

**Secretary General's Statement for the 3<sup>rd</sup> Senior Officials Meeting on Tourism  
Cooperation was held on  
Wednesday 10<sup>th</sup> of March, 2021**

**The Honourable Minister of information and Culture of Nigeria, Alhaji Lai Mohammed,  
The Chairman,  
Distinguished delegates,  
Ladies and Gentlemen**

I wish to warmly welcome you to this important gathering of the senior officials of tourism. Permit me to start by thanking the Federal Republic of Nigeria in general and the Federal Ministry of Information and Culture in particular for graciously hosting this meeting, albeit virtually.

This is the first meeting we are having since November 2019 when we had the Second Senior Officials and Ministerial Meeting on Tourism Cooperation in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia.

As we settle down to deliberate on pertinent issues relating to the tourism track of sectoral cooperation, I wish to bring to the fore the need to implement to the latter the Comprehensive Strategy on Tourism Cooperation, Crescent Moon Initiative and Kuala Lumpur Declaration that were adopted at the aforementioned meeting.

As a matter of fact, we are supposed to render a kind of performance evaluation report at this meeting, if not for the debilitating COVID-19 pandemic that disrupted progress not only in the tourism sector but in virtually all fields of human endeavors.

**Distinguished delegates,  
Ladies and Gentlemen**

Tourism is one of the most affected sectors by the consequential adversities of the COVID-19 pandemic. The United Nations World Tourism Organization estimates an expected fall of tourist arrivals between 20 per cent and 30 per cent could translate into a **decline in international tourism receipts (exports) of between US\$300-450 billion**, almost one third of the US\$ 1.5 trillion generated in 2019. Taking into account past market trends, this would mean that between **five and seven-years' worth of growth will be lost** to COVID-19. Putting this into context, UNWTO also pointed out that in 2009, on the back of the global economic crisis, international tourist arrivals declined by four per cent, while the SARS outbreak led to a decline of just 0.4 per cent in 2003.

I would like to re-emphasize that the tourism sector is an important sectoral track of cooperation for the D-8 Organization. The sector, along with the hospitality industry, is the biggest employer of labor and thus a veritable source of decent jobs for our teeming population. It is also a money spinner as it facilitates the inflow of streams of much needed foreign exchange to our national economies. Tourism also enhances global harmony and international understanding.

**Distinguished delegates,  
Ladies and Gentlemen**

This is why we are working closely with the World Tourism Forum Institute (WTFI) in order to improve our tourism products, increase tourist arrivals and augment tourism receipts especially in the post-pandemic era. The institute will help our Member States to improve their tourism sectors by benchmarking them against best-in-class destinations around the globe. It will also aggressively market D-8 countries as exceptionally nice destinations with attractive tourism offers and products.

I also believed that the partnership between the two institutions will facilitate the accomplishment of the objectives set out in The Crescent Moon Initiative and the D-8 Comprehensive Tourism Roadmap, including the steady flow of streams of investments from across the world. The tourism sector is seen by both sides to be an enabler of prosperity, harmony, and unity among the D-8 Member States.

**Distinguished delegates,  
Ladies and Gentlemen**

The Secretariat, in line with the decisions of the second ministerial meeting, activated the two tabs under the D-8 Tourism portal on the D-8 Website, and requested the Member States to submit the lists of the focal points and tourism training academies to upload the information on the D-8 Tourism Portal.

I hereby reiterate my request to the remaining Member States to please register on the aforementioned portal and submit the list of their focal points in order to advance the agenda of our cooperation.

With regard to my new initiative of the D-8 Designated Airport in each Member State in order to promote people to people and Business to Business contacts as well as tourism and travel facilitation among all Member States with a view to later on establish a D-8 Airports Association that would provide Airport facilities and services for the D-8 citizens, I would request your kind and valuable support on this matter and I am really thankful to the Government of Pakistan for nominating the Jinnah International Airport Karachi as the D-8 Designated Airport. That make it three now including Sabiha Gokcen Airport, Istanbul and Nnamdi Azikiwe Airport, Abuja, Nigeria. We hope to have designated airports in all Member States not only to increase the volume of bilateral economic activity but also to showcase our Organization to the world.

**The Chairman,  
Distinguished delegates,  
Ladies and Gentlemen**

Our aim is for information and ideas to be shared, best practices to be exchanged and streams of investments to flow across political borders of the Member States with fluid ease so that D-8 can compete favorably with best-in-class tourist destinations around the world. It is also our aim to use tourism to increase the inflow of foreign exchange and create millions of new jobs for our people.

I also wish to share that initiation of the D-8 Payment Card System that will be launched during the Summit will provide a tool for travelers to use for business transactions within the Member States.

The D-8 Secretariat is also working on several projects on media activities of the Organization. One of these important initiatives is the D-8 Entrepreneur Development and Media Alliance (D-8 EDMA) which is a platform to facilitate the exchange of news and information particularly in the social, economic and entrepreneurial spheres; feature and promote the public and private sector's presence amongst the D-8 Member States; and establish, develop and facilitate a functional network of interested media agencies for effective engagements.

The D-8 EDMA Platform will have two main sections which are EDMA TV and Entrepreneur Development and include News, Programmes, Adverts, Webinars, Online Coaching and Workshops. The sources for creating the platform and content will be the D-8 Secretariat, D-8 Member States, D-8 Chamber of Commerce and Industry (D-8 CCI), National News Agencies and relevant authorities of the Member States and interested parties from private sectors of Member States. It is to be located in the D-8 Creative Economy and Financial Center in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia.

However, the projected benefits of this initiative/platform are increased visibility and image for the D-8, prominent role for the D-8 CCI, promotion of the interests of the D-8 Member States and promotion of investment and business opportunities in the D-8 Member States.

We believe that the last tourism meeting which was held in Kuala Lumpur started a new beginning for the D-8 tourism development agenda. It is imperative for the D-8 members to remain focused and adopt innovative solutions in our efforts to unlock greater value for the sustainability and continued progress of the tourism industry.

I wish you fruitful deliberations and glorious outcomes.

I thank you for your attention.