

Welcome Statement

by

**Dr. Seyed Ali Mohammad MOUSAVI D-8 Secretary-General at the
2nd D-8 Meeting of Tourism Cooperation 1-2 July 2013, Tehran - Iran**

**Mr. Chairman,
Distinguished delegates,
Ladies and Gentlemen,**

On behalf of the D-8 Organization for Economic Cooperation, I would like to welcome you all *to the 2nd D-8 Meeting of Tourism Cooperation*.

It is my pleasure to be with you at the opening of this important Meeting. First, I would like to extend my heartfelt gratitude to the Government of Islamic Republic of Iran, especially to the - Iranian Cultural Heritage and Tourism Organization, for organizing and hosting this meeting in Tehran. I would also like to express my appreciation to all delegates here, whose dedication and support has made this meeting possible.

Mr. Chairman,

Please allow me to start my address with a brief, and recent, facts and figures of the tourism sector in the world as well as in D-8 Countries.

Last year, 2012, was a dynamic year for tourism in the world. The growth of international visitor arrivals has been significantly increased. According to UNWTO report 1,035 billion international tourists traveled in the world, recording an increase of 4% compared to 2011. International tourism receipts also grew by 4% to US\$ 1,075 billion. Growth in international tourist arrivals is expected to continue in 2013 only slightly below the 2012 level (+3% to +4%) and in line with UNWTO long-term forecast. This increase in arrivals in 2012 was slightly faster in advanced economies than in emerging ones. But, in 2015, developing economies will, for the first time in history, receive more international tourist arrivals than advanced ones, and receiving over one billion arrivals by 2030.

In 2012, D-8 countries received around 85 million international visitor arrivals, an increase of 3,8% on 2011. D-8 also held around 8% share of international tourism receipts, reaching US\$ 78 million in 2012. In terms of international tourism receipts, the D-8 countries recorded around 8,5% share of international tourist arrivals reaching 86 million people in 2012. This increase signifies an excellent performance with comparison to international figures despite an increasingly uncertain global economy, political changes and instability situation in some of our countries.

These figures also demonstrate the growing importance of tourism sector in the world economy and therefore D-8 economic cooperation should well-prepared to take benefits from this opportunity, given that tourism sector is also much linked to socio-economic efforts of many countries to maintain and develop environmental and cultural heritages, businesses, services, employment, as well as poverty alleviation.

Distinguished Delegates,

There is now, increased awareness of the power of tourism as a tool for development and change. The importance of tourism as an economic engine and a tool for development and change for D-8 was also mentioned in the Tehran Declaration that was endorsed by the Ministers at 1st D-8 Tourism Ministerial Meeting, on 15 May 2008, in Isfahan. Therefore, it is my firm expectation that one of the outcomes of our Meeting today would be the preparation an action plan or a Roadmap of D-8 Tourism Cooperation for implementation of this important document.

With the increased cooperation between the D.8 Member countries, tourism can in fact help to better deal with many poverty and social issues as well as act as a strong supporter of heritage and natural conservation. In some cases tourism must be seen as transformative in its ability to bring about change and to achieve a wide range of social, cultural and economic goals. We should discuss to develop and to cooperate in tourism infrastructure development, in fully private and/or public- private partnership, such as building airports, ports, transportation, roads, and other facilities.

We should also seek to develop joint programs and projects with the United Nations World Tourism Organization (UNWTO), Organization of the Islamic Cooperation (OIC), and other regional cooperation. UNWTO initiates some tourism issues on poverty alleviation and microfinance, ecotourism and climate change. In addition, the OIC has already adopted a comprehensive strategic and action plan on tourism in 2009. As you know all D-8 member states are members of UNWTO, and also OIC. Therefore, we have to make any efforts to make success of the available programs and projects based on our needs.

Mr. Chairman,

As D-8 tourism continues to grow and gains increased relevance like international tourism, the sector must confront existing obstacles and tackle emerging challenges. Removing current obstacles to tourism development such as complicated visa procedures and increased taxation, I believe that D-8 PTA, Visa and Customs Agreements and also D-8 cooperation on civil aviation contribute to play significant roles.

We know as well, that the majority of populations of D-8 countries are Muslims with their dense population. **Religious tourism**, such as travels and tour packages for Umrah and Hajj is now mushrooming and promising for tourism business. Of course we also shall pay attention on the potency of other sector of tourism like health tourism, ecotourism, coasts and small islands tourism; fairs industry and conferences tourism; tourism and poverty alleviation and cultural heritages tourism and so on and so forth.

Mr. Chairman,

Since 2008, my predecessors, Secretary-Generals of D-8 attended all World Health Tourism Congresses organized by Turkish Health Tourism Association. This meeting will be hold again as the 6th Congress on 22-24 November 2013, in Istanbul, Turkey. There are also a number of similar conferences in other member countries. We need to benchmark to each other by supporting to attend and try to have back-to-back meetings during this next and other congress/meetings in D-8 countries.

Distinguished Colleagues,

Let me now turn to the Meeting here today. In 2014, D-8 is going to enter the second period of its life in ongoing evolution of the cooperation which means that all member countries will complete the chairmanship of D-8. The second circle is going to start with 9th Summit in Turkey. D-8 Charter which was adopted 8th summit in Islamabad last year, recognizes that there are more than twenty cooperation areas to be considered within the D-8. So within this second period, we, as D-8 countries should be designed to complement these areas and I believe here in this meeting we should declare the necessity of taking immediate measures to encourage, facilitate and promote tourism in the priority areas of the organization as an important element for D-8 cooperation.

Looking back at where we started, and looking forward to where we should be headed, I believe that the genuine initiation to formulate a tangible framework of tourism is properly reflective of the momentum of our collective enterprise in this field and provides a good chapeau for the meeting today. I would also like to emphasize that the Meeting here in Tehran has provided us all with a precious opportunity to liaise with each other better, at both public and private levels and also between the two complimenting sectors. We can - and we should - expand and institutionalize our connections and communications. I really doubt that you need to be further encouraged on the urgent need for sharing information, experiences and best practices to promote actual cooperation on this important issue.

Distinguished Colleagues,

Coming to the end of my remarks, let me underline that I find reassuring the

feasible importance of tourism for D-8 Community through an strategically oriented long-term plan. We shall therefore embark upon a new phase of tourism development in our organization with an strong strategic plan and equally strong commitment on the part of the public and private sectors to ensure their success and that tourism plays its rightful role in ensuring the social, political, cultural and social goals of the organization's economy are met.

My last word would be to urge all of you to focus on developing a good set of feasible strategic plan as part of a workable action plan for tourism cooperation, which, as everybody knows, has been clearly stipulated in the our Organization's 2008-2018 Roadmap. This plan should be realistic, action oriented, attuned to the global realities and designed to ensure that the D-8 can continue to be a successful tourism destination. It will also allow D-8 countries to be a strong competitor within the global tourism environment.

Finally, I would like to thank the people and the government of I.R. of Iran for their warm hospitality as well as their initiative for hosting this event during recent years and I thank you very much for your attention and wish all of you every success in this meeting.