourist movements. With the tourism sector's contribution to global GDP reaching \$1.4 trillion in 2023, this marks a 93% recovery from its 2019 peak of \$1.5 trillion, signaling a robust rebound in global tourism post-pandemic.

Assembling in the lively city of Ashgabat, we recognize tourism's crucial role in stimulating economic growth, fostering cultural exchange and enhancing regional unity. The tourism industry not only contributes significantly to sustainable economic development but also boosts the region's welfare through value-added activities. Moreover, it promotes peace regionally and globally by encouraging cultural understanding and tolerance.

Our tourism sector's highlight is the successful ECO Tourism Capitals initiative, which has earned widespread acclaim within our Member States and internationally. We have selected six cities so far: Dushanbe (Tajikistan), Sari and Ardabil (Iran), Shahrissabz (Uzbekistan), Erzurum (Türkiye) and Shusha (Azerbaijan). This year, Shahrissabz in Uzbekistan will be celebrated as the ECO Tourism Capital, with an official ceremony in the last week of April. I warmly invite you to join the 2024 Shahrissabz festivities as we celebrate its title as the ECO Tourism Capital.

Eminent Representatives,

At the Fifth ECO Ministerial Meeting on Tourism in Ardabil, Iran, on October 5, 2023, the Ardabil Declaration emphasized the importance of joint promotion and collaboration in developing tourism destinations across ECO Member States. A significant stride in this direction is the establishment of the ECO Tour Operators' Network in 2022, uniting over 350 tour operators, including 37 from Turkmenistan, to create joint tour packages and promote them internationally. This initiative will be further bolstered by the First ECO Tour Operators Forum in Baku, Azerbaijan, on May 2-3, 2024.

The ECO Region, having welcomed over 70 million tourists last year, aims to surpass its 2019 record of 87 million visitors. This ambition is supported by investments in infrastructure, hospitality, marketing and visa facilitation in the region, showcasing their cultural assets and enhancing tourist attraction. The region's tourism potential, including its 87 UNESCO world heritage sites and diverse attractions for gastronomy, health, business, and mountain tourism, promises significant economic contributions.

As we convene at this Conference, it is crucial to focus on leveraging tourism for economic growth and regional integration. By exploring development opportunities in Turkmenistan and the broader ECO Region, we can secure a prosperous future for our nations and deepen the ancient Silk Road's spirit of connectivity. Addressing challenges and implementing Conference recommendations will elevate our global tourism stance, fostering economic growth, cultural exchange and global peace.

In 2024 under the Chairmanship of Iran, our focus is on fostering stronger economies and more connected communities by increasing intra-regional trade, collaborating on significant projects and achieving our collective vision for a better future. This year's theme, “The Year of Enhanced and Resilient ECO Region through Expansion of Intra-Regional Trade”, encapsulates our commitment to boosting regional unity and improving living standards through maximizing economic collaboration.

Concluding my remarks, I look forward to productive discussions and successful outcomes at this pivotal Conference.

Thank you all for your kind attention.
