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18th CAREC Ministerial Conference Joint Ministerial Statement

**Consultation Meeting of CAREC National Focal Points
Central Asia Regional Economic Cooperation
24–25 September 2019
Tashkent, Uzbekistan**



**Joint Ministerial Statement
18th Ministerial Conference on
Central Asia Regional Economic Cooperation
Tashkent, Uzbekistan; 14 November 2019**

A New CAREC – Expanding Horizons of Regional Cooperation

Representing the Governments of Afghanistan, Azerbaijan, the People's Republic of China, Georgia, Kazakhstan, the Kyrgyz Republic, Mongolia, Pakistan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, and Uzbekistan, Ministers adopted the following statement at the conclusion of the 18th Ministerial Meeting on Central Asia Regional Economic Cooperation (CAREC) in Tashkent on 14 November 2019

I. A New CAREC – Expanding Horizons of Regional Cooperation

- Pleased with the progress and achievements of the CAREC Program through a journey of nearly 20 years' collective endeavors for shared and sustainable prosperity
- Noted the generally positive regional outlook and expanded horizons for regional cooperation marked by strong growth, declining trade cost, and the increasing economic interactions among neighboring countries since the opening of Uzbekistan, while recognizing the trade tensions among major economies still constitute the main risk to the outlook
- Committed to embrace the new horizons of regional cooperation in implementing the expanded agenda of CAREC 2030 strategy in the areas of connectivity and trade, tourism, agriculture and water, and human development, as well as in deepening policy dialogue on issues of regional significance
- Endorsed the CAREC Transport Strategy (CTS) 2030 and the CAREC Energy Strategy (CES) 2030 to continue enhancing infrastructure and economic connectivity in the region through greater focus on more sustainable and greener solutions in the region

II. Sound Progress on Implementation of the CAREC 2030

Economic and financial stability

- Welcomed the CAREC High-Level Forum on Balancing Infrastructure Investments with Debt Sustainability in Nur-Sultan, Kazakhstan on 15 May. The forum, which was jointly organized by ADB, IMF, and the World Bank, created an effective dialogue between ministers and central bank governors to discuss the fiscal constraints, debt sustainability, and the need for more private sector involvement in infrastructure financing

- Welcomed the first CAREC Capital Markets Regulators' Forum, organized by ADB and the Securities and Exchange Commission of Pakistan, on 29-30 August in Islamabad, Pakistan to discuss access to finance reforms and private sector development through strengthened regional cooperation and integration of capital markets
- Highlighted the importance of continued and regular policy dialogue on areas of common interest to keep policy makers informed of regional and global macroeconomic trends and to promote economic and financial stability in the region

Trade, tourism, and economic corridors

- **In trade**
 - Pleased with the progress achieved in the implementation of the CAREC Integrated Trade Agenda (CITA) 2030 and supported the priority areas identified in the updated Rolling Strategic Action Plan (RSAP) 2019-2021, including continued support for accession to the World Trade Organization (WTO) and implementation of the WTO Trade Facilitation Agreement, addressing technical barriers to trade, enhancing trade in services and investment facilitation, promoting digital trade, and strengthening collaboration between public and private sectors
 - Welcomed establishment of the CAREC sanitary and phytosanitary (SPS) regional working group to support and oversee the implementation of Common Agenda for Modernization of SPS Measures for Trade (CAST)
 - Commended the continued endeavors and progress in customs cooperation including updated terms of reference and priority areas of the Customs Cooperation Committee in line with CITA 2030
 - Cognizant of the persistent trade tensions and the discernible effects on regional investment and trade patterns
- **In tourism**
 - Noted the high priority of tourism development on CAREC countries' national agendas and urged continued work in advancing regional tourism cooperation through identifying bankable projects, institutional strengthening of tourism agencies, and joint tourism marketing and promotion initiatives
 - Commended the high-level public–private dialogue on key opportunities and challenges for collaborative actions in the tourism sector and called for continued and deepened policy dialogue in this area to unleash the untapped tourism potential of the CAREC region.
 - Welcomed the Asian Development Bank (ADB) technical assistance to develop a CAREC tourism strategy 2030 and a regional tourism investment framework 2021–2025
- **In economic corridors**
 - Commended the progress in implementing the Almaty-Bishkek Economic Corridor and its seven ongoing projects
 - Welcomed the initiation of a second pilot economic corridor under CAREC connecting Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan and Tajikistan and noted the potential of expanded trade and increased economic integration along the corridor
 - Encouraged all partners to continue exploring other sections and various modalities and approaches for economic corridor development in CAREC

Infrastructure and economic connectivity. Applauded achievements in this cluster, particularly the strong country ownership in the development of the CTS 2030 and the CES 2030

- **In transport**
 - Satisfied with the implementation progress of the Transport and Trade Facilitation Strategy 2020, the Railway Strategy 2030 and the Road Safety Strategy 2030, as well as knowledge work in promoting faster, greener, safer and sustainable connectivity
 - Support CTS 2030's emphasis on multimodal connectivity, quality and sustainability of transport projects and assets, and development of demand-driven knowledge products to support high-level decision-making
 - Noted the alignment of CTS 2030's six strategic pillars with CAREC member countries' national priorities, and welcomed the initiation of work on maritime transport cooperation through a scoping study by ADB
 - Look forward to the full implementation of the CTS 2030 to further improving regional transport connectivity and developing well-coordinated transport systems in the region

- **In energy**
 - Satisfied with progress on key cross-border energy connectivity projects and efforts towards establishing a common energy market
 - Appreciated the completed mid-term review of the Energy Sector Coordinating Committee Strategy and Work Plan 2016–2020
 - Welcomed the successful organization of the 1st CAREC Energy Ministers Dialogue and the 4th CAREC Energy Investment Forum
 - Support CES 2030's three cross-cutting pillars on (i) better energy security through regional interconnections; (ii) more investments through market liberalization reforms; (iii) enhancing sustainability by greening the regional energy system; and also support the three focus areas on (i) creating new knowledge products and peoples' networks; (ii) attracting private sector investments across the energy value chain; (iii) empowering women in energy
 - Look forward to the full implementation of the CES 2030 to further advancing energy cooperation and reaping new opportunities in the next decade

Agriculture and water

- Satisfied with the progress in developing regional agricultural value chains and upgrading CAREC countries' SPS systems to meet international standards
- Welcomed the establishment of a CAREC Food Safety Network for sharing food safety related information and coordinating food inspection and enforcement efforts among the CAREC countries
- Welcomed the commencement of work in the water sector through the conduct of a development partners' dialogue in Tashkent to deliberate on the issues, challenges, and opportunities in transboundary water management in the region.

Human development

- Appreciated the completion of the scoping study on Enhancing Regional Cooperation in Education and Skills under CAREC to identify challenges and opportunities for enhancing and expanding cooperation in skills development and higher education among CAREC countries.

- Welcomed the initiation of two scoping studies on “Strengthening Cross-Border Community Collaboration in CAREC” and “Promoting Regional Health Cooperation”, as well as the development of the first CAREC gender strategy to support the implementation of CAREC 2030 strategy.
- Expect all development partners to step up efforts for enhanced engagement in this sector along with the private sector and civil society.

III. CAREC Institute

- Commended the CAREC Institute (CI) on progress achieved in implementing its strategy 2018-2022 and its two-year rolling operational program 2019-2020
- Encouraged CI to continue strengthen partnerships with institutes in CAREC countries for joint research and capacity building, knowledge management and dissemination, and elevate its role as the knowledge arm of the CAREC Program
- Welcomed the organization of the Fourth Think Tanks Forum in Xi’an

IV. Enhancing Institutional Mechanisms

- Commended the increasing participation and engagement of development partners in implementing the CAREC 2030 strategy
- Called for development partners to increase financial and technical support for CAREC and for the CAREC Secretariat particularly through leading activities in various clusters and sectors
- Welcomed the planned conduct of the 1st CAREC Development Partners’ Forum in 2020 to strengthen coordination and collaboration in support of the CAREC Program
- Called for increased participation of private sector in the CAREC Program
- Urged all partners to pro-actively support and participate in the celebration of the 20 years anniversary of CAREC Program in 2020
- Expressed appreciation to the CAREC Secretariat, the sector coordinating committees and the CI for their continued and dedicated support to the CAREC Program

V. Conclusions and Acknowledgement

- Thanked Government of Uzbekistan for chairing and hosting 18th Ministerial Conference, and ADB, for the excellent arrangements made
- Look forward to gathering together in 2020 under the chairmanship of Afghanistan