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SPEECH OF

H.E. MR. IYAD AMEEN MADANI,
SECRETARY GENERAL OF THE ORGANIZATION OF
ISLAMIC COOPERATION,
AT
THE OPENING CEREMONY

OF THE NINTH SESSION
OF THE ISLAMIC CONFERENCE OF
TOURISM MINISTERS

Niamey, Republic of Niger
21-23 December 2015

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**Your Excellency Mr. Issoufou Mouhamadou,
President of the Republic of Niger,**

**Your Excellency, Madam Yahaya Baare Aoua Abdou,
Minister of Tourism and Handicrafts of the Republic of Niger,**

Honourable Ministers and Heads of Delegation,

Distinguished Delegates,

Ladies and Gentlemen.

It is indeed a great pleasure and honour for me to address the ninth edition of the Islamic Conference of Tourism Ministers of the Organization of Islamic Cooperation, holding in Niamey, the capital of the Republic of Niger. The choice of this venue for a meeting on tourism is instructive, considering the fact that Niger Republic is widely reputed for its rich African cultural heritage, traditional warm hospitality, well-stocked natural reserves and historical parks, as well as the site of the last specimen of the West African Giraffes, living on Koure Plane near Niamey.

Let me express, at the outset, my heartfelt appreciation to H.E. Issoufou Mouhamadou, President of Republic of Niger, the esteemed Government and people of Niger for hosting this Conference and for their traditionally warm reception and generous hospitality extended to all delegates, including the entire delegation of the OIC General Secretariat.

I must equally express my sincere appreciation to the Republic of The Gambia, in its capacity as Chairman of the 8th 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.

Let me also express my utmost pleasure to meet on this occasion with our Ministers of Tourism, given the fact that this gathering is the very first OIC Ministerial Conference on tourism, which I am attending since my assumption of duties as the Secretary General of our Organisation in 2014. We are equally gratified by the steady increase in intra-OIC cooperation in the domain of tourism since the last meeting in the Gambia in 2013. There is no doubt that the landmark resolution represented by the adoption of the Mechanism and Criteria for the annual award of the OIC City of Tourism has deepened and expanded our cooperation areas in many areas. This is more so in view of the fact that tourism has continued to hold greater potentials for promoting Small and Medium Enterprises and for generating employment for a greater number of our populations, including the vulnerable segments and the youth.

Statistically, the tourism sector accounts for 9 percent of global GDP, while providing 120 million direct jobs and another 125 million indirect jobs in related industries. This means that the industry now accounts for one in eleven jobs worldwide. As of 2014, worldwide international tourist arrivals hit 1,133 million and tourism receipts reached \$1,245 billion, corresponding to 4.2 and 4 per cent increase over the previous year, respectively.

As a regional grouping, OIC countries attracted 174.7 million tourists in 2013, compared with 156.4 million in 2009. International tourism receipts in the OIC countries also recorded a significant increase of about \$20 billion during the period 2009-2013. In 2013, the net contribution of international tourism activity accounted, on average, for 0.35 per cent of the total GDP in the OIC countries. In the same year, international tourism receipts as a share of total merchandise exports was averaged 6.5 per cent within the OIC countries.

**Excellences,
Distinguished Delegates,**

Complementary to the implementation of the OIC Framework for the Development and Cooperation on Tourism, the activities marking the commemoration of the OIC City of Tourism for 2015, which is Al-Quds Alsherif have taken place as planned. I had the opportunity of launching the award and the series of activities for the event during my visit to Ramallah, Palestine on 4-5 January 2015. It is gratifying that most of our institutions have expended considerable efforts in ensuring the commemoration of this year-long event. We should not fail to commend IRCICA and SESRIC for the Exhibition of more than 100 years old photographs of the city of Al-Quds Al-Sherif, and the Workshop on improving tourism potentials of Al-Quds Al-Sherif held during the year respectively, among other activities. However, let me hasten to

observe that the contributions of member states in the commemoration of this award will better promote the objective for which this award was established. We should endeavour to allocate airtimes in our national media networks to introduce and showcase this awardee city to the public of OIC member states. The General Secretariat is hopeful that as we celebrate Konya as the OIC City of Tourism 2016, efforts would be made to obtain and air relevant documentaries on this city to our respective citizens.

Furthermore, the Workshop on the tourism potentials of Al-Quds Sherif has demonstrated clearly that religious and heritage tourism can greatly increase intra-OIC cooperation, while at the same time improving the livelihood of the Palestinian people, who have long suffered from the inhuman blockade and economic deprivation meted out by the Israeli occupying power. It is for this reason that the recent ruling by the Islamic Fiqh Academy, which is a subsidiary institution of the OIC, is hereby brought to your kind attention. The ruling allows visit to Al-Quds from the point of view of Islamic jurisprudence. However, in order to address our rejection to any acts leading to normalisation with Israel due to unregulated visit of Muslims to Al-Quds, countries may wish to consider allowing their citizens to travel through the Jordanian entry points only. Evidently, the total ban on the visit of pilgrims to Al-Quds is seriously affecting the economic well-being of the Palestinians, including the future of Palestine, since the lack of sustainable source of income leads to a situation whereby majority of Palestinians are forced to go on exile, abandoning the territory to the Israeli occupiers.

In general, I wish to 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 initiatives of the Arab Republic of Egypt and the Islamic Republic of Iran to jointly organise with the Islamic Centre for Development of Trade (ICDT) the 3rd and 4th Tourism Fairs in 2017 and 2019 are 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. This project 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. We are aware that Niger Republic is one of the eight West African countries, which are covered by this integrative project. It is, therefore, important to secure the buy-in of the Private Sector in order to make this project more viable and feasible.

**Mr. Chairman,
Honourable Ministers,
Distinguished Delegates,**

In scaling up our activities for increased cooperation on tourism, the current emphasis on multi-stakeholder partnership, which the OIC is adopting for the implementation of its numerous programmes and projects, is relevant in this connection. The problems facing tourism and the development of a sustainable international tourism sector in the OIC countries are diverse each country has its own touristic features, level of development and national development priorities and policies.

In this context, international 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. Let me also, at this juncture, 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. I also commend the partnership of the UN World Tourism Organisation (UNWTO) for their unwavering cooperation with us on the West African conservation project. The on-going demarches to enlist the support of UNDP/ South-South Cooperation Unit on some tourism-related projects is also commendable. As we proceed on our various plans, we will continue to involve the various national funds in our member states in closer coordination with the Islamic Development Bank Group on the need to accord greater priority to projects in the tourism sector that are capable of fostering growth in the real sector of our respective economies.

Finally, let me to also commend our senior officials and institutions, who have, since the last two days, proposed concrete projects aimed at strengthening intra-OIC cooperation in the next biennium. I am confident that the pertinent recommendations, which they have proposed will receive your kind consideration and approval.

As I wish this meeting a successful outcome, let me to re-assure Honourable Ministers and Heads of Delegation that the OIC General Secretariat will spare no effort in ensuring the timely implementation of the resolutions of this Conference.

I thank you all.

Wassalamu Alaikum Warahmatullah Wabarakatuh.