

Report of
The 3rd ECO Ministerial Meeting on Tourism

Preceded by

The 5th High Level Expert Group Meeting on Tourism

Report

The 3rd ECO Ministerial Meeting on Tourism, preceded by the 5th High Level Expert Group (HLEG) Meeting on Tourism was held on 3-4 October 2019 in Khujand, Republic of Tajikistan. The Meeting was attended by the delegations from the Islamic Republic of Iran, the Kyrgyz Republic, the Islamic Republic of Pakistan, the Republic of Tajikistan (Host), the Republic of Turkey and the Republic of Uzbekistan as well as the delegation of ECO Secretariat. *List of participants attached as Annex-I.*

5th HLEG

2. The 5th High Level Expert Group Meeting on Tourism, held on 03 October 2019 in Khujand, the Republic of Tajikistan, was inaugurated by H.E. Mr. Numon Abdughafforzoda, the Chairman of the Committee of Tourism Development of the Republic of Tajikistan while welcoming the delegates to Khujand, profoundly thanked and appreciated them for their active participation in the Meeting. He called for strengthening and improvement of the cooperation among the Member States in tourism sectors.

3. The ECO Secretariat delivered a presentation regarding progress report on the implementation process of the decision taken since the last Meetings, expected outcomes, data and fact and share of ECO tourism in World; as well as current and future planned ECO activities for development of sustainable tourism in the ECO region. *Copy of Presentation is attached at Annex-II.*

4. The 5th HLEG discussed the overall issues according to the Agenda of the 3rd Ministerial Meeting on Tourism including the Khujand Declaration on Tourism, as well as finalized the draft report of the Ministerial Meeting on Tourism.

5. The Meeting adopted two projects in tourism sector titled as "ECO Tourism Visa" and "ECO Tours Operators Network" and recommended to CPR to allocate funds for implementation of these projects. Copy of the Projects Proposal is attached at Annex- III.

6. The Meeting also urged the Member States to expedite the appointment of their National Focal Points (NFPs) for prompt and smooth communication among the Member States and NFPs. The list of Focal Points of Member States as furnished by the representatives during meeting is attached at *Annex- IV*; the remaining Member States will forward the details of their NFPs through Diplomatic Channel.

3rd ECO Ministerial Meeting on Tourism

Agenda Item 1: Inauguration and Welcome Statements by:

High level Dignitary from the Republic of Tajikistan

7. The Meeting was inaugurated by the H.E. Mr. Rajabboy Ahmadzoda, the Governor of Sughd Province of the Republic of Tajikistan. In his inaugural statement, he welcomed the delegates in the beautiful Khujand city of the Sughd Province and appreciated their participation in the Meeting. He highlighted the potentials and progress of the Republic of Tajikistan in Tourism Sector under the leadership of the H.E. President Emomali Rahmon. He accentuated the holding of experience/knowledge sharing events regularly for fruitful activities and mutual beneficial cooperation among the Member States in tourism sector. The Governor also encouraged the Member States for promotion of natural tourism, health tourism, gastronomy tourism as well as restoration and preservation of historical and cultural heritages.

ECO Secretary General:

8. H.E. Dr. Hadi Soleimanpour, the Secretary General of the ECO in his opening remarks warmly welcomed the distinguished Ministers and delegates from the Member States. He expressed his thanks and deep gratitude to the H.E. Emamali Rahmon, the President of the Republic of Tajikistan for his chairmanship and patronage of the ECO. He also expressed his thanks and the appreciation to the Governor of Sughd as well as the host authorities of the Republic of Tajikistan for their support to convene this meeting as well as extension of kind hospitality. The Secretary General underscored the importance of tourism and sustainable development of tourism in the region. H.E. Dr. Soleimanpour while appreciating the participants of 5th HLEG Meeting on Tourism for their deliberations to finalize the ECO Principles for Sustainable Tourism development and ECO Tourism Action Plan have highlighted the main features of these documents and their necessity for the concerned authorities of the Member States. He underlined that the tourism industry has gained a very positive attention from the Member States and has become a priority development field for the coming decade. The Secretary General highlighted that the development of the tourism industry throughout the region needs intra regional international connectivity through all modes of the transportation in order to ensure comfortable, cheaper accessible and security travel in ECO Region. The Secretary General hoped that based on the decisions taken in this meeting and the Khujand declaration, we will also be able to undertake significant steps in development of tourism industry in ECO region. He also assured that the ECO Secretariat will extend every possible support to implement the decision of this Meeting. *Copy of his statement is attached at Annex-V.*

Agenda Item 2: Group Photo

9. Under this agenda item group photo of the participants has been taken.

Agenda Item 3: Election of the Chairman

10. H.E. Mr. Numon Abdughafforzoda, the Chairman of the Committee of Tourism Development under the Government of the Republic of Tajikistan was unanimously elected as Chairman of the 3rd ECO Ministerial Meeting on Tourism.

11. H.E. Mr. Numon Abdughafforzoda, at the outset cordially welcomed the distinguished delegates in the city of Khujand and appreciated their participation in the meeting. He highlighted the achievement of the Republic of Tajikistan during the last few years in tourism sector through introducing new policies by their Government. He underscored that the Government of the Republic of Tajikistan has concluded bilateral agreements with many countries with the aim to develop cooperation in tourism sector and creating conducive conditions for its development, these agreements provide basis for cooperation between authorized state bodies in tourism industry and tourist companies to increase the tourists' flow, as well as promote joint tourist routes and brands. He called for enhancement and strengthening of tourism which help to improve the cooperation among the Governments of the Member States. H.E. Mr. Numon has stressed the holding of exhibitions, fairs, forums, and conferences, seminars with the participation of representatives of the private and public sectors in the ECO framework. The Chairman emphasized on creation of special ECO-tourism investment chain between the Member States, attracting investment in the tourism infrastructure including roads, hotels and hostels etc. He desired the organization of joint events/conference for sharing of experience and the skill development/capacity building courses among the ECO Member States. The Chairman, anticipated that this meeting will have a positive impact on the fruitful cooperation and will create a solid basis for cooperation and development of tourism sector among ECO Member States. *Copy of his Statement is attached at Annex-VI.*

Agenda Item 4: Adoption of the Agenda

12. The Agenda of the Meeting was adopted, which is attached as *Annex-VII*.

Agenda Item 5: Appointment of the Drafting Committee

13. The Chairman decided that the draft report of the meeting would be prepared by the ECO Secretariat for consideration of the representatives, under the relevant agenda item.

Agenda Item 6: Statements / Presentations by the Heads of Delegations

14. The Heads of delegations of the participating member states delivered statements over tourism related policies, activities, achievements and development programmes in their respective countries. *Copies of available Statements are attached as Annex-VIII.*

15. The Meeting welcomed the proposal of the Republic of Uzbekistan regarding creation reliable and economical, viable air links among ECO Member States particularly with and among Central Asian Member States to boost tourism flow to the region and also invited the Secretariat to prepare a technical report in this regard.

16. The Republic of Kyrgyz Republic has proposed to consider the issue of Joint Introduction of Public Private Partnership (PPP) System in ECO Member States and developed and introduce tourism destinations as well as registration of tourist in proper system. The Secretariat may circulate these proposals to Member States for their feedbacks.

Agenda Item 7: Adoption of the ECO Principles for Sustainable Tourism Development:

17. The meeting adopted the ECO Principles for Sustainable Tourism Development in ECO Region and emphasized that ECO Member States should apply these principles in their future development programmes for sustainable tourism. *Copy of the ECO Principles for Sustainable Tourism is attached at Annex- IX.*

Agenda Item 8: Decision on ECO Tourism Plan of Action:

18. While approving the ECO Tourism Plan of Action the Meeting appreciated the contributions of the participants of the 5th High Level Expert Group meeting on finalization of this action plan. *Copy of the ECO Tourism Plan of Action is attached at Annex-X.*

19. Regarding the implementation of the adopted projects the meeting argued that the ECO Secretariat may allocate financial assistance by the CPR Meeting as well as political encourages the international organizations for financial and technical support. In this regard the private sectors of the Member States may also be involved.

20. Representative of Iran stressed the importance of networking of all tourism stakeholders including tour operators, tour leaders, hotel industry, airlines, educational institutions, etc. He also mentioned the benefits of establishing an e-based platform using new technologies and sharing knowledge and best practices to organize co-creation based activities.

Agenda Item No. 9: Selection of the ECO Tourism Capital:

21. The Meeting, after thorough deliberations on selection of the ECO Tourism Capital, approved city of Dushanbe as ECO Tourism Capital for the years 2020-2021 and also decided to approve cities of Sari and Ardabil in the Islamic Republic of Iran as ECO Tourism Capitals for the years 2022 and 2023 respectively.

Agenda Item 10: Adoption of the Khujand Declaration on Tourism:

22. The Meeting considered and adopted the Khujand Declaration on Tourism. *Copy of Declaration is attached at Annex-XI*

Agenda Item 11: Any Other business

23. No issue was considered, under this agenda item,

Agenda Item 12: Date and venue of the next Meeting

24. While appreciating the offer of the Republic of Uzbekistan for holding the 4th ECO Ministerial Meeting on Tourism in 2020 the Meeting welcomed the proposal of the Islamic Republic of Iran for hosting 5th ECO Ministerial Meeting on Tourism in 2022. The exact dates and venues will be confirmed by the Member States through Diplomatic Channel in due course.

Agenda Item 13: Adoption of the Report *(prepared by the 5th High Level Expert Group Meeting on Tourism)*

25. The Meeting considered the report prepared by the 5th High Level Expert Group Meeting on Tourism and approved.

Agenda Item 14: Closing and Vote of Thanks

26. The Member States expressed their gratitude to H.E. Mr. Numon Abdughafforzoda, the Chairman of the Committee of Tourism Development under the Government of the Republic of Tajikistan for conducting the Meeting's proceedings in an efficient and professional manner as well as his outstanding Chairmanship of the Meeting. The Meeting appreciated the Government of the Republic of Tajikistan for making excellent arrangements for the Meeting.

27. The Member States further expressed their gratitude to the ECO Secretary General and his team for preparation of relevant documents and coordination with all the ECO Member States in organizing this important meeting in an efficient and able manner.
