



**Statement of the  
ECO Secretary General H.E. Amb. Khusrav Noziri  
at the Ceremony of Proclamation of Shahrissabz City  
as ECO Tourism Capital for 2024  
*Shahrissabz, Uzbekistan, April 25-26, 2024***

**Excellency Mr. Aziz Abdulkhakimov, Minister of Ecology, Environmental Protection and Climate Change of the Republic of Uzbekistan,  
Excellency Mr. Murotjon Azimov, Governor of Kashkadarya region,  
Honorable Heads and Members of Delegation of the ECO Member States,  
Distinguished Participants,  
Ladies and Gentlemen,**

It is a great pleasure and honor to be here today for the proclamation of Shahrissabz as the ECO Tourism Capital of 2024. While congratulating to the Government of Uzbekistan and the people of Shahrissabz on this remarkable achievement, I thank all the distinguished delegates for joining us on this auspicious occasion.

**Excellencies,**

Uzbekistan, renowned for its vibrant culture, diverse landscapes and rich history, has become a premier destination for global travelers. The hosting of the 25<sup>th</sup> Session of the UN World Tourism Organization General Assembly in 2023 in the ancient city of Samarkand highlighted Uzbekistan's rising stature in the global tourism arena, emphasizing its dedication to fostering dialogue, cooperation and innovation in the sector.

Against the backdrop of this historic milestone, Uzbekistan under leadership of Honourable President, His Excellency Mr. Shavkat Mirziyoyev has continued to make significant strides in enhancing its tourism infrastructure, services and promotional efforts, further solidifying its position as a premier destination for tourists.

**Distinguished Participants,**

Shahrissabz, with its rich history, cultural heritage and natural beauty, embodies the captivating allure of our region. Named this year's ECO Tourism Capital, the city shines as a beacon of excellence in our Organization's tourism landscape. From its legendary past to its stunning landscapes, Shahrissabz exemplifies the charm of Uzbekistan's tourism.

As the birthplace of Amir Timur, founder of the Timurid Empire, Shahrīsabz boasts a UNESCO World Heritage-listed historic center. This includes the grand Ak-Saray Palace and the revered Dar-ut-Tilavat Complex, preserving the essence of the Silk Road's cultural legacy. Its breathtaking vistas, as captured by ECO artists in recent Plein Air activities, range from lush valleys to the snow-capped Pamir Mountains, inviting endless adventures.

Famous Uzbek poet Mir Alisher Navai expressed his deep respect and loyalty to Shahrīsabz, one of the most ancient and beautiful corners of Māwarā'an-nahr (Transoxiana), the land of great scholars and cities in his works. In particular, in his epic poem "Sab'a-i Sayyar" ("Seven Planets"), an Egyptian tourist named Saad tells a legend to Sasanid Shah Bahram-i Gor. Saad says that he met two tourists in green clothes during his trip and asked them where they were from and the tourists responded like this:

Дедилар: “Кишвари дурур дилкаш,  
Оти ҳам Шаҳрисабз эрур ҳам Каш.  
Хизр монанд сабзадин ранги,  
Сабзаси суйи кўзгуси занги.  
Шаҳрисабз ўлди бизга чун мулкат,  
Йўқ ажаб гар яшил дурур кисват”

The unfolding international event in Shahrīsabz echoes the above sentiments of Mir Alisher Navai. It promises to celebrate the city's unique identity and the warm hospitality of its people. From cooking competitions to ethno-sport displays and captivating folklore music, this festival will showcase Uzbekistan's rich cultural heritage to visitors from all around.

### **Distinguished Delegates,**

The Economic Cooperation Organization remains dedicated to fostering regional cooperation and sustainable development across Member States. A key focus is on enhancing tourism, which offers vast potential for economic growth, cultural exchange and social progress.

Since its inception at the 3<sup>rd</sup> ECO Ministerial Meeting on Tourism in Khujand, Tajikistan in 2019, the annual tradition of ECO Tourism Capital has showcased the diverse cultural heritage and natural beauty of our member countries. This practice underscores our shared commitment to using tourism as a driver for progress and prosperity.

Previous ECO Tourism Capitals like Dushanbe in Tajikistan, Sari and Ardabil in Iran have seen increased visibility and investment, leading to significant socioeconomic advancement. In 2024, Shahrīsabz embraces this opportunity for further growth. Looking ahead, Erzurum in Türkiye and Shusha in Azerbaijan are slated for 2025 and 2026, poised to benefit similarly.

The tradition of selecting ECO Tourism Capitals is gaining momentum, with Lahore in Pakistan, Marv in Turkmenistan and Karakol in Kyrgyz Republic as potential candidates for 2027. This signals a bright future for sustainable tourism development in the ECO Region

### **Ladies and Gentlemen,**

As we gather today, let's renew our commitment to sustainable tourism practices that preserve nature, safeguard cultural heritage and empower local communities. This is an opportunity to strengthen friendships and cooperation among our Member States, harnessing tourism's potential for positive change.

Reflecting on Shahrizabz's new role as ECO Tourism Capital, we recall our progress towards the ECO Vision 2025. Crafted at the 13<sup>th</sup> ECO Summit, the vision aims to transform our region into a peaceful and green tourism destination with diverse offerings and top-notch services.

Under the ECO Secretariat's coordination and Member States' dedication, we have made significant strides. The 4<sup>th</sup> ECO Ministerial Meeting on Tourism, led by Uzbekistan in December 2022, highlighted our joint commitment to regional tourism cooperation. The Samarkand Declaration, stemming from this meeting, emphasizes preserving and promoting our region's natural and cultural treasures.

Similarly, the 5<sup>th</sup> ECO Ministerial Meeting on Tourism, held in Ardabil city, Iran, the ECO Tourism Capital for 2023, adopted the Ardabil Declaration on October 5, 2023. This Declaration focused on joint promotion and ongoing collaboration for our region's tourism development, aligning with our goal of peaceful and green tourism destinations.

In recent years, our focus has intensified on promoting regional tourism destinations, enhancing travel facilitation, diversifying products and services, developing human resources and elevating quality standards. These efforts have yielded significant results, engaging the private sector and local communities in tourism activities.

### **Excellencies,**

In conclusion, I once again extend my sincere congratulations to Uzbekistan on Shahrizabz's selection as the ECO Tourism Capital for 2024. May this honour bring prosperity and further inspire all Member States to make more investment in sustainable tourism development. I also express my earnest gratitude to the people and authorities of Uzbekistan, especially Shahrizabz city, for their generous hospitality and hard work in ensuring the success of this event.

Thanking you all, I eagerly anticipate everyone exploring the wonders of Shahrizabz during this memorable occasion.