

**3rd Meeting of the ECO Tourism Ministers
Statement Read by Ambassador Imran Haider,
Head of Delegation of the Islamic Republic of Pakistan
(4th October, 2019 Khujand, Tajikistan)**

Honorable Chairman, at the very outset, I would like to congratulate you on your election as Chairman of the 3rd meeting of the ECO Tourism Ministers.

Mr. Chairman, Respected Secretary General ECO, Delegate Members, Ladies & Gentlemen,
As Salam-o-Alaikum!

ECO is a major geopolitical block. Being one of the founding members of ECO, Pakistan is fully committed to implement ECO's vision. Pakistan has always played constructive role in strengthening the ties and developing mutually beneficial partnerships within the ambit of ECO.

Tourism industry plays a significant role in development. Tourism not only generates commercial activity, employment and revenues, directly but also creates demand and growth for many other industries.

Enriched with world's oldest civilizations, vast glaciers, snow-capped peaks, famous gardens of Shalimar, famed mountain passes, remains and ruins of Mohenjo-Daro & Taxila, Early Muslim & Mughal civilization and Silk Road's heritage, Pakistan possesses enormous tourism potential.

In the recent past, the Government of Pakistan has taken major policy decisions to promote tourism industry that include establishment of National Tourism Coordination Board (NTBC) to develop and enhance coordination with provinces as well as federal ministries, marketing and promotion of tourism potentials both nationally and internationally; and capacity building for provision of quality services. Simultaneously, e-visa service for multiple countries including ECO members has already been launched.

Improvement of regional and international cooperation for generating interests of investors and tourists is another priority of the Government of Pakistan. We believe that ECO member countries possess immense potential. In order to further promote tourism in ECO states, the member countries may improve visa facilitation, strengthen relations among government bodies governing tourism, and improve air and land connectivity in the region. The private sector players including investors, tour operators, aviation authorities and cultural bodies also need to forge better linkages and cooperation.

Promoting eco-tourism is one of the primary focus areas of our Government. The government is introducing new destinations to reduce stress from the existing tourist places and also developing environmental standards to be observed across the country. The government has also launched 10-billion tree plantation project to create eco-friendly atmosphere. Similarly, enforcement of existing regulations is being ensured to conserve wildlife and limit deforestation.

Government is also encouraging use of technology as an effective medium for promoting tourism and environmental friendly practices. For this purpose, we are encouraging use of IT solutions through creation of an interactive e-portal/website for tourism, development of Android/IOS/Window Phone applications, search engine optimization, social media promotional campaigns, blogging and v logging.

Pakistan is fully committed to promote eco-friendly tourism and will continue to play its part in ensuring implementation of mutually agreed plans. We highly value the ongoing developments through the forum of ECO and attach great importance to joint efforts by ECO Member States.

In the end, on behalf of my delegation and myself, I would like to express deep appreciation for the Committee of Tourism Development, Republic of Tajikistan and the ECO Secretariat for making excellent arrangements and extending great hospitality to us.

Thank you all.