



Central Asia Regional Economic Cooperation Program

**Joint Ministerial Statement  
12<sup>th</sup> Ministerial Conference on  
Central Asia Regional Economic Cooperation  
Palace of Independence  
Astana, Kazakhstan  
24 October 2013**

**“Integrated Transport and Trade”**

*Representing the Governments of Afghanistan, Azerbaijan, the People's Republic of China, Kazakhstan, the Kyrgyz Republic, Mongolia, Pakistan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, and Uzbekistan, Ministers adopted the following statement at the conclusion of the 12th Ministerial Meeting on Central Asia Regional Economic Cooperation (CAREC) in Astana, the Republic of Kazakhstan, on 24 October 2013.*

**Achievement, Assessment and Alignment**

1. We noted with satisfaction the achievements of the CAREC Program in delivering results while continuing to align strategies in response to developments in the region and the rest of the world. Guided by the overarching objectives of *CAREC 2020* to expand trade and increase competitiveness, and learning from the assessment and lessons of the past, we set new pathways to more effectively integrate into the global economy.

2. In refining our sector strategies, we took stock of progress made as well as the challenges that remain. We are pleased with the overall progress made in the four areas of cooperation --- transport, trade facilitation, trade policy, and energy. Corridor improvements have exceeded targets on the aggregate, while transport facilitation has gained momentum from ongoing expansion in membership in CAREC's Cross-Border Transport Agreement. Trade facilitation initiatives continued to address improvements “at the border” and “behind the borders” through increased investments in automated customs information systems and national single window systems, piloting of joint customs control, single stop principles, and adopting international best practices and modernization of Sanitary and Phytosanitary (SPS) facilities. Achievements in implementing the Energy Work Plan 2013-2015 include endorsement of the plan to undertake a study on CAREC countries' power sector financing gap and measures to address it. In the area of trade policy, trade liberalization measures continue to be on the positive trend, supported by the implementation of capacity building and knowledge-sharing initiatives.

**Integrated Approach to Transport and Trade**

3. We recognize that dramatic changes in global and regional context have important implications for CAREC. Trade patterns have shifted, creating new demands for transport routes

and transport modes. We are pleased that the Mid-Term Review of the Transport and Trade Facilitation Strategy and Action Plan 2008–2017 has been completed. This assessment has provided valuable insights on our strategic and operational imperatives towards 2020. We support the refinements as articulated in *CAREC Transport and Trade Facilitation Strategy 2020* that call for a more integrated approach to improving transport and logistics infrastructure, and trade and transport facilitation. The approach entails focusing on multimodal transport and improved logistics services to support value-chains; improved corridors alignment through new corridors and extensions of existing corridors to link with gateway ports; and, improvements in border crossing services stemming from customs modernization and integrated border management. We endorse the new *Trade Policy Strategic Action Plan (TPSAP) 2013–2017* that calls for increased focus on non-tariff measures and the removal of quantitative restrictions that are not World Trade Organization (WTO) compliant to bring about greater trade openness, and the expansion of trade in services as a path to greater regional integration in CAREC. Donors expressed their readiness to support implementation of the *TPSAP 2013-2017*. We reaffirm that WTO accession and implementation of commitments remain a priority in the new Strategy.

### **Enhanced Institutional Support and Mechanisms**

4. We recognize that the integrated approach to CAREC cooperation will require greater coordination, enhanced institutional modalities, systematic and targeted knowledge interventions and capacity building support, improved results based monitoring, and innovative ways to meet the financial requirements of priority projects.

5. In this regard, we commend the initiative of the CAREC Secretariat to review and improve CAREC's results-based monitoring framework to better assess our cooperation Program at a time when strategies in the priority areas of cooperation are being revised and refined to further align with *CAREC 2020*. We encourage the Secretariat to build on the preliminary review in consultation with sector coordination committees and reflect the outcomes in the 2013 Development Effectiveness Review of CAREC Program.

6. We reached a consensus to accept the offer of the People's Republic of China to host the physical base of the CAREC Institute in Urumqi, Xinjiang Uygur Autonomous Region, and look forward to the start of its initial operations in 2014 so that it can begin providing analytical inputs and associated capacity building in support of CAREC Program initiatives. We noted, with appreciation, Kazakhstan's offer to establish a branch of the Institute in Kazakhstan, in order to facilitate the development of CAREC Program.

7. We are grateful for the continued technical and financial support and strong commitment of our multilateral institution partners, including in new challenging areas emerging in all sectors, and for their participation in this Conference. We also thank the participating bilateral development partners active in the region and look forward to their increased contribution in the CAREC Program. We will seek to further intensify our engagement with the private sector as we seek innovative solutions to complex challenges, including the mobilization of finance.

### **Conclusions and Acknowledgement**

8. Our ownership of the program remains strong, and we are confident that as good neighbors and as good partners, we will be able to realize the good prospects from constructive cooperation in the coming years. Our strategic focus on integrated approach to transport and trade will further enhance the benefits of our collective endeavors. The spirit of cooperation that has guided us for the past decade will sustain us through any challenges that lie ahead in our journey towards the vision of CAREC 2020.

9. We thank the Government of the Republic of Kazakhstan for chairing and hosting our 12<sup>th</sup> Ministerial Conference, and our Secretariat, the Asian Development Bank, for the excellent arrangements made. We look forward to our 13<sup>th</sup> meeting to be held in 2014 in the Kyrgyz Republic.