

**OIC/6-ICTM/2008/TM/REP/FINAL**

**REPORT**  
**OF THE SIXTH SESSION OF THE**  
**ISLAMIC CONFERENCE OF TOURISM MINISTERS**

**DAMASCUS – SYRIAN ARAB REPUBLIC**  
**27-28 Jumadial Thani 1429H**  
**(1-2 July, 2008)**

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1. The Meeting of the Sixth Session of the Islamic Conference of Tourism Ministers was held in Damascus, Syrian Arab Republic on 27-28 Jumadial Thani 1429H (1-2 July 2008).
  
2. The Meeting was attended by the following Member States:
  - Republic of Azerbaijan
  - Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan
  - Islamic Republic of Afghanistan
  - United Arab Emirates
  - Republic of Indonesia
  - Republic of Uzbekistan
  - Republic of Uganda
  - Islamic Republic of Iran
  - Islamic Republic of Pakistan
  - Kingdom of Bahrain
  - Brunei Darussalam
  - People's Republic of Bangladesh
  - Republic of Turkey
  - Republic of Chad
  - Republic of Tunisia
  - Algeria
  - Republic of Senegal
  - Syrian Arab Republic
  - Republic of Sudan
  - Republic of Somalia
  - Republic of Iraq
  - Sultanate of Oman
  - Republic of The Gambia
  - Republic of Guinea
  - State of Palestine
  - State of Qatar
  - Republic of Cameroon
  - Comoros
  - Kuwait
  - Great Socialist People's Libyan Arab Jamahiriya

- Malaysia
  - Arab Republic of Egypt
  - Kingdom of Morocco
  - Islamic Republic of Mauritania
  - Nigeria
  - Republic of Yemen
3. The following representatives of the OIC General Secretariat, Subsidiary Organs, Specialized and Affiliated Institutions took part in the meeting:
- OIC General Secretariat.
  - Statistical, Economic and Social Research and Training Centre for Islamic Countries (SESRIC).
  - Research Centre for Islamic History, Art and Culture (IRCICA).
  - Islamic Centre for Development of Trade (ICDT).
  - Islamic Development Bank (IDB).
  - The Islamic Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (ISESCO).
  - The Islamic Chamber of Commerce and Industry (ICCI).
  - Islamic Conference Youth Forum for Dialogue and Cooperation (ICYF-DC).
4. The Deputy Secretary General of the United Nations World Tourism Organization (UNWTO) and the President of Arab Tourism Organization also attended the meeting.
5. The list of participants is attached in Annex-I.
6. The meeting started with a recitation of verses from the Holy Qur'an.
7. Before the inaugural statements a documentary film about the tourism potential of the Syrian Arab Republic was demonstrated.
8. H.E. Mr.Abulfas Garayev, Minister of Culture and Tourism of the Republic of Azerbaijan in his capacity as Chairman of the Fifth Session of the Islamic Conference of Tourism Ministers (ICTM) delivered an opening speech whereby he welcomed the participating delegations to Damascus, Syria. His Excellency expressed his gratitude to the authorities of the Syrian Arab Republic for hosting the 6th Session of the ICTM and, especially, to H.E.Mr.Bashar Al-Assad, President of the Arab Republic of Syria in appreciation of the honour of patronizing the Session and creating the most favourable conditions for the success of the conference.
9. H.E. Mr.Abulfas Garayev emphasized that the Chairmanship of the Republic of Azerbaijan in the ICTM and all the activities related to it, have given Azerbaijan a unique opportunity to witness tremendous efforts made by the Member States to develop and promote tourism at national, regional and international levels. He

also recalled the resolutions adopted at the 5th Session of ICTM, in particular, the Resolution on Tourism Development which fully condemned the detrimental impact of conflicts on the cultural and natural heritage, as well as on the ecotourism of OIC Member States and the deliberate destruction of Islamic cultural and historical monuments, the natural bases for ecotourism in conflict-affected Islamic countries. The latter was unanimously and concretely reflected in “Baku Declaration”, which strongly denounced any actions of illegal exploitation of natural resources and destruction of cultural and historical monuments in the territories of Azerbaijan occupied by Armenia, as well as the deliberate destruction of Islamic cultural and historic monuments in the territory of Armenia. The statement of the Minister of Culture and Tourism of the Republic of Azerbaijan is attached in Annex-II.

10. Dr. Taleb Al Rifai, Deputy Secretary General of the UNWTO, made a statement in which he provided the latest statistics on tourism activities for the year 2007. He laid emphasis on the role of tourism in achieving economic progress, considering it an important factor for rapprochement among people. He expressed the UNWTO’s willingness to offer necessary support to the OIC Member States. The statement of the Deputy Secretary General of the UNWTO is attached in Annex-III.
11. The Head of Delegations of the Republic of Turkey (on behalf of Asia Group), the Republic of Senegal (on behalf of African Group) and the Arab Republic of Egypt (on behalf of the Arab Group) delivered on behalf of their respective group, vote of thanks to the Government and People of the Syrian Arab Republic for hosting the 6th Session of the ICTM and the excellent conditions for the holding of the conference.
12. His Excellency Prof. Ekmeleddin Ihsanoglu, Secretary General of the OIC, in his opening address expressed gratitude to H.E. Mr. Bashar Al-Assad, President of the Syrian Arab Republic and his Government for their generous initiative to host Sixth Session of the ICTM and for all the arrangements made for ensuring its success. He emphasized that the development of the tourism sector in the OIC Member States is firmly bound on a direct course towards achieving the objectives of The OIC Ten-Year Programme of Action. He pointed out that the number of international tourist arrivals in the OIC countries increased significantly to an average annual growth rate of 7.1%. This rate was higher than the world average and the averages of the traditional tourist-receiving regions of Europe and the Americas during the same period. The Secretary General also underscored that despite achievements of the OIC Member States, a large part of the tourism potential of the OIC region remained unutilized. In this regard he expressed his confidence that the Sixth Session of the ICTM will provide a significant contribution to strengthen economic and commercial cooperation among the OIC Member States, including tourism sector. The statement of the OIC Secretary General is attached in Annex-IV.

13. In his address at the inaugural ceremony, H.E. Mohammed Naji Otri, the Prime Minister of the Syrian Arab Republic, who represented H.E. Mr. Bashar Al-Assad, President of the Arab Republic of Syria highlighted the importance of tourism as a vehicle of rapprochement between peoples and cultures, and as means to convey the message of tolerance and project the authentic and radiant civilizational image of Islam and to redress the distorted image spread around by certain Western media about Islam and Muslim societies; in addition to it being one of the cardinal pillars of the economies of countries worldwide, with the sector of tourism having achieved a prime position for all states in the diversification of their financial revenues, in feeding their public treasuries, providing job opportunities for their youth and upgrading infrastructures, services and urban development. H.E. the Prime Minister laid stress on the need to adopt a strategic plan in the area of tourism and to see to its early implementation. He also insisted on the need to initiate a debate on the current status of tourism in the Islamic countries, on ways to develop it and to evolve practical solutions to obstacles standing in its way, in addition to exchanging experience and benefiting from each other's successful experiments in marketing, training, diversifying and further developing tourist products and services, to facilitate entry procedures to all Islamic countries and to cooperate in the launch of tourist projects and integrated cities. The address is attached in Annex V.
14. The Meeting elected the following Members of the Bureau:
  - Chairman: Syrian Arab Republic
  - Vice Chairman: Republic of Turkey
  - Vice Chairman: Republic of Cameroon
  - Vice Chairman: State of Palestine
  - Rapporteur: Republic of Azerbaijan
15. The Meeting adopted its Agenda and Work Program, which are attached in Annex – VI and VII, respectively.
16. The Minister of Culture and Tourism of the Republic of Azerbaijan (in his capacity as Chairman of the 5<sup>th</sup> Session of the ICTM) presented a documentary film on the activities and developments undertaken since the Fifth Session of the ICTM, held in Baku, Republic of Azerbaijan, on 9-12 September 2006. Particularly, the presentation highlighted the International Scientific Conference on “Role of Tourism in the Economies of OIC Countries”, held on 21-22 June, 2007 in Baku; Forum of Silk Road Tour Operators of Islamic Countries, also held in Baku on 13 April, 2008; an International Seminar on “Development of E-Tourism Technologies in Islamic Countries” held in Dhaka, Bangladesh, on 22-24 April, 2008, which organized jointly by the Islamic University of Technology in Dhaka and the Ministry of Culture and Tourism of the Republic of Azerbaijan; and a Conference on “Religious and Health Tourism: Organization of Spiritual

and Physical Recreation” held in Nakhchevan, Republic of Azerbaijan, on 20-22 May, 2008.

17. The Chairman of the Senior Officials Meeting (SOM) of the 6<sup>th</sup> Session of the ICTM presented the report on the SOM, held in Damascus, on 29-30 June 2008. The Conference thanked the Governments of the Republic of Indonesia, Malaysia and the Islamic Republic of Iran for their significant role as focal points, in collaboration with the concerned OIC institutions, for tourism facilitation, tourism marketing and research and training in tourism, respectively, and appreciated the reports submitted by them in following up of the actions carried out in their respective fields. The meeting adopted the report of the SOM which is attached in Annex-VIII.
18. During the General Debate the delegations raised issues related to the creation of a OIC web site dedicated to tourism in OIC official languages; the framework for facilitation of tourist visa arrangements, including possibility of issuing electronic visa; the protecting of the true image of Islam through tourism activities and developing unified approach among the Member States; the increased role of the private sector in tourism development; the promotion of student exchange programs among the Member States; the using of the OIC permanent missions in Western countries as an effective tool for dissemination of information about the tourist potentials of OIC Member States; the demonstration of solidarity of the OIC Member States against the unilateral sanctions imposed upon some Member States; the development of tourism as an important poverty alleviation tool; the promotion of ecotourism and protection of the environment; exchange of information among the Member States; and etc. It was emphasized that there is a need to debate and to address all these issues at the OIC level.
19. The Meeting examined and adopted the Framework for Development and Cooperation in the Domain of Tourism between OIC Member States, which was initially titled as the Strategic Plan for Development of Tourism in OIC Member States by the OIC Second Experts Group Meeting on Tourism Development, held in May 2007 in Istanbul, Republic of Turkey. The Framework shall include, *inter alia*, the following objectives: to streamline a concrete common objective in the area of cooperation among Member States in the field of tourism; to portray the true image of Islam and the Islamic World; to substantially develop tourists exchange from countries non-member States of the OIC towards the Member States of the OIC; to significantly increase the share of Member States in international tourism; and to adjust, whenever required the common policies and programmes related to tourism development, on international fluctuations of energy and food markets; and to make a new tabulation to the reports based on activities and programmes.

20. The conference designates the following OIC Member States to be members of the Coordination committee for the implementation of the Development and Cooperation in the Domain of Tourism between OIC Member States.

Chairman = Republic of Turkey  
 Members = Republic of Cameroon and  
 Republic of Senegal (Representing the African Group)

Arab Republic of Egypt and  
 Republic of Tunisia (Representing the Arab Group)  
 Republic of Azerbaijan and  
 Malaysia (Representing the Asian Group)  
 State of Palestine as Permanent Member  
 Arab Republic of Syria, Chairman of the 6<sup>th</sup> ICTM  
 Islamic Republic of Iran as future Chairman of 7<sup>th</sup> ICTM  
 The Secretary General of the OIC or his Representative.

21. The Conference mandated the Coordination Committee to work out plans and programmes with a view of ensuring effective implementation of the Framework for Development and Cooperation in the Domain of Tourism between OIC Member States taking into account the Framework and the discussions on the subject matter. The Framework document is attached in Annex-IX. The Coordination Committee was also mandated to include performance mechanism and evaluation on the implementation of the Framework every two years and submit its reports to the Islamic Conference of Tourism Ministers through the General Secretariat of the OIC.
22. The Conference welcomed the offer made by the Islamic Republic of Iran to host the Seventh Session of the ICTM in 2010 and invited the Member States to actively participate in the Conference.
23. The Conference noted with satisfaction the noteworthy efforts made by the OIC Secretary General in the implementation of the decisions and recommendations of the Islamic Conferences of Tourism Ministers as well as other meetings organized by the OIC Member States and institutions in the area of tourism. As a result, the Conference gave mandate to the Secretary General to follow up on the implementation of the resolutions decided at the Conference.
24. The Conference further adopted two Resolutions: one on the Coordination and Development of Tourism Activities among the OIC Member States; and the other on the Sustainable Tourism Development in a Cross-border Network and Protected Areas in West Africa; as well as the Damascus Declaration. These documents are attached in Annex-X, XI and XII, respectively.

25. The Meeting expressed its profound gratitude to H.E. Mr. Bashar Al-Assad, the President of the Syrian Arab Republic for having patronized the Sixth Session of the ICTM and for all the facilities accorded to all delegations since they arrived in the historic and cultural city of Damascus.
26. The Meeting also expressed its gratitude to the Government and people of Syrian Arab Republic for the warm welcome and generous hospitality extended to the participants and for the excellent arrangements made to ensure the success of the Meeting.
27. The meeting finally expressed its thanks to the General Secretariat of the OIC under the able leadership of its Secretary General H.E. Prof. Ekmeleddin Ihsanoglu, for their dedicated and tireless efforts in steering the 6<sup>th</sup> ICTM.
28. At the end of the proceedings, the participants addressed their thanks to the Chairman of the 6<sup>th</sup> Session of the ICTM and congratulated him for his excellent steering of the debates.

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