

[Statement of the Chief Executive Officer of Bangladesh Tourism Board Mr. Abu Tahir Muhammad Zaber & Head of the Delegates of Bangladesh in 12<sup>th</sup> Session of the Islamic Conference of Tourism Ministers (ICTM) Khiva, Republic of Uzbekistan.]

Bismillahir Rahmanir Rahim

Honorable Chair, Honorable Secretary General of OIC,

Distinguished Head of the Delegates and

Members of the delegation

Excellencies

Ladies and Gentlemen

Assalamualaikum warahmatullhi wabarakatuhu and very Good Morning

On behalf of the Bangladesh delegation, I express my sincere thanks and deep appreciation to the Government of the Republic of Uzbekistan for hosting this excellent conference and the warm hospitality accorded to our delegation since our arrival in the touristic capital of Uzbekistan, Khiva. I also add my voice to the distinguished speakers and delegates, in thanking the OIC for this particular initiative to hold this critically important conference, providing a platform of exchanging views on the development of the tourism industry in a more sustainable and resilient manner.

Ladies and Gentlemen

Bangladesh is often called a land of beauty, because of its rich cultural heritage, people's warmth and hospitality as well as incredibly beautiful tourist attractions. Not only for its picturesque landscape and diverse flora and fauna, but also its distinctive cultural vibrancy and culinary delights that leave a lasting impression in the hearts of tourists. Bangladesh hosts the longest unbroken sandy sea beach in the world, named Cox's Bazar, which could be a place of attraction for the beach lovers, especially travelers from the land locked countries and beyond. The biggest mangrove forests in the world, Sundarbans is located in the south of Bangladesh that is the home to the Royal Bengal Tiger, a perfect destination for adventurous explorers. In addition to that, we have a number of historical places, recognized by UNESCO as World Heritage sites that includes, among others, Sixty Domes Mosque in the mosque city of Bagerhat.

Distinguished Delegates,

Bangladesh attaches high importance and value to nurture, promote and reflect Islamic heritage and culture. The Government of Bangladesh led by the Hon'ble Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina has been constructing 564 "Model Masjid and Islamic Cultural Centers" across the country at the tune of around one Billion US dollar. Out of total

564 Model Masjid, a total of 200 are already completed and inaugurated. Bangladesh capital, Dhaka is often referred to as the "City of Mosques" and the Venice of the East, due to its Islamic architecture and a river-front, facing the river Buriganga, a tributary of the mighty Ganges. While we seek the support of OIC in our endeavors to preserve and promote Islamic heritage in Bangladesh, we express our commitments to working with OIC member states in further boosting and expanding Islamic heritage, culture and values globally.

Ladies and Gentlemen.

The spectacular developments that Bangladesh has attained in its socio-economic landscapes in recent decades under the pragmatic and visionary leadership of Hon'ble Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina serves as a reason to draw the attention of tourists as well as foreign business and investment elites alike. The efficient completion of multiple mega projects-especially in road, transport and energy sectors-in the recent time bears testimony to the economic and financial strength and capacity of Bangladesh. To ensure faster, comfortable and secured communication, Padma Bridge, Metro Rail, Elevated Expressway, underwater tunnel, flyover, etc. have been developed throughout the countries. Given the improved infrastructures, connectivity and services, we are witnessing an encouraging surge of tourism in Bangladesh. Domestic tourism is also booming, estimating around 30 million domestic tourists travel throughout the country.

Distinguished Delegates,

Bangladesh is well on track in realizing its vision-2041, transforming the country into an advanced economy by this time. The government is committed to turning the country into 'Sonar Bangla' (golden Bangla)-a poverty free, hunger free, peaceful and prosperous Bangladesh-as dreamt by the Father of the Nation Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman. Terming tourism as one of the high priority sectors for the economic growth and development, Bangladesh Government has formulated a comprehensive Tourism Master Plan, that has laid out a road map for the tourism sector from 2024-2041, with a target of achieving incremental growth in tourism. It has denoted sustainable development of tourism and tourist resources as a key catalyst for rapid economic growth and job creation. In the master plan, 226 tourism projects have been identified, offering huge opportunities for investments, especially in Eco Tourism, Backwater Tourism, Adventure Tourism, Heritage tourism as well as other allied sectors including accommodation and transport etc. I would like to request the Government of OIC member states and private entrepreneurs to explore Bangladesh more seriously and deeply in terms of effectively harnessing the potentials that our tourism and related sectors offer to prospective investors.

Distinguished Delegates,

As we emphasize on the enhanced investments in the tourism and hospitality sectors in order to stimulate tourism activities comprehensively, we underline the importance of paying due attention to the green investments in this particular sector, potentially taking into cognizance the inclusion of the host community, conservation and preservation of biodiversity and natural environment, building awareness among the local community, as well as sourcing the local resources. These types of initiatives would not only help preserve and protect the nature but also create economic scopes and opportunities including employment generations through the establishment of Community Based Tourism. On the conclusion, I would reiterate that the engagements of OIC member countries need to further intensified in order to share and coordinate our ideas, experiences and best practices, more emphatically in the realms of eco-tourism, as well as sustainable and responsible tourism so that overall sustainable development goal could be achieved together within its stipulated time frame.

Thank you all, again.

AllahHafez.

Joy Bangla, Joy Bangabandhu

May Bangladesh Live Forever