

Statement by H.E. Dr. Hadi Souleimannour, Secretary General, E.CO Secretariat:
3rd Ministerial Meeting on Tourism
(Khujand, 4 October 2019)

**Excellencies,
Governor of Sughd Province,
Chairman of the Committee of Tourism Development
Distinguished Participants,
Ladies and Gentlemen,**

It is a great privilege for me to warmly welcome to all the participants of this Ministerial Meeting in the beautiful city of Khujand. I would like to express my sincere thanks and extend deep gratitude to the Paishwa-e-Millat and the honourable President of the Republic of Tajikistan, Janab-i-Aali Imam Ali Rahman for the excellent chairmanship and patronage of the ECO as well as the government of Tajikistan for all their support to convene this meeting, such a kind receptivity and extension of kind hospitality to all of us.

Excellencies,

As you are aware, tourism plays a vital role in the economy of the countries around the globe and has become the fastest growing economic sector in the world in the recent years. The UNWTO figures indicate that the number of tourist arrivals globally reached 1.4 billion in 2018. Nowadays, the share of the Tourism sector in the world economy is more than 10 percent with the contribution of 8.8 Trillion dollars. According to the figures of the WTTC, it covered 319 million jobs around the world in 2018 and more importantly one fifth of all new jobs created over the last five years by tourism sector.

Through traveling, people get to better know each other, increase familiarity, enhance tolerance, bridge the global cultural gap and establish business-to-business contacts.

Excellencies,

Considering the resources the ECO region is blessed with, it might be expected that the region as a whole could be one of the most important tourist destinations in the world. The region stretches from central to south and south to west Asia, nearby the two important global tourism markets of Europe and China, with 460 million inhabitants, well-known for its natural beauty, as well as diversity of its historical-cultural heritage, echoing the

memoires of the ancient Silk Road. However, the figures do not reflect the potential of the region. In 2017, around 60 million tourists visited the countries in ECO region which constitutes only 4.5 percent of the total arrivals in the world with the total revenue around 43 billion dollars which account for only 2.84 percent of the total world tourism expenditures. The sector constitutes 9.3 percent of the GDP in the region, slightly less than the world average, with Azerbaijan and Turkey bearing most of the figure within the region.

In view of this, and taking into account the fact that isolated geographical locations of some Member Countries have not served the regional tourism development in general during the last decade, ECO has taken steps towards boosting awareness in the region making the tourism as one of its priority areas. ECO Council of Ministers, within the context of its documents such as Quetta Plan of Action and Istanbul Declaration have urged the member states to take the necessary measures for promotion of the ECO region as a considerable tourism destination. ECO Vision 2025 adopted in the 13th ECO Summit in 2017 at Islamabad, specified the Tourism industry as the priority development field for the coming decade. Our objectives have been, inter alia, to develop ECO Region as a global tourist destination, strengthening links between public and private sectors in tourism sector and to study tourism policies and programs to attract foreign investments in the region.

This meeting provides us with an opportunity to make a breakthrough in the Tourism sector. All the ECO Member states agree that tourism is one of the main areas of cooperation in the ECO, yet a comprehensive tourism strategy is needed. With the adoption of Eco Principles for Sustainable Tourism Development, we have a guide in front of us for a common framework to harmonize development guidelines for any tourism plans and projects in the region.

Decision on ECO Plan of Action on Tourism to promote regional cooperation and to call upon the Member States to take necessary measures for harmonization of their national tourism plan of action with it, adoption of promising projects of the ECO such as creation of ECO tourism destinations and their networking, Single tourism Visa procedure in ECO countries, ECO Chain hospitals for Health Tourism., Developing ECO Tourism Destinations

and the networking of Tour Operator in the ECO region would also be worth mentioning to be the main outcome of this meeting.

It is also important to note that the development of the Tourism industry throughout the region needs intra regional and international connectivity through all modes of transportation in order to ensure comfortable, cheaper accessible and secure travel in ECO Region. We hope that based on the decisions taken in this meeting and the declaration, we will also be able to undertake significant steps in this regard as well.

Excellencies,
Distinguished delegates,

Last but not least, I would like to thank once again the Government of the Republic of Tajikistan and His Excellency Minister of Tourism, Chairman, for excellent arrangements as well all my deep gratitude and appreciation for all the Ministers as well as the Heads of Delegations for their valued participation.

I re-assure that the ECO Secretariat will extend every possible support to implement your decisions and to move forward our shared agenda of prosperity in the region

Thank you very much for your kind attention.