

**STATEMENT BY THE D-8 SECRETARY-GENERAL,
AMBASSADOR ISIAKA ABDULQADIR IMAM, FOR THE THIRD
D-8 MINISTERIAL MEETING ON TOURISM COOPERATION,
AUGUST 5, 2023, BHUBHAN, MURREE, PAKISTAN**

**H.E. Awn Chaudhry, Advisor to the Prime Minister of Pakistan
on Tourism and Sports,**

Honourable Ministers of D-8 Responsible for Tourism,

D-8 Ambassadors to Islamabad,

Distinguished Delegates,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Assalam Alaikum

I am honored to be among the distinguished Delegates attending the **Third D-8 Ministerial Meeting on Tourism**, here in this vibrant city of Murree in Pakistan. This would be my first time of participating in this ministerial meeting on tourism, since I assumed duty as Secretary General of D-8 Organization in January 2022. Therefore, I feel delighted meeting all our Honourable Ministers, Excellencies and other distinguished delegates.

I want to convey my utmost gratitude to the Government of the Islamic Republic of Pakistan for the warm welcome and generous hospitality accorded me and my delegation. I also want to thank the Pakistan Tourism Development Corporation (PTDC) for the excellent preparation and organization of this Meeting.

May I also take this opportunity to express my immense gratitude to His Excellency Mr. Muhammed Shehbaz Sharif, the Honorable Prime Minister of Pakistan, and His Excellency Bilawal Bhutto-Zardari, the Minister of Foreign Affairs of Pakistan, for their strong support for the Developing Eight Organization for Economic Cooperation. As a founding member of the D-8 Organization, Pakistan has been active in all our programs and activities.

I want to also use this opportunity to congratulate the Government of the Islamic Republic of Pakistan on the launch of 'Tourism Brand Pakistan initiative', which took place yesterday in Islamabad. This

is another landmark initiative of Pakistan to further boost tourism and unlock the potentials in the sector.

**Excellencies, Distinguished Delegates,
Ladies and Gentlemen,**

The essence of our gathering here today is to discuss about Tourism industry and the immense potential it holds to significantly transform the socio-economic development in the D-8 Countries.

Our recent experience has taught us that tourism is most prone to disruption. The Covid-19 pandemic wrought havoc and grind the tourism industry to a halt. We have witnessed how cities that used to be bustling with activities became quiet from lockdown imposed to curb the spread of the pandemic. We have seen how lives and jobs were lost because of the effect of Covid-19. However, we must express our gratitude to Almighty Allah that things are looking up as the sector begins to recover gradually.

As tourism begins its recovery, this meeting becomes even more crucial since we need to strengthen our cooperation to accelerate the process of recovery. We must devise a means to create a resilient tourism industry and take advantage of its potential for economic and social transformation. To achieve this, we must strengthen our cooperation in the areas of tourism for mutual benefits of all members of D-8 Group.

As a background therefore, I am pleased to report that we have recorded some modest progress in the following areas, since the last D8 Ministerial Meeting held in 2019 in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia.

- Establishment of D8 Tourism Portal
- D8 Designated Airports
- D8 Payment Card

The Secretariat, in line with the Decision of the Second Ministerial Meeting, activated two tabs under the D-8 Tourism Portal on the D-8 Website. The Portal has been ready since 2020. It will serve as an information gateway for all activities and information on D-8 Tourism. To maximize the D-8 tourism portal, I call upon all member states to submit the list of relevant tourist agencies to the Secretariat to be listed in the Portal. The portal aims to bring benefits to both our external partners and us. I also invite all Member States to nominate contact persons for better coordination and cooperation.

With regard to the D-8 Designated Airports, I am pleased to note that four airports have been designed as D8 Airports, namely, the Jinnah International Airport in Karachi, Pakistan. The Sabiha Gokcen International Airport, in Istanbul, Türkiye. The Nnamdi Azikiwe International Airport, in Abuja, Nigeria and the Soekarno-Hatta

International Airport in Jakarta, Indonesia. I thank the Governments of Indonesia, Nigeria, Pakistan, and Türkiye for designating those airports. I wish to use this medium to call other Member States to follow suit, as this initiative will assist in promoting people-to-people and business-to-business contacts.

**Excellencies, Distinguished Delegates,
Ladies and Gentlemen,**

While badly affected by the pandemic, the tourism sector has shown the strongest potential to re-emerge from its devastating effect. Therefore, this noble Ministerial Meeting can provide policy guidance to share best practices and leverage our collective strength to revitalize the sector, in the post-pandemic era.

Indeed, some of our Member States have shown potential for tourism growth, spurred by unique cultural, historical, and natural attractions. Countries like Egypt, Indonesia, Malaysia, and Türkiye, are world-

renowned tourist destinations, with established foundations and infrastructure. Their tourism industry contributes to their economies significantly, while their respective rebound is also remarkable. Other member countries are also showing remarkable growth in their tourist arrivals and revenues since 2022.

Excellencies, Ladies, and Gentlemen, we need to maintain and increase the momentum to return to the 2019 figure in 2024. And we can do this through the following four key action points:

- Optimizing our potential in **Cultural Heritage, Natural Beauty, Religious Tourism and Medical Tourism** as well as **Hospitality Industry.**
- Relaxing our visa regime to enhance Business **Travel.**
- Enhancing **Marketing Efforts.**
- Implementing the **D-8 Comprehensive Strategy on Tourism** and the **Crescent Moon Initiative,** adopted at the Kuala Lumpur Meeting, as well as the soon-to-be-adopted **Islamabad Declaration 2023.**

We can also focus on the low-hanging fruits in tangible projects and programs such as organizing **capacity-building programmes, joint cultural events, travel fairs and exhibitions**. As we stand at the threshold of this new era, I therefore urge all Member States to accelerate implementing those strategies and innovative measures to foster tourism growth. By pooling our collective resources, knowledge, and expertise, we can use tourism as a critical driver of sustainable development, economic resilience, and cultural understanding among our nations.

To conclude, **Excellencies, Ladies, and Gentlemen**, from today's meeting **our** immediate goal is to grow the tourism sector to be at par with -- and even surpass -- the pre-pandemic situation. We have the tools at hand. What is left to do is to implement them. As the Secretary-General of this noble Organization, I will incessantly knock on your doors to ensure effective collaboration.

My office will keep on communicating with yours to jointly implement this Meeting's decisions. I am optimistic that we can reach the 500 billion US Dollars intra-trade target, set by our leaders well before the 2030 deadline, if we are committed and strive to implement our decisions. I trust we can drive this Meeting's purpose to lay a stronger foundation for our collective efforts in tourism cooperation.

Thank you for your attention.