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**SPEECH OF**

**H.E. DR. YOUSEF A. OTHAIMEEN,**  
**SECRETARY GENERAL OF THE ORGANIZATION OF**  
**ISLAMIC COOPERATION,**  
**AT**  
**THE OPENING CEREMONY**

**OF THE TENTH SESSION**  
**OF THE ISLAMIC CONFERENCE OF**  
**TOURISM MINISTERS**

Dhaka, People's Republic of Bangladesh  
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THE ORGANIZATION OF THE ISLAMIC COOPERATION,  
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**Your Excellency Madam Sheikh Hasina Wazid,  
Honorable Prime Minister of People's Republic of Bangladesh,**

**Your Excellency Mr. Abdul Hassan Mahmud Ali, Minister of Foreign Affairs  
of Bangladesh,**

**Your Excellency Mr. Shajahan Kamal, Minister for Civil Aviation and  
Tourism of Bangladesh,**

**Honourable Ministers and Heads of Delegation,**

**Ladies and Gentlemen.**

It is indeed a great pleasure and honour for me to address the tenth edition of the Islamic Conference of Tourism Ministers of the Organization of Islamic Cooperation, holding at this beautiful and historic city of Dhaka, which is widely acclaimed for its rich Islamic cultural heritage.

Let me express, at the outset, my heartfelt appreciation to Her Excellency Madam Sheikh Hasina Wazid, Honorable Prime Minister of Bangladesh, and to the esteemed Government and people of Bangladesh for hosting this Conference and for the warm reception and generous hospitality extended to all delegates.

I must equally express my sincere appreciation to the Republic of Niger, in its capacity as Chairman of the 9<sup>th</sup> Session of the ICTM, for having successfully steered OIC activities in the domain of tourism and for the diligent follow-up of the decisions of the last Ministerial Conference on Tourism.

**Hignesses,  
Excellencies,  
Ladies and Gentlemen,  
Distinguished Delegates,**

Today, the tourism sector is no longer restricted to entertainment but has become a strategic source of income and a socio-economic necessity for Islamic countries. The importance of tourism as a job-creating industry and a marketing tool for the civilization of states has increased significantly. It now constitutes one of the major components of local economy and pillars of national income. Tourism is also a window on societies and a means for cultural exchange and for developing knowledge of the traditions and customs of our member states, therefore deepening ties among our Muslim peoples.

In this context, I am delighted to note the continued increase in intra-OIC cooperation in the area of tourism since the last conference held in Niger in 2015. There is no doubt that tourism has continued to maintain greater capacities in supporting SMEs in order to provide job opportunities to more people in our member states, including the youth and social groups suffering economic vulnerability.

Over the past few decades, international tourism activity has shown substantial and sustained growth in terms of both tourism revenues and number of tourists, and has left broad economic, social, cultural and environmental footprints reaching almost every part of the globe. International tourism activity generates significant economic benefits to tourists' host and home countries alike. According to the UNWTO, the number of international tourist arrivals has been registering an annual growth rate of 4.4 per cent.

As a substantial part of the developing countries, the OIC member countries also benefited from such a positive change. As a group, the OIC countries attracted 173.4 million tourists in 2015 compared with 160.6 million in 2011.

One of the main driving factors behind this positive development in intra-OIC tourism is the introduction of Islamic tourism, also known as family-friendly tourism, in which all tourism activities, services, facilities and products are designed and served in line with the principles of Islam.

In this context, the two documents namely, the Strategic Roadmap for Development and Promotion of Islamic Tourism and the Study on Muslim-Friendly Tourism Branding in the Global Market, are of special importance for the further development of Islamic tourism in Member States. I hope that the adoption of these two

documents will give an additional impetus for increased cooperation in the area of tourism and the rejuvenation of our respective national economies.

**Excellencies,  
Distinguished Delegates,**

You would recall that the theme of this session is: Promoting Regional Integration through Tourism. In this regard, the various items on the agenda of this meeting are capable of increasing intra-OIC cooperation in many areas. Accordingly, the findings of the Working Group on Islamic Tourism, which was put in place an Executive Program for Development of Islamic Tourism 2017-2018 are very commendable.

Similarly, the implementation of the OIC City of Tourism Award and the OIC Award of Seal of Excellence for Handicrafts require a holistic mechanism in order to ensure that tourist activities are multiplied within the recipient countries. It is important for the Coordination Committee to consider including such activities as joint projection of documentary films by member states on the awardee city of tourism as well as the staging of an annual OIC tourism activity in the same city. The Committee should also identify high net-worth philanthropists in OIC countries to support these activities in our member states. In addition, our next agenda should also focus on the implementation of the Prince Sultan Bin Salman Database of Islamic Architectural Heritage, which includes such heritage sites in Al-Quds Al-Sherif and Nagorno Karabagh, among others.

Moreover, let me also stress the need for our Ministers to give the appropriate directives towards increasing public awareness on the numerous tourism potentials in our member states. In this regard, the initiative of the Arab Republic of Egypt to jointly organise with the Islamic Centre for Development of Trade (ICDT) the 3<sup>rd</sup> Tourism Fair in the second half of 2018 is commendable. Equally significant is the timely execution of joint tourism projects, such as the Regional Project of Sustainable Tourism Development in a Network of Cross Border Parks and Protected Areas in West Africa. Such projects will ensure the scaling up of tourism infrastructure in our regions, generate the much-needed employment among the low-income segments of our populations, and promote regional integration within the OIC.

**Your Highnesses,  
Your Excellencies,  
Distinguished Delegates,**

Since regional actions provide an avenue for increased economic cooperation and policy-dialogue, especially among neighboring countries located in the same region. In

particular, intraregional tourism promotes regional integration through increased trade and economic activities and helps countries better understand each other. It equally paves the way to addressing some common challenges such as visa restrictions and non-standard practices at customs.

In this regard, regional partnership and closer cooperation with international development banks and institutions would help in surmounting the series of funding constraints, which have always plagued our efforts to consolidate the project-based approach to tourism development. It is, therefore, gratifying to note the presence of the representative of United Nations World Tourism Organisation at this session, much as we remain grateful for their enduring partnership with the OIC, especially on the above-mentioned West African regional tourism project.

Finally, let me commend our senior officials and relevant institutions, who have proposed valuable projects aimed at strengthening intra-OIC cooperation in the next biennium. I am confident that the pertinent recommendations, which they have presented will receive your kind consideration and approval. In addition, let me express my appreciation to the various OIC institutions, which have collaborated in the implementation of the various resolutions and decisions in the domain of tourism development over the years.

I wish this session a successful outcome.

***Wassalamu Alaikum Warahmatullah Wabarakatuh.***