



**ECONOMIC COOPERATION ORGANISATION (ECO)**

**Samarkand Declaration  
13 December, 2022**

We, the Ministers for Tourism and Heads of Delegation of the Member States of the Economic Cooperation Organization from the Republic of Azerbaijan, Islamic Republic of Iran, the Republic of Kazakhstan, the Kyrgyz Republic, the Islamic Republic of Pakistan, the Republic of Tajikistan, the Republic of Türkiye, Turkmenistan and the Republic of Uzbekistan, participating in the Fourth ECO Ministerial Meeting on Tourism, on December 13, 2022, hosted by the Republic of Uzbekistan in virtual format, and keeping in view the Article II of İzmir Treaty, relevant parts of Quetta Action Plan, and other ECO documents including ECO Vision 2025, as well as:

**Recalling** the Declarations of the First, Second and Third ECO Ministerial Meetings on Tourism in Tehran (2008), Antalya (2009) and Khujand (2019);

**Recalling** the Ashgabat Consensus for Action adopted during the 15<sup>th</sup> ECO Summit held in Ashgabat, Turkmenistan on November 28, 2021 assigning the Tourism Ministers to take urgent measures in coping with serious challenges of the ECO tourism industry arising from COVID-19 pandemic in line with other regional and global post-COVID initiatives;

**Acknowledging** tourism as a fundamental driver of economic and sustainable development and solidarity among nations, it can have positive and lasting effects on cultural and natural heritage, on creativity and cultural diversity, and on the environment and balance of societies, thereby facilitating dialogue among cultures and contributing to the construction of global peace;

**Bearing in mind** the contribution of tourism for creating immense opportunities for inclusive economic growth and sustainable development of the ECO region through job creation, empowerment of local communities, regeneration of rural and urban areas, and the appreciation and protection of natural and cultural heritage;

**Recalling** the ECO Vision 2025 which envisaged that the ECO Region has a significant potential to be one of the major tourism destinations in the world with its rich historical and cultural heritage and ancient Silk Road ties;

**Emphasizing** the crosscutting nature of the tourism, a close coordination across several national stakeholders is essential to reach the regional tourism objectives;

**Underscoring** the development of tourism sector lies on close synergy of public and private sectors;

**Underlining** the need for giving full attention to the essential role of coordination among tourism and transport sectors is integral to the growth of regional tourism and its competitiveness through increased access to international and regional markets and economic benefits generated through enhanced transport connectivity;

**Highlighting** robust collaboration is the key element for the successful implementation of the regional strategies and actions for sustainable development of tourism;

**Acknowledging** the development of human resources in travel and tourism is integral to the growth of regional tourism and its competitiveness globally;

**Emphasizing** that development and implementation of harmonized service quality and environmental standards that can help protect the environment and bring tangible benefits to local communities and aligned with international best practices, including those related to safety, health and environment protocols are essential to increasing the competitiveness of the region as a global tourism destination, and attracting tourists from international markets;

**Underlining** the essential role of investment generation for a competitive tourism sector and inclusively for the other sectors of the ECO Member States for stimulating economic growth and enhancing poverty reduction;

Have decided to:

- 1- **Implement** the 'Road Map on Facilitating Accelerated Recovery, Safe and Sustainable Development of Tourism after Covid-19 in the ECO region' and **call upon** the Member States to cooperate and take necessary measures for its full realization expeditiously;
- 2- **Appreciate** Dushanbe the Capital of the Republic of Tajikistan as ECO Tourism Capital for the years 2020-2021 and the city of Sari in the Islamic Republic of Iran as the ECO Tourism Capital for the year 2022 for their excellent arrangements and hospitality;
- 3- Congratulate warmly the city of Ardebil in the Islamic Republic of Iran as the ECO Tourism Capital for the year 2023 and welcome their initiatives within the framework of ECO Tourism Capital celebrations as well as their willingness to host the 5th ECO Ministerial Meeting on Tourism in 2023 in Ardabil.

- 4- **Announce** the city of Shakhrisabz in the Republic of Uzbekistan as ECO Tourism Capital for 2024 and the city of Erzurum in the Republic of Türkiye is decided as the ECO Tourism Capital for 2025;
- 5- **Emphasize** the need to work in a coordinated and collaborative manner to protect and foster the regional brand through regionally harmonized quality standards and regulations while carrying out programmes to ensure the preservation, conservation and promotion of the natural, cultural and historical heritage of the ECO Member States.
- 6- **Urge** the ECO Member States to consolidate their efforts to jointly promote the natural and cultural richness of the Silk Road through organization of joint events and meetings that could enrich cultural, economic and trade exchanges and people to people contacts regionally and globally;
- 7- **Reiterate** the need for increased cooperation and collaborative exchanges among the public and the private tourism stakeholders of the Member States in promoting regional tourism;
- 8- **Welcome** the establishment of the “ECO Tour Operators Network” as a platform for sharing and refining ideas on actions, as well as a mechanism for acting together with a collective voice to promote the region through preparation of joint regional tour packages to attract the intending travelers/tourists towards various areas of tourism that could benefit all partners in tourism destinations;
- 9- **Encourage** the Member States to host regional meetings of tour operators and major tourism stakeholders to enhance exchange in tourism sector among Member States;
- 10- **Call upon** the Member States to actively participate in regional tourism exhibitions / fairs to contribute development and promotion of the regional tourism market;
- 11- **Take initiatives** to increase collaboration between tourism and transport sectors for developing regional tourism by enhancing land, rail, sea and air connectivity to major tourism destinations of the Member States in order to ensure comfortable, economical, accessible and secure travel in the ECO region;
- 12- **Reaffirm** the need to address the obstacles and barriers that hamper the expansion of both tourism and air transport within, to and the ECO Region and
- 13- **Encourage** the Member States to facilitate air connectivity in/to the region through establishing regular and chartered flights to stimulate regional tourism;
- 14- **Take initiatives** for visa facilitation and enhancement of transport connectivity in/to the ECO region to tap the full potential, enhance appeal and sustained tourism performance of regional tourism sector and consider Kazakhstan’s

introduction of a two-week visa-free regime for Iranian travelers as a significant step towards creating a visa free regime in the ECO region;

- 15- **Reactivate** ECO Tourism Promotion Fund through COM to allocate financial support and invite Member States to fulfill their pledges to this Fund, request the other Member States to expedite their contributions to the ECO Tourism Promotion Fund, enabling the ECO Secretariat to help implement the tourism objectives contained in the ECO Vision 2025;
- 16- **Support** collaboration among the Member States in enhancing the human resource capacity of the Member States for providing high standards and quality in the tourism services of the region;
- 17- **Ensure** that tourism follows a truly sustainable path and enhanced cooperation and concrete partnerships among the tourism stakeholders be encouraged for conducting tourism activities in harmony with the conservation of the natural environment;
- 18- **Encourage** the Member States to take active policies to incentivize and restore investment in the regional tourism sector to compensate the decrease in investment in the sector during the pandemic, to maintain the quality of the tourism offer and promote a sustainable recovery;
- 19- **Appreciate** the Republic of Uzbekistan for hosting of 25<sup>th</sup> Session of the General Assembly of the World Tourism Organization in 2023 in Samarkand and this high-level tourism event will undoubtedly mirror the tourism potential of other ECO Member States;
- 20- **Express** deep appreciation to the Ministry of Tourism and Cultural Heritage of the Republic of Uzbekistan, for virtually hosting the 4<sup>th</sup> ECO Ministerial meeting, and also thank the ECO Secretariat for its contribution to successfully organize the meeting.