



**Statement of Ambassador Khusrav Noziri, ECO Secretary General
at the 12th Session of the Islamic Conference of Tourism Ministers of the
Organization of Islamic Cooperation (OIC)
*2 June 2024, Khiva, Uzbekistan***

**Excellency Ambassador Hissein Brahim Taha, Secretary General of OIC,
Excellency Mr. Aziz Abdukhakimov, Honourable Minister of Ecology,
Environmental Protection and Climate Change of the Republic of Uzbekistan,
Honorable Ministers,
Ladies and Gentlemen,**

It is an honor to address this distinguished gathering in Khiva, a city renowned for its unique blend of Islamic and Central Asian architecture. I congratulate Khiva authorities for the city's being rightfully named the Tourism City of the Islamic World for 2024.

I also wish to express my gratitude to the Government of Uzbekistan and the OIC Secretariat for providing us this platform to share our insights.

Distinguished Delegates,

The Economic Cooperation Organization (ECO) aims to enhance its Member States' economies through sustainable development. The region, with a population of over 500 million and a GDP of nearly 2.5 trillion USD, has immense tourism potential. Hosting 86 UNESCO World Heritage sites, including ancient Khiva, it attracted around 80 million visitors last year.

Our tourism priorities include promoting Member States' destinations under the ECO brand, involving the private sector and local communities, spreading sustainable tourism practices, enhancing stakeholder capacities and diversifying tourism products and services.

The ECO Tourism Capitals initiative, highlighting cities like Dushanbe, Sari, Ardabil, Shahrizabz, Erzurum and Shusha underscores our commitment to tourism as a catalyst for economic growth and regional cooperation.

In 2022, we established the ECO Tour Operators' Network to enhance private sector involvement in tourism and foster members' cooperation. Last month, we facilitated B2B meetings and networking at the First ECO Tour Operators Forum,

hosted by Azerbaijan's State Tourism Agency. We plan to organize similar events to further cooperation and promote joint tour packages.

Eminent Delegates,

With ten ECO countries, also part of the OIC, we aim to enhance cooperation with the OIC in various fields, including tourism, as per our 1994 MoU. By sharing expertise and best practices in tourism human resource development, we propose organizing a joint ECO-OIC event focused on student exchange, mutual recognition of competencies and workforce training in tourism.

We propose joint research and events on health tourism, a priority in OIC's tourism diversification policies. ECO plans to host the Third ECO Conference and Exhibition on Health Tourism in Iran this year. Additionally, we can collaborate on promoting ziyarah (religious tourism) in the ECO region, which boasts numerous madrasahs, mosques and social complexes significant in the spread of Islam.

Excellencies

The ECO's main goal is to achieve regional prosperity by expanding trade and investment ties among the Member States. I believe that tourism can play a significant role in achieving this goal by creating jobs, generating income and promoting cultural exchange. We share common values that emphasize cooperation and solidarity among us all.

In conclusion, let us forge ahead with determination and collaboration, leveraging tourism as a cornerstone for economic growth, cultural enrichment and enduring regional and inter-regional cooperation in a broader and inclusive developmental context.

Together, we can build a prosperous future grounded in mutual understanding and shared prosperity.

Thank you.