

U.S. Intervention for 20th CAREC Virtual Ministerial Conference

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I want to thank the Asian Development Bank and the Government of Azerbaijan for hosting this Conference. President Asakawa, Minister Jabbarov, Excellencies, ladies and gentlemen, I am honored to join you and the other delegations and participants in this conference.

The United States joins with other CAREC partners in a shared vision of a vibrant and prosperous region. All of us support a stable and thriving Central Asia that is more closely connected to its neighbors, and to the rest of the world.

We are committed to supporting CAREC efforts to improve the region's infrastructure. We also seek to help our regional partners implement the regulatory frameworks that will better facilitate trade and transit and reduce associated costs. In 2021, this commitment is more important than ever as we continue the fight against COVID-19 and ensure the recovery reaches those who have been hardest hit during the pandemic. Trade and transit, the movement of goods and people, and exchanges have all been negatively affected by the global pandemic over the past 20 months.

The United States applauds CAREC's focus on digital connectivity and on health.

The global COVID-19 pandemic has highlighted the critical importance of digital connectivity and revealed the gaps we must address in both digital infrastructure and digital access in order to ensure economic resilience and to build back better. Digital infrastructure includes physical, regulatory, and governance frameworks. When fully realized, digital connectivity enables us to conduct financial transactions, to access education and entertainment, to maintain people to people ties, and to convene in groups – as in this meeting today. Achieving this connectivity across secure networks, and with a diverse pool of equipment vendors will help ensure that national security and the data of citizens and companies are protected.

The new *CAREC Digital Strategy 2030* can address social and economic challenges of digital connectivity – including the disparity in access to computers, mobile devices, and internet connections, and bad actors' use of digital space to promote disinformation and misinformation. Increasing digital connectivity and reducing regulatory and legal barriers are also critical to ensuring the full and free participation of women in the economy – which in turn is essential to drive economic growth in the pandemic recovery. This is a timely and important effort both for CAREC, and for its members.

As the global pandemic has shown, health involves a different kind of connectivity. Infectious diseases and outbreaks can cross borders, and our collective efforts are needed to prevent, detect, and respond to emerging outbreaks. Health security is both national security and economic security. *The CAREC Health Strategy 2030* can help foster cooperation across and

between national health sectors. This, in turn, can improve health outcomes and enable health services for mobile and marginalized populations, including migrants and refugees.

Greater regional cooperation on health can address both long-term social determinants of health and noncommunicable diseases - which are the leading causes of global morbidity and mortality and make people more vulnerable to infectious threats. Increased regional health cooperation will bolster regional and global health security.

The United States is doing its part by accelerating the equitable distribution of safe and effective vaccines. President Biden has committed to providing more than 1.1 billion vaccine doses, primarily through COVAX. To date, we have provided more than 243 million doses to more than 100 countries, with no political strings attached.

The United States has also made good on our \$4 billion commitment to COVAX. We urge others to accelerate the delivery timeline and their financial and vaccine dose commitments. The United States is also providing support to more than 100 countries to boost vaccine readiness and combat misinformation and dis-information, building confidence in safe and effective vaccines.

The United States recognizes that the CAREC region currently faces unique challenges and opportunities to introduce broad-based and enduring prosperity to its citizens. Stability and economic growth are mutually reinforcing. Peace and stability are the underlying conditions to significant economic growth and investment; and economic growth is essential to preserving and deepening peace.

It remains critically important to the United States that CAREC governments pursue development in a way that preserves their sovereignty and serves the interests of their citizens, not just the interests of the developers.

The United States will continue to support the policies and programs that help advance the development of the CAREC countries, making the CAREC vision a reality.

Thank you.