

**Statement by Dr. Seyed Ali Mohammad Mousavi D-8 Secretary General at
The Meeting of Consular Authorities of D-8 Member States on Implementation of
Agreement on Simplification of Visa Procedures 17-18 February 2014, Tehran-Iran**

*His Excellency Ambassador Ghashghaavi,
Honorable Deputy Foreign Minister of Islamic Republic of Iran on Consular and
Parliamentary,*

*His Excellency Ambassador Bizmark,
Honorable D-8 Commissioner of Islamic Republic of Iran,*

*His Excellency Ambassador Mirfakhar,
Honorable Chairman and Director General of Consular Issues, Ministry of Foreign
Affairs of Islamic Republic of Iran,*

*Distinguished Delegates,
Ladies and Gentlemen,*

On behalf of Developing Eight Countries Organization for Economic Cooperation (D-8), I would like to welcome you all to our very first time meeting, **The Meeting of Consular Authorities of D-8 Member States on Implementation of Agreement on Simplification of Visa Procedures.**

It is a great honor and pleasure for me to be with you all, at the opening of this significant gathering. First, let me extend my heartfelt gratitude to the Government of Islamic Republic of Iran, especially to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, for this well- prepared Meeting, providing us with this wonderful venue in capital city of Tehran. I would also like to express my appreciation to all delegates for their presence and for their contribution to this Meeting.

Distinguished Delegates,

I would like to start with a brief observation on the importance role of visa towards tremendously contribution in enhancing economic relation. A number of studies on international trade showed that the easier on visa application procedures for businessmen, the more business travel between one to another country, particularly, among D-8 Member States, the stronger is the business network, better maintained business relationship, wider promoted trade commodities, which would ultimately boost trade volume afterwards.

There are some important aspects of visa and travel facilitation, such as the effect on jobs created from trade as well as foreign direct investment (FDI). The urgency to expedite and optimize the visa exemption, or at least, simplification, has been gaining weight recently as the private sectors are stressing the importance of the agreement to boost trade and investment among D-8 Member States. The role of visa agreement is so significant to enhance D-8 commercial relations. More collaboration must be maintained between governments to overcome visa difficulties.

Needless to say that the presence or perception of delays in obtaining the necessary visas can give an international investor the impression that it may be difficult to finalize or oversee an investment in the D-8 countries. It is important to have in place the people and facilities needed to efficiently handle the demand for visas. Myths and misperceptions regarding the difficulty of the visa process must also be promptly debunked so as to prevent an inaccurate assessment of the D-8's migration systems.

Distinguished Delegates,

Within the context of this overall sketch, let me now turn to the D-8 Visa Agreement. As all of you here knows, this Agreement, in fact the first legal instrument to be developed and articulated by the D-8, was completed at the Cairo Summit (February 2001) and subsequently signed at the Kuala Lumpur Summit (2008). Thus far, it has been ratified by - and entered into force since 5 February 2010 - for six Member Countries, namely Bangladesh, Iran, Malaysia, Nigeria, Pakistan and Turkey.

Following the entry into force of the Agreement, the D-8 Secretariat received a number of complaints from the parties with respect to the implementation of the Agreement. Businessmen still face difficulties in obtaining visa from member countries in spite of an existing Visa Agreement, for instance, submission of invitation letter from the counterparts, required days for issuing the visa, business identification documents, submission of bank accounts, and requirement of a guarantor person from the counterparts.

With above in mind, the D-8 Secretariat brought this important issue to the Commission,

particularly the 33rd Session of Commission (2-3 September 2013) and later on to 34th Session of Commission (17-18 December 2013), both was held in Islamabad, Pakistan. In these meetings, the Secretariat presented the report of the feedbacks provided by several Member Countries, and subsequently, the Commissioners discussed ways and means to facilitate and simplify visa procedures for businessmen. Finally, the Commission welcomed the proposal, made by Iran to host our meeting, here today in Tehran. In this context, once again, I would like to express my gratitude to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Iran for their readiness to host this important meeting.

As you may concur with me, the main aim of our meeting today is to identify solutions for some factual challenges in the implementation of D-8 Visa Agreement and, at the same time, to discuss ways and means, based on the common understanding for further enhancement of the simplification of visa procedures. In addition, security concerns are paramount, however Member States, particularly their relevant institutions over visa and immigration issues, must regularly reexamine the business related visa process to identify new opportunities to make it more efficient, user-friendly, transparent, prioritized, accountable and timely.

Distinguished Delegates,

There are several challenges that need to be taken into deep consideration when D- 8 Visa Agreement is being implemented. For instance, international investment focus, registered business traveler facilitation programs, further strengthening of public information efforts, expanded range and points of service with new technology, and performance standards. In addition, I strongly believe that deeper arrangements stipulated from the Agreement are necessary to promote trade and investment in certain sectors and enhance economic integration more broadly.

I believe that after almost a decade, this is the high time for us to focus in D-8 Visa Agreement implementation in very concrete terms in order to strengthen trade and investment relations among the member countries. In today's meeting, I do really hope that a set of viable recommendations, including the possibility of creating a D-8 Identification Card as valid

identifying document in order to increase efficiency and flexibility in the visa application procedures, while leveraging technology to best secure and control borders, will be considered.

Taking into account the applied modern technology in visa facilitation, it is also worth to review and, if necessary, amend the relevant article(s) of Visa Agreement with the current modernized procedures and regulation applied in D-8 Member States. Subsequently, exploration of the possibility and necessity to strengthen the Visa Agreement with additional protocol is also imperative in order to increase efficiency and accessibility of visa facilitation and procedures.

To this end, the early and successful implementation of Visa Agreement, which is already in hand, would help the Member Countries to meet our D-8 intra-trade target, to a level of 15-20 percent of their total trade in the world by the end of 2018. I am confident that through our constructive cooperation we will succeed in reaping the fruits of our endeavors in the near future. Once again, I thank the government of Iran for hosting this important meeting and for their hospitality and I wish you all success in your endeavors and deliberations.

Thank you very much for your attention.