

VIRTUAL CAREC 19th MINISTERIAL CONFERENCE
7 December 2020 (1400-1615, Manila time)

SUMMARY OF PROCEEDINGS

I. Introduction

1. The 19th Ministerial Conference (MC) of the Central Asia Regional Economic Cooperation (CAREC) was held virtually on 7 December 2020. The MC was attended by the ministers and senior officials from 11 CAREC member countries and senior representatives from development partners. President of the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan Excellency Mohammad Ashraf Ghani opened the conference with a special message. Minister of Finance of Afghanistan Mr. Abdul Hadi Arghandiwal delivered the welcome address and Asian Development Bank (ADB) President Mr. Masatsugu Asakawa delivered the keynote address. The MC was chaired by Mr. Abdul Hadi Arghandiwal, Minister of Finance of Afghanistan, and co-chaired by ADB Vice President Mr. Shixin Chen. The MC deliberated and endorsed the CAREC Tourism Strategy 2030, CAREC Gender Strategy 2030, and CAREC 2030 Program Results Framework. It discussed the progress of implementation on the CAREC 2030 strategy. The MC included a presentation by the International Monetary Fund (IMF) on the Macroeconomic Prospects of CAREC Countries in the Post-COVID Environment. A Joint Ministerial Statement was issued at the end of the MC. The statements by President Ghani, President Masa, and Minister Arghandiwal are in Appendix 1, the Joint Ministerial Statement, the agenda, and the list of participants are in Appendix 2,3, and 4, respectively.

II. Highlights of the 18th Ministerial Conference

2. Inaugural Session. His Excellency, the President of the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan Mr. Mohammad Ashraf Ghani delivered a special message and reaffirmed Afghanistan's support to strengthen regional cooperation. Minister of Finance of Afghanistan Mr. Abdul Hadi Arghandiwal delivered the welcome address. He appreciated ADB's support and contributions to the CAREC agenda and committed Afghanistan's stronger engagement to regional cooperation. ADB President Mr. Masatsugu Asakawa, in his keynote address, reaffirmed ADB's support for people-centered regional cooperation in the post-COVID environment. President Asakawa also emphasized the crucial role that digitization and the private sector must play in promoting innovation and regional cooperation as the region transitions to a post-pandemic new normal.

3. Macroeconomic Prospects of CAREC Countries in the Post-COVID Environment (by IMF). In his presentation, Mr. Subir Lall from the IMF noted that as COVID-19 disrupted economic activity and cross-border flows, CAREC countries utilized large fiscal stimulus packages to support public healthcare and provide relief to people and firms. Monetary and financial sector measures helped ease financial conditions and kept credit flowing. Many CAREC countries entered

recession in 2020, with elevated inflation rates. Mr. Lall emphasized that recovery is expected to be gradual and uncertain. Public debt is set to rise, requiring adjustment and fiscal reforms over the medium term. He underscored that a new growth model was needed for the post-COVID 21st century, with a focus on strong, resilient, inclusive, and green growth.

4. 2020 CAREC Deliverables for Endorsement. Director General Mr. Werner Liepach presented the main deliverables (the CAREC Gender Strategy 2030, the CAREC Tourism Strategy 2030, and the CAREC 2030 Program Results Framework) to the MC in video format.¹ The Ministers unanimously endorsed the deliverables and agreed that the strategies and the framework will serve as key initiatives for CAREC countries to overcome the effects of the pandemic and further the vision of the CAREC 2030 Strategy. They committed full support for the implementation and also suggested potential project opportunities.

5. The Ministers highlighted the adverse socio-economic impacts faced by CAREC countries due to the COVID-19 pandemic and emphasized the importance of joint efforts in policy coordination, regional integration, and multilateralism to overcome the crisis. They thanked the international financial institutions and other partners for their support. The Ministers emphasized the importance of CAREC's new and timely initiatives in tourism, digitalization, and gender development, in addition to the ongoing projects in trade facilitation, transport corridors, energy and other key areas. The Results Framework was highlighted as a living and evolving road map to achieve the goals of the CAREC 2030 Strategy and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

6. Partner Statements on Confirming Support for the CAREC Program.

Development partners submitted written statements confirming their support for the CAREC Program. The Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank, the Government of Japan, and the United States presented their statements at the MC.

- The Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank (AIIB) stated that it was pleased with the discussions at the CAREC Development Partners Forum and committed to enhancing its cooperation for supporting the implementation of the CAREC 2030 strategy.
- The CAREC Federation of Carrier and Forwarder Associations (CFCFA) urged participants of the CAREC MC to consider support to the CFCFA.
- The CAREC Institute (CI) stated that it maintained focus on operations through the pandemic and generated numerous research outputs and conducted capacity building trainings virtually. Its goals on institutional development and partnerships were furthered despite the challenges presented in this year.
- The Eurasian Fund for Stabilization and Development welcomed CAREC's focus on openness and outreach and stated that it is important for CAREC to synchronize its agenda with other regional and global initiatives so that member countries can

¹ Video links: [CAREC 2030 Program Results Framework \(РУССКИЙ | 中文\)](#); [CAREC Gender Strategy 2030 \(РУССКИЙ | 中文\)](#); [CAREC Tourism Strategy 2030 \(РУССКИЙ | 中文\)](#)

benefit from convergence of standards, practices, and improved soft and hard connectivity.

- The Government of Japan stated their support for open, stable, and self-sustained development of Central Asian countries as a catalyst for regional cooperation and reaffirmed its commitment to continue its contributions for solidarity among Central Asian countries.
- The United Nations Industrial Development Organization (UNIDO) stated that it will continue to engage with a wide range of partners and is looking forward to further strengthening its cooperation with the CAREC Program and the CAREC Institute.
- The United States appreciated the work on the CAREC tourism strategy, gender strategy, and results framework and stated its support to the efforts of the CAREC Program to improve the region's infrastructure and sought partnerships to develop regulatory frameworks to reduce costs and facilitate trade.
- The World Bank underscored the importance of strong regional coordination with a people-centered approach for obtaining improved outcomes, and noted important planned regional projects in trade, transport, and energy connectivity. Specifically, the World Bank hopes to strengthen partnership on Central Asia-South Asia (CASA) initiatives with ADB and CAREC countries.

III. Conclusion

The Ministers welcomed the CAREC Program's efforts to deliver in a virtual format. The MC deliberated on the theme "People Centered Regional Cooperation in the Post COVID Environment" and endorsed the CAREC Gender Strategy 2030, the CAREC Tourism Strategy 2030, and the CAREC 2030 Program Results Framework. The Ministers agreed that this year saw significant progress despite the challenges faced. The progress in implementation of strategic agendas, capacity building activities, and research and knowledge generation across CAREC's operational clusters, and by the CAREC Institute, furthered the objectives of the CAREC 2030 Strategy. Further activities to enhance institutional mechanisms and develop stronger participation from various stakeholders and partners was also appreciated.

CAREC Ministers reaffirmed their commitments and support for the implementation of CAREC 2030. The Ministers welcomed the Republic of Azerbaijan as the chair of the CAREC Program for the year 2021. The MC also welcomed support from development partners and looked forward to further collaboration.



**GOVERNMENT OF ISLAMIC
REPUBLIC OF AFGHANISTAN
19th MINISTERIAL CONFERENCE**

**CENTRAL ASIA REGIONAL ECONOMIC
COOPERATION (CAREC)**

**Talking Points BY H.E. Ashraf Ghani President of Islamic
Republic of Afghanistan**

*Your Excellency Co-Chair Vice President Chen, Ministers,
and Heads of Delegations, Excellency Mr. Asakawa, President
of the Asian Development Bank, esteemed representatives of
development partner organizations, distinguished colleagues
from CAREC member countries.*

I am delighted to be here at the important events to bring the regional key players together for regional Connectivity. Regional Connectivity is one of the top priorities of our economic development agenda. The CAREC platform can help us fully integrate the infrastructure, systems, and programs and share our common cultural values.

We were excited to host the Ministerial Conference in Kabul and wanted to see you all and have an opportunity to share our ideas, plans, and programs in detail with each other. But the Covid-19 pandemic didn't give us a chance to sit together,

and the only option we had to make it online. I hope that soon after the pandemic will have an opportunity to see each other.

I also would like to thank ADB for their generous support that helped us through a \$40 million grant to fight covid-19 and additional budget support of \$ 100 million to overcome the pandemic's social and economic impact.

The CAREC program is a proactive facilitator of practical, results-based regional projects and policy initiatives critical to sustainable economic growth and shared prosperity in the region. Since its beginning in 2001 up to November 2020, CAREC has mobilized \$39.2 billion in investments that have helped establish multimodal transportation networks, increased energy trade, and security, facilitated free movement of people and freight, and laid the groundwork for economic corridor development among the member countries.

Afghanistan is one of the key active members in the CAREC, since its joining in 2005, around \$4.5 billion had been invested in the CAREC projects that resulted in bringing electricity from three neighboring countries (Tajikistan, Uzbekistan, and Turkmenistan). In addition, Afghanistan was connected through railway with Uzbekistan in Hairatan, with Turkmenistan in Aqina and Torghondi through the technical support of the CAREC and Financial Support of ADB.

Furthermore, CAREC has completed the Aviation Sector study a few years back which has an excellent recommendation that how the CAREC member countries can be connected with each other through different open sky approaches that how the CAREC member countries can travel directly to each other without using Airports out of the region.

Afghanistan can play a central role in connecting Central Asia with South Asia that the surplus energy of central Asia can be transferred to south Asia where there is a dire need for energy. So, I would like to call on ADB to mobilize additional financial and technical resources to the CAREC Secretariate and also to the CAREC institute to connect the member countries through Transport infrastructures such as Road, Railway, and Energy and also facilitate trade among the member countries through the installation of synchronized systems and equipment to reduce the delays in Customs and Borders.

In addition, CAREC can also work to connect the people of the member countries through a cultural initiative that they can work on the Visa-Free Movement,

Organizing Joint Cultural Programs, Joint language and also a CAREC university that the students of member countries can study together to share their thoughts, ideas, and culture with each other. These kinds of programs will bring common understanding among the people and it will reduce the misunderstanding and hate in the region which will create a win-win situation for all.

So, the CAREC 2030 Strategy provides the new long-term strategic framework for the program leading to the future. It is anchored on a broader mission to connect people, policies, and programs for shared and sustainable development, serving as the premier economic and social cooperation platform for the region.

The Ministerial Conference functions as a **high-level strategy-setting and policy body**. It provides overall strategic guidance and serves as a platform to discuss and debate important policy and strategic issues of regional relevance. The Ministerial Conference exercises overall accountability over the results of the CAREC Program.

The Ministerial Conference is held on an annual basis and is attended by Ministers of state agencies **in charge of overall planning and empowered with full decision-making rights**, such as the ministries of finance, economic development, or the office of the president. CAREC development partners also participate in the meeting. Observers may be invited to the Ministerial Conference, subject to agreement by the participants.

The End.

General Information of CAREC to H.E the President of Afghanistan

The Central Asia Regional Economic Cooperation (CAREC) Program is a partnership of 11 countries and development partners working together to promote development through cooperation, leading to accelerated economic growth and poverty reduction. It is guided by the overarching vision of "Good Neighbors, Good Partners, and Good Prospects."

CAREC program helps Central Asian countries to realize their potentials by promoting regional Connectivity and regional cooperation with the focus on the following four priority sectors:

- 1) Energy,
- 2) Trade Policy,
- 3) Transport,
- 4) Trade Facilitation

The member countries are Afghanistan, Azerbaijan, China, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Magnolia, Pakistan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan, and Georgia.

End

Keynote Address by ADB President Masatsugu Asakawa

19th Ministerial Conference of Central Asia Regional Economic Cooperation

December 7, 2020

Introduction

Excellency President Ashraf Ghani, Minister of Finance Mr. Arghandiwal, Ministers and delegates, development partners, and distinguished guests:

Welcome to the 19th Ministerial Conference of the Central Asia Regional Economic Cooperation (CAREC) Program. I extend my appreciation to the Government of Afghanistan for hosting this year's conference, which I am participating in for the first time as ADB President—and which is being held virtually for the first time since CAREC was founded in 2001.

We are honored by the presence of President Ashraf Ghani, which shows the importance he attaches to promoting economic cooperation in the region.

Today's event focuses on "People-Centered Regional Cooperation in the Post-COVID Environment," a topic which is timely and more important than ever.

While some worry that globalization will retreat after the pandemic due to travel bans and trade restrictions, I strongly believe that globalization will return; but it will take a different shape. I want to clearly express ADB's commitment to continue to promote stronger regional cooperation and integration and to champion the spirit of open regionalism. This is a commitment to help our developing members adapt to the new and evolving forms of globalization while also addressing inequalities and ensuring peace and prosperity for all.

I believe that CAREC embodies this spirit of open regionalism, and that it offers us an indispensable platform to address our common challenges. These challenges include mitigating economic hardships faced by the citizens of the region, including vulnerable migrant workers who have lost their jobs, as well as their families who have lost a major source of support from remittances. There are also common needs for enhancing public health, including making safe and effective vaccines available to all; and for strengthening the resilience of populations to future crises.

I. ADB's response to the COVID-19 pandemic in the CAREC region

Let me now share with you how ADB is responding to the immediate crisis caused by the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) and its longer-term impacts.

In mid-April of this year, ADB responded swiftly and decisively to the pandemic by launching a comprehensive \$20 billion package to help our developing members address the impacts of COVID-19 on health, livelihoods, and economic activity.

ADB's support consists of: (i) grants and technical assistance to procure medical equipment and train health personnel; (ii) quick-disbursing budget support through a new financing instrument called CPRO—the COVID-19 Pandemic Response Option—which is helping governments to scale up their countercyclical expenditures; and (iii) direct support to private businesses, including bolstering trade and supply chain finance.

\$3.5 billion out of our \$20 billion in COVID-19 assistance package has been directed to CAREC countries so far. Our support includes an emergency project in the Kyrgyz Republic to improve services at eight hospitals with personal protective equipment, test kits, and devices for contact tracing. Our CPRO program in Georgia is helping the government to provide income support for 550,000 employees and self-employed workers who are facing temporary or permanent job losses, as well as cash transfers for 41,500 persons with disabilities. We have also mobilized significant additional financial resources through cofinancing to CAREC countries totaling about \$2.1 billion from development partners such as the World Bank and the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank.

We are now working intensively to develop a new mechanism that will ensure speedy and equitable access to safe and effective vaccines throughout developing Asia, especially for poor and vulnerable populations. Our goal is to help our developing members formulate national COVID-19 vaccine allocation plans; build strong vaccine delivery systems; and purchase safe and effective COVID-19 vaccines in a timely manner. We will implement this in close collaboration with the COVAX Facility, other multilateral development banks, and UN agencies.

II. CAREC's continued role in supporting regional cooperation

Let me now turn to the CAREC program, which has actively contributed to the region's development for two decades—and which will remain crucial to its recovery after the pandemic.

Since its founding, CAREC has financed 208 regional infrastructure and trade projects worth \$39.2 billion. Of this, \$14.7 billion in financing has come from ADB; \$15.8 billion from other development partners; and \$8.7 billion from CAREC governments. Even with the unprecedented challenges of this year, CAREC has maintained momentum in implementing the strategic framework we adopted in 2017 to advance regional cooperation, known as CAREC 2030.

Allow me to summarize some of our key achievements this year in 2020.

First, we have further strengthened regional connectivity by investing in high-quality infrastructure projects. For example, a new project will expand energy trade between Afghanistan and Uzbekistan to provide 500,000 households and businesses with reliable access to electricity. Another cross-border investment project will strengthen connectivity between the PRC and Mongolia, to enhance living conditions for people in border areas through improved access to economic opportunities and health services.

Second, CAREC is beginning to promote new priority areas to support people-centered economic recovery through two important strategies that the Ministers will consider today. The CAREC tourism strategy will promote the development of safe tourism destinations, helping to support employment for millions of people; while the CAREC gender strategy will support equal access to economic opportunities for women and girls, and give them a voice in decision-making processes.

And third, in association with the CAREC Institute, CAREC is strengthening its role as a catalyst for knowledge work and policy dialogue in further support of regional and global agendas for cooperation. For example, CAREC completed a study on regional health cooperation, identifying opportunities to mitigate the spread of diseases and to improve health services for migrants and border communities. To advance policy dialogue, senior finance ministry officials from CAREC countries recently participated in an ADB-IMF-World Bank forum to discuss countercyclical fiscal policy measures to mitigate COVID-19.

III. Innovation in regional cooperation and integration

Let me now emphasize the crucial role that innovation and technology must play in promoting cooperation as the region transitions to a post-pandemic new normal. Two areas are critical here.

The first is digitalization. The CAREC region must strengthen digital connectivity and the use of digital technologies, so that regional and global initiatives can expand their reach. The development of digital solutions is underway that can grow e-commerce and tourism and automate border inspections in order to facilitate trade. There is also huge potential for adopting technologies that improve the monitoring of cross-border health threats; enable the use of telemedicine and online education; and raise food safety standards. To maximize the value of these advances, we will also work together to address the digital divide and strengthen cyber security. I am pleased that CAREC is starting a technical assistance program that will help integrate technology and develop startup ecosystems that offer digital solutions for regional challenges.

The second area involves the role of the private sector as a driver of innovation, which can further accelerate regional cooperation. A CAREC Regional Infrastructure Projects Enabling Facility is being prepared to attract private participation and innovative financing solutions for regional infrastructure projects. ADB is also helping to pioneer a regional disaster risk financing mechanism, which will enable CAREC countries to work effectively with private insurance companies to mitigate earthquakes, floods, and infectious diseases-related risks.

Closing

Ladies and Gentlemen, as the world emerges from the pandemic, we must all come together to revive our regional cooperation efforts with a spirit of open regionalism, so that CAREC can seize the opportunities of renewed globalization. In particular, let us expand connectivity, rejuvenate trade, and embrace innovation and technology in ways that put the people of the CAREC region at its center.

I want to conclude by assuring you once again that ADB is fully committed to supporting our member countries and partners in these efforts at this crucial time for the region.

Thank you.



**GOVERNMENT OF ISLAMIC
REPUBLIC OF AFGHANISTAN
19th MINISTERIAL CONFERENCE**

**CENTRAL ASIA REGIONAL ECONOMIC
COOPERATION (CAREC)**

**Opening Remarks BY H.E. ABDUL HADI
ARGHANDIWAL MINISTER OF FINANCE AND**

Your Excellency Co Chair Vice President Chen, Ministers and Heads of Delegations, Excellency Mr. Asakawa, President of the Asian Development Bank, esteemed representatives of development partner organizations, distinguished colleagues from CAREC member countries.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Asalam-u-Alekom. Good morning and good afternoon to everyone!

It is my distinct pleasure to welcome you all, on behalf of the Government of Afghanistan, to the 19th CAREC Ministerial

Conference. Afghanistan has the privilege to host and chair the CAREC program this year. Although we are not able to have the honor of hosting you in Afghanistan, we successfully convened all meetings and conferences in a virtual format this year.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

We just concluded a successful 2020 Afghanistan pledging conference in Geneva. The Government of Afghanistan presented the Afghanistan National Peace and Development Framework II (ANPDF-II) document at this conference, which outlines our vision and priorities towards achieving full self-reliance.

For Afghanistan, continued international support and cooperation is needed to finance its priorities in its key development areas. We are glad that our international partners have pledged \$3.3 billion annually in the coming four years. We have further reaffirmed our commitment to ensuring adequate transparency and accountability for the donor pledges.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

2020 has been an eventful year. As we host and chair the CAREC program this year, the global COVID-19 pandemic has ripped through many countries with devastating effects on their economies. Afghanistan, too, has been affected by the COVID-19 outbreak. Afghanistan's economy is to contract by 5% in 2020. Inflation has spiked and the balance of payments has deteriorated due to border closures. Further, the pandemic has led to poor domestic revenue performance and increase in health expenditures, placing significant pressure on the fiscal accounts.

We express our gratitude for the \$220 million emergency disbursement under the Rapid Credit Facility program of the IMF in April, followed by the generous support programs of the World Bank and ADB. This has helped the government of Afghanistan at a crucial stage, enabling us to manage the overall fiscal deficit in 2020, of which 46% of it will be contributed from our domestic revenues. We have negotiated a three- and half-year new program under the Extended Credit Facility (ECF) arrangement of the IMF.

The government of Afghanistan has allocated AFS-30 billion to fight COVID-19. This covers health programs and social packages to support the poor and create employment. The government has also deferred tax payments for businesses, and a stimulus package for MSMEs is expected to be finalized by the end of 2020. Thanks to ADB for recent approval of a \$100 million budget support for the CARES program in response to COVID -19 .

Respected Friends,

WE remain committed to a results-driven peace negotiation with the Taliban. We are committed to a political settlement that will not only end the suffering of the Afghan people but also build upon the gains of the past 19 years.

Our aim is for Afghanistan to be peaceful, prosperous, and in harmony with our neighbors. Afghanistan's geostrategic location serves as a bridge between Central and South Asia. This proposition enables us to support integration to boost economic growth, create jobs, and reduce poverty within our landlocked but increasingly land-linked geography.

I assure you that we remain fully committed to the multilateral

trading system and view CAREC as a platform to support multilateralism and trade diversification. We fully support the CAREC initiatives and welcome other partners' support for implementing the Trade Facilitation Agreement.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Today, we endorse the CAREC Tourism Strategy 2030, the CAREC Gender Strategy 2030, and the CAREC 2030 Program Results Framework. We welcome the initiatives which have been prepared despite the pandemic, which has halted international travel, tourism, and continues to have a significant impact on the lives of the people across regions. Afghanistan being part of these excellent initiatives can hope for welcoming tourists as we strive to achieve sustainable peace.

Dear Friends and Colleagues,

I am honored to note that Afghanistan is one of the top post-conflict countries where gender equity and equality has continued to improve. More women are placed in leadership positions. Under the Afghanistan National Peace and Development Framework (ANPDF II), Afghanistan has proposed a revised Women's Economic Empowerment Program. We are looking forward to learning from the experiences of others to promote women's empowerment and contribute to the well-being of women in the region. CAREC Gender Strategy and new initiatives under it will help us achieve these objectives.

Excellencies, Ladies, and Gentlemen,

I believe the CAREC 2030 Strategy will create an open and inclusive regional cooperation platform to connect people, policies, and projects for shared and sustainable development. The strategies that have been endorsed today, will contribute towards its mission. On behalf of the Afghan government, I keenly look forward to their implementation.

Please allow me to thank all the CAREC member countries. I also thank our development partners who have supported Afghanistan. I wholeheartedly thank you all for your meaningful participation in this conference. It was unfortunate that the COVID-19 pandemic prevented us from hosting all of you physically in Afghanistan but we will wait for another opportunity in the post-COVID years. Finally, I would like to thank the ADB and the CAREC Secretariat for ensuring the success of the 19th Ministerial Conference.

Thank you.

Appendix 2

**Joint Ministerial Statement
19th Ministerial Conference on
Central Asia Regional Economic Cooperation
7 December 2020**

People Centered Regional Cooperation in the Post-COVID Environment

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 19th Ministerial Meeting on Central Asia Regional Economic Cooperation (CAREC) held virtually on 7 December 2020.

I. People Centered Regional Cooperation in the Post-COVID Environment

1. The CAREC program in its 20th year marks two decades of cooperation between member countries. We are pleased with the progress made and commend the efforts undertaken to address the challenges imposed by the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020. We note the deterioration in the regional economic outlook due to the pandemic and acknowledge its adverse impact on the economic and social lives of people living in the member countries. The importance of regional cooperation has been reinforced by these challenges. We commend CAREC's reorientation that allowed it to continue its operations virtually and develop new initiatives to mitigate the impact of this crisis. We reaffirmed our commitment to regional cooperation to address these new challenges and maintain industrial output and supply chains. We renewed our commitment to implementing the CAREC 2030 strategy and thereby endorsed the CAREC Gender Strategy (CGS) 2030, the CAREC Tourism Strategy (CTS) 2030, CAREC 2030 Program Results Framework to further our development objectives through regional cooperation.

II. Progress on Implementation of the CAREC 2030

2. **Economic and financial stability.** We welcomed the activities held to promote understanding of the economic and financial challenges in the CAREC region including the high-level seminar on economic and financial stability that were organized in collaboration with the IMF and World Bank focusing on fiscal policy and macroeconomic consolidation as well as the proposed seminar on financial stability in the COVID environment. We noted the joint-work currently underway at ADB and CAREC Institute to find solutions for the challenge of finding sufficient access to trade finance felt by Micro and Small-Scale Enterprises (MSMEs) and female-owned enterprises.

3. **Trade, Tourism, and Economic Corridor**

- On **trade**, we were pleased with the progress of the CAREC Integrated Trade Agenda (CITA) 2030, and welcomed the steps taken by the Regional Trade Group (RTG) and Customs Cooperation Committee (CCC) to increase trade facilitation and improve capacity of customs agencies. We commended the support being provided by CAREC to Kazakhstan in hosting the WTO's 12th Ministerial Conference in 2021, and to other member countries in meeting their WTO commitments. We were pleased with the progress made on sanitary and phytosanitary measures and noted that Uzbekistan recently acceded to the International Plant Protection Convention and is the first CAREC country to implement e-Phyto solutions. We commended the joint actions of Afghanistan, Azerbaijan and Turkmenistan aimed at development of efficient transport corridor through their respective territories and extending of this corridor further to the other countries of the region. We welcomed the feasibility study for establishing a multilateral Trade Credit and Investment (re-) Guarantee Agency (TCIGA) and noted approval of parallel projects to develop economic cooperation zone between the PRC and Mongolia along CAREC corridor 4. We also welcomed the recently approved technical assistance project on free trade agreement capacity building for CAREC countries, and agreed to develop a roadmap for a CAREC-wide FTA.
- On **tourism**, we welcomed the CAREC Tourism Strategy 2030 and appreciated its strategic vision and focus on promoting safe and sustainable regional tourism destinations, while covering key issues of connectivity and infrastructure, quality and standards, skills development, marketing, and market intelligence. We also welcomed the regional tourism investment framework which will complement the CTS 2030 and elaborate upon the projects to be implemented over 2021–2025.
- On **economic corridors**, we recognized the significant progress made on the Almaty-Bishkek Economic Corridor (ABEC) which included, amongst others, the completion and adoption of the ABEC Tourism Master Plan and finalization of a feasibility study for a modern agricultural wholesale markets network. We were pleased by the progress on the Shymkent-Tashkent-Khujand Economic Corridor (STKEC) which, amongst others, included finalization of the roadmap for development of the STKEC and a report on trade potentials along the corridor.

4. **Infrastructure and economic connectivity.**

- On **transport**, we commended training workshops that were successfully conducted on key aspects such as the railway sector assessments, road asset management systems (RAMS), road safety and performance-based contracting, and welcomed the approval of a technical assistance project for the preparation of CAREC Regional Infrastructure Projects Enabling Facility. We noted continued progress in connectivity and cross-border

services improvement projects, as well as in promoting sustainable regional cooperation of transportation despite the bottlenecks caused by the pandemic.

- On **energy**, we appreciated the progress in implementation of the CAREC Energy Strategy 2030 and on CAREC's large portfolio of regional energy trade projects and technical assistance and capacity building initiatives, including on establishment of a new regional transmission cooperation association, promotion of market reforms, establishment of a financing vehicle for green energy projects, development of a CAREC Energy Outlook and a women-in-energy program. We appreciated the efforts undertaken to implement the activities that were endorsed at the Regional Energy Ministers Dialogue in September 2019.

6. **Agriculture and water.** We welcomed the launch of two new technical assistance programs which will develop the CAREC water pillar and improve public health and agro-trade facilities.

7. **Human development.** We appreciated the completion of the scoping study on CAREC regional health cooperation. We welcomed the upcoming technical assistance project that will aid CAREC countries in addressing public health threats, including pandemics, and lead to the preparation of a CAREC regional health strategy, and an investment framework for 2022–2026.

8. **Information, communication, and digital technologies (ICT).** We welcomed the promotion of ICT as a crosscutting initiative with the approval of an ADB-financed technical assistance that will prepare a technology vision and a digital strategy for CAREC, integrate ICT in the five operational clusters of the CAREC 2030 strategy, and assess methods to develop a regional startup ecosystem.

8. **Multisector**

- We endorsed the **CAREC Gender Strategy 2030** which aims to mainstream gender into CAREC's operational clusters. We commended the consultative approach undertaken in the preparation of the strategy in difficult circumstances caused by the onset of the pandemic.
- We commended the completion of the **CAREC Border Communities Collaboration** scoping study which has identified ways to promote development and collaboration of communities living in member countries' border areas.
- We commended the completion of the **CAREC 2030 Results Framework** which provides a concrete measurement framework to evaluate the results of the CAREC 2030 strategy.
- We appreciated the ongoing work for designing a **comprehensive risk transfer mechanism** which will reduce member countries' physical and financial vulnerability to infectious disease outbreaks and natural hazards.

III. CAREC Institute

We commended the CAREC Institute (CI) on the progress made on its research portfolio, capacity building trainings, and knowledge management activities. We welcomed the steps taken by CI to adapt to COVID-19 by shifting to a hybrid platform and applauded its efforts to hold flagship events, undertake publications, and prepare a mid-term review of the CI strategy 2018-2022. We noted the need for CI to develop modalities and mechanisms to ensure its financial sustainability as well as to improve the governance and management structure going forward with support and participation of CAREC member countries.

IV. Enhancing Institutional Mechanisms

We appreciated the role of development partners for their continued financial and technical support towards the CAREC Strategy 2030. In this regard, we applauded organization of the Development Partners' Forum to exchange ideas and initiatives on further strengthening this collaboration. We called for increased private sector participation as the CAREC program broadens its scope and takes on new challenges of the post-COVID environment. We expressed our appreciation to the CAREC Secretariat, the sector coordinating committees, and the CAREC Institute for their dedicated support to the CAREC Program. We encouraged MDBs including ADB and other development partners to mobilize more resources and play an anti-cyclical role in supporting the economic recovery in the post-COVID era.

V. Conclusions and Acknowledgement

We thank the Government of Afghanistan for hosting this 19th Ministerial Conference, and Asian Development Bank for support provided. We look forward to coming together in 2021 under the chairmanship of the Republic of Azerbaijan.



VIRTUAL 19th MINISTERIAL CONFERENCE

People-Centered Regional Cooperation in the Post-COVID Environment

7 December 2020 (1400-1615, Manila time)

AGENDA

Monday, 7 December 2020

1330–1400 Registration

1400–1615 CAREC Ministerial Conference (MC)

Chair:

Mr. Abdul Hadi Arghandiwal, Minister of Finance
Islamic Republic of Afghanistan

Mr. Shixin Chen
Vice President, ADB

Participants: CAREC country delegations and representatives of development partner institutions.

1402–1412 Special Message from His Excellency, the President of the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan

Mr. Mohammad Ashraf Ghani
Islamic Republic of Afghanistan

1412–1420 Welcome Address

Mr. Abdul Hadi Arghandiwal, Minister of Finance
Islamic Republic of Afghanistan

1420–1428 Keynote Address

Mr. Masatsugu Asakawa
President, ADB

1428–1440 Macroeconomic Prospects of CAREC Countries in the Post-COVID Environment

Mr. Subir Lall
Deputy Director of the Middle East and Central Asia Department, IMF

- 1440-1443 **Statement by World Bank**
Mr. Hartwig Schafer
Vice President for South Asia, World Bank
- 1443–1453 **2020 CAREC Deliverables for Endorsement**
- CAREC Tourism Strategy 2030
- CAREC Gender Strategy 2030
- CAREC 2030 Program Results Framework
- The CAREC Secretariat will present the three main deliverables for Ministers' endorsement.*
- 1453–1600 **CAREC Ministers Endorsement**
CAREC Ministers will provide a brief statement (3 min. per country) with their insights and guidance on CAREC 2030 implementation and the endorsement of the following: CAREC Program Results Framework, CAREC Tourism Strategy 2030, and CAREC Gender Strategy 2030. Development Partners will be invited to provide their views time permitting.
- 1600–1610 **Consideration of the Joint Ministerial Statement**
CAREC Ministers will consider the draft Joint Ministerial Statement with a view to endorsement
- 1610–1615 **Closing Remarks**
Mr. Abdul Hadi Arghandiwal, Minister of Finance
Islamic Republic of Afghanistan



**VIRTUAL CAREC 19th MINISTERIAL CONFERENCE
7 December 2020 (1400-1615, Manila time)**

LIST OF PARTICIPANTS

I. CAREC COUNTRIES

A. Afghanistan

1. Mr. Mohammad Ashraf Ghani, President
2. Mr. Abdul Hadi Arghandiwal, Governor and Minister of Finance
3. Mr. Habib Zadran, Deputy Minister, Ministry of Finance/ CAREC National Focal Point
4. Mr. Qudratullah Zaki, Minister of Transport
5. Najeebullah Yamin, Minister of Public works
6. Ms. Hasina Safi, Minister of Women's affairs
7. Mr. Tahir Zaheer, Minister of Information and Culture
8. Mr. Anwarulhaq Ahadi, Minister of Agriculture
9. Mr. Nesar Ahmad Ghoryani, Minister of Commerce
10. Mr. Khan Mohammad Takal, Head of Energy and Water Authority
11. Mr. Naseer Sediqi , Acting deputy Minister Policy (MOF)
12. Mr. Shekaib Sharifi, DG Policy (MAIL)
13. Mr. Yama Shams, Head of Railway Authority
14. Mr. Shah Zaman Maiwandi, Head of NEPA
15. Mr. Maiwand Farahi- CEO Afghan insurance
16. Ms. Freshta Kargar- Director Bilateral Relation-MOF
17. Ms. Nargis Orokzai: Director of Communication-MOF
18. Mr. Fazel Malik Neyazl-CEO of Continental
19. Mr. Safiullah Ahmadzai, Acting CFO for DABS
20. Ms. Ulkur Begum, Advisor to DM Finance
21. Mr. Yassen Zazai, Aid Management Focal Point for ADB

B. Azerbaijan

22. Mr. Mikayil Jabbarov, Minister, Ministry of Economy

C. People's Republic of China

23. Ms. Jiayi Zou, Vice Minister, Minister of Finance (MOF)
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65. Ms. Mariam Gabunia, CAREC Trade Policy Focal, Head, International Trade Policy Department, MOESD

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74. Mr. Bakhyt Kashyrbayev, Head of Division of Labor Market Development, Department of Employment of the Population, Ministry of Labor and Social Protection of Population
75. Mr. Murat Imashev, Head of Division for Cooperation with Integration Associations, Department of International Cooperation, Ministry of Trade and Integration
76. Mr. Sungat Zhaksybayev, Expert of Division, Department of International Cooperation, Ministry of Labor and Social Protection of Population of the Republic of Kazakhstan
77. Ms. Saltanat Abdikarimova, Managing Director of the Department on Employment, the National Chamber of Entrepreneurs of the Republic of Kazakhstan "Atameken"

F. Kyrgyz Republic

78. Mr. Sanzhar Mukanbetov, Minister, Ministry of Economy
79. Mr. Sultan Akhmatov, Deputy Minister of Economy/ CAREC National Focal Point

G. Mongolia

80. Mr. Narantsogt Sanjaa, State Secretary, Ministry of Finance

H. Pakistan

81. Mr. Makhdum Khusro Bakhtyar, Federal Minister, Economic Affairs Division
82. Mr. Eazaz Dar, Additional Secretary, Economic Affairs Division/ CAREC National Focal Point
83. Mr. Nabeel Munir, Additional Secretary (UN), Ministry of Foreign Affairs

- 84. Mr. Saeed Siddiqi, Joint Secretary ADB, Economic Affairs Division
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- 86. Mr. Mubeen Meher, Director (CARs&ECO), Ministry of Foreign Affairs

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- 100. Mr. Akynnyaz Agamyradov, Head of Tourism Department, Ministry of Culture
- 101. Ms. Gulshat Bakyyeva, Deputy Head of Tourism Department, Ministry of Culture
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- 109. Ms. Ejebay Charyyeva, Research officer, State Institute for Human Rights and Democracy

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- 119. Mr. Shixin Chen, Vice President (Operations 1)
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- 179. Mr. Khalid Umar, Chief Strategic Planning Division
- 180. Ms. Tamar Berdzenishvili, Senior Knowledge Management Specialist

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- 181. Mr. Makhmadali Shokirov, Chairperson

D. Cassa Depositi e Prestiti (CDP) Italy

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H. Eurasian Development Bank (EDB)

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F. Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office (FCDO) (formerly DFID)

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- 252. Ms. Yuting Zhang (Annie)
- 253. Ms. Jinpan Lin (Amy)