



**23rd Ministerial Conference
Central Asia Regional Economic Cooperation (CAREC) Program
8 November 2024, Astana**

Joint Ministerial Statement

Building a More Integrated and Resilient CAREC Region

We, the Ministers representing the Governments of Azerbaijan, the People's Republic of China, Georgia, Kazakhstan, the Kyrgyz Republic, Mongolia, Pakistan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, and Uzbekistan, adopt the following statement at the conclusion of the 23rd Ministerial Conference on Central Asia Regional Economic Cooperation (CAREC) in Astana on 7–8 November 2024.

1. We **appreciate** the CAREC Program's achievements and contribution to enhancing regional connectivity, deepening economic linkages, and adopting an integrated approach to responding to the rapidly evolving global and regional landscape. Growth in most countries in the region remains largely steady amid unabating geopolitical headwinds and supply chain disruptions. We **underscore** the need to adapt and work together to respond to diversity, build resilience to future pandemics, and address climate change.

2. We **welcome** the findings and recommendations of the **Midterm Review (MTR) of the CAREC 2030 Strategy**. We **endorse** the ten-point recommendations as follows: (i) streamline scope for enhancing impact of CAREC initiatives; (ii) review and recalibrate sectoral strategies; (iii) pursue regional public goods to address common issues; (iv) reinvigorate regional ownership for sustaining outcomes; (v) strengthen engagement with development partners and private sector; (vi) promote integrated and climate-smart development; (vii) improve program effectiveness and monitoring with key performance indicators (KPIs) to implement and track the progress on the recommendations; (viii) strengthen the CAREC Secretariat; (ix) enhance CAREC Institute's role as a strategic partner for knowledge-driven development; and (x) develop an implementation action plan. We **request** the CAREC Secretariat prepare the implementation action plan and update the CAREC Program results framework in consultation with CAREC member countries and development partners.

3. We **reiterate** our commitment to achieving a climate-resilient and low-carbon CAREC region by endorsing the **CAREC Climate Change Action Plan (CCAP) 2025–2027**. We commend the efforts of the Working Group on Climate Change to translate the [CAREC Climate Change Vision](#) into concrete actions and implementable regional initiatives and projects across CAREC clusters. We **endorse** the CCAP 2025–2027, which encompasses four action areas to support adaptation and mitigation activities and promote transboundary cooperation, coordination, and knowledge sharing. Specifically, we welcome the proposed initiatives on (i) climate risk, preparedness, and health, including regional climate risk assessments and resilient infrastructure planning, regional multi-hazard early warning system, health and climate, and regional risk transfer solutions; (ii) water-energy-food security nexus, including regional glacier risk assessment, water forecasting, irrigation, reservoir restoration, river basin monitoring, and climate adaptation in mountainous areas; (iii) low-carbon growth, including decarbonization of transport and trade corridors, grid readiness and renewable energy integration, emissions reduction in urban areas, and carbon market development; and (iv) knowledge generation and regional information sharing, climate finance and development

of bankable regional projects, and capacity building. We are determined to strengthen our partnerships further, pool resources to implement the CCAP, and develop coordinated actions to advance the climate agenda in our region.

4. We **welcome** the establishment of the **CAREC Climate and Sustainability Project Preparatory Fund (CSPPF)** and **thank** the Governments of the People's Republic of China and the Republic of Korea for their generous contribution as founding Financing Partners and the commendable efforts of the Asian Development Bank (ADB) in the CSPPF's establishment. The CSPPF will help address and narrow CAREC countries' financing gaps in achieving climate change goals and SDGs by supporting the preparation of bankable climate- and SDG-related regional projects, supporting green transition and sustainable growth.

5. We **express full support** to the Government of Azerbaijan for its Presidency of the 29th Conference of Parties (COP29) this year, bringing the global climate focus to our region, including the CAREC initiatives at COP29. We **welcome** the establishment of the **CAREC Partnership for Climate, Innovation and Trade** to deepen our cooperation by leveraging smart and technology-driven solutions for greening and facilitating regional trade.

6. We **commend** the CAREC countries' initiatives to maintain an open trade regime and facilitate trade and fully support the remaining CAREC members—Azerbaijan, Turkmenistan, and Uzbekistan—in their accelerated efforts to accede to the World Trade Organization. We encourage pragmatic cooperation in the areas of digital trade, green and resilient supply chains, international standards, and cross-cutting issues with trade.

7. We **recognize** CAREC's efforts to enhance connectivity among our economies and provide tangible benefits to our people through regional projects. We **welcome** the approval of new regional projects aligned with CAREC sectors' priorities, including the ADB-financed investments that will modernize Azerbaijan's Sumgait–Yalama railway, improving regional connectivity; enhance environmental management and sustainable tourism in Kyrgyz Republic's Issyk-Kul Lake; reconnect Tajikistan's country's power system to the Central Asian Power System (CAPS) through interconnections with neighboring Uzbekistan; and improve border efficiency for sustainable trade in Mongolia. We **encourage** CAREC members to continue identifying and generating innovative pipeline projects, including those aimed at reducing carbon emissions and promoting regional energy security, adopt innovative solutions, including responsible use of artificial intelligence to respond to climate change and develop and expand CAREC transport and economic corridors. We appreciate ADB's timely support to the countries' initiative to develop the green energy corridor under the Caspian Sea.

8. We **support** the initiative to enhance regional cooperation for green skills development. We encourage ministries and institutions of higher education and technical and vocational education (TVET) in CAREC countries to strengthen cooperation in skills development through joint research and training initiatives, student and faculty exchange programs, and peer learning at policy and institutional levels

9. We **endorse** the **CAREC Joint Statement on Regional Tourism Development** (Appendix), which outlines the commitment of national tourism organizations from CAREC member countries to implement *CAREC Tourism Strategy 2030*. We recognize the need for a regional tourism cooperation mechanism. We welcome the proposal to establish a CAREC Tourism Coordinating Office in Samarkand, Uzbekistan, underscoring the need for private sector engagement and financial sustainability.

10. We **take note** of the proposed CAREC Institute (CI)'s Revitalization Plan aimed at broad-based reforms to enhance the CI's status as a regional knowledge center supporting the CAREC Program. We **call** on the CI management to develop a new CAREC Institute Strategy 2026–2030 to be presented at the next CAREC Ministerial Conference in 2025.

11. We **encourage** the member countries and development partners of the CAREC Program to forge impactful partnerships and create synergies with other regional initiatives, such as the Belt and Road Initiative, the Global Development Initiative, and others, to reinvigorate regional cooperation and achieve regional public goods.

12. We **greatly appreciate** the Government of Kazakhstan for chairing and hosting the 23rd CAREC Ministerial Conference, the senior officials' meeting, and working group meetings in 2024, and the ADB as the CAREC Secretariat for the excellent arrangements and support. We look forward to assembling again in 2025 under the chairmanship of the Kyrgyz Republic to continue our joint efforts to build a more integrated and resilient CAREC region.

Appendix

CAREC Joint Statement on Regional Tourism Development

We, the representatives of the national tourism organizations of Azerbaijan, the People's Republic of China, Georgia, Kazakhstan, the Kyrgyz Republic, Mongolia, Pakistan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, and Uzbekistan, following our meeting in Istanbul, Türkiye, during the 2nd CAREC Tourism Working Group (TWG) meeting on 26 June 2024, hereby present this **Joint Statement on Regional Tourism Development** to express the following undertaking for our CAREC Ministers' approval in principle:

1. **Reaffirming** our commitment to the [CAREC Tourism Strategy 2030](#), envisioning a *sustainable, safe, easily accessible, and well-known tourism region* that provides a variety of unique all-year-round quality experiences to visitors along the Silk Road, and widely shares its benefits among its communities through its five pillars: (i) connectivity and infrastructure, (ii) quality and standards, (iii) skills development, (iv) marketing and branding, and (v) market Intelligence. **Recognizing** the strategy's cross-cutting themes: health, safety, and security, digital and communication technologies, gender equality, private sector development, environmental sustainability, and universal access.
2. **Agreeing** that effective implementation of the *CAREC Tourism Strategy 2030* requires a regional tourism cooperation mechanism focusing on six program areas: (i) visa and transborder travel facilitation, (ii) cross-border circuit and corridor development, (iii) development and implementation of regional tourism investment projects, (iv) joint marketing and promotions, (v) sustainable tourism management, measurement, and cooperative climate action and resilience, and (vi) travel association and private sector engagement.
4. **Proposing** to establish a new CAREC Tourism Coordinating Office (CTCO) to act as the TWG Secretariat and lead the strategy's implementation, including raising funds from the government, private sector, and development partners to support it.
5. **Acknowledging** the resolution adopted at the 25th UN Tourism General Assembly in October 2023 to establish a Silk Road Thematic Office in Samarkand, Uzbekistan. We thank Uzbekistan and UN Tourism for their willingness to explore future possibilities of using the Silk Road Thematic Office as a CTCO permanent host once it becomes operational in 2025.
6. **Accepting** the generous support offered by the Government of Uzbekistan, we propose utilizing the existing Silk Road Office of the Tourism Committee at the Ministry of Ecology, Environmental Protection and Climate Change, in Samarkand, Uzbekistan, as host of the CTCO for an initial period of two years in 2025-2026.
7. **Suggesting** a phased approach to the implementation of the CTCO, focused initially on institutional setup and launching flagship programs. These will build on the work completed under TA 9776–REG Sustainable Tourism Development in the CAREC and developing a management plan and content strategy for the www.VisitSilkRoad.org web portal.
8. **Emphasizing** the importance of the financial sustainability of the CTCO as well as increasing private sector engagement in innovation and enterprise, we encourage CAREC countries to provide voluntary financial support to advance the joint efforts in CAREC tourism development.

We express our gratitude to the Asian Development Bank for its support of the CAREC tourism initiative and our governments for their active participation.