



**Statement by Mr. Syed Shakeel Shah
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Ministers, National Focal Points, Development Partners, Colleagues

Good morning!

1. On behalf of the Government of Pakistan, I thank the Government of Kazakhstan, ADB, and the CAREC Secretariat for organizing this year's CAREC Ministerial Conference and making excellent arrangements.
2. As we gather here in the beautiful city of Astana for 23rd ministerial, CAREC has established itself as a strong voice for regional economic integration and regional approaches to common goods. It has developed a convening power to bring together regional governments, civil society and people for unified action.
3. Pakistan attaches great importance to **regional connectivity initiatives, as they create new opportunities for development and economic growth**. This commitment is reflected in the successful recent hosting of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization meeting in Islamabad¹. Pakistan's commitment to regional connectivity is also highlighted in successful implementation of China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) projects, which have **significantly upgraded the country's transport, energy, and digital infrastructure**. This experience offers valuable insights for the CAREC region as it seeks to connect markets, optimize resources, and promote shared prosperity.
4. Since its inception in 2001, the **CAREC program has achieved many milestones** including establishment of institutional structures, approval of various sector strategies, forming partnerships, developing strategic frameworks and holding regular meetings and workshops. Pakistan believes that **CAREC program's role and footprint in the development and implementation of the regional portfolio in Pakistan can be further enhanced to realize its actual potential to deepen its integration in the region**. Pakistan sincerely hopes that the Midterm Review (MTR) will strategically review and re-align priorities for enhanced effectiveness of initiatives on all CAREC clusters. Also, geo-strategic constraints like exclusion of Afghanistan has led to stalling of many initiatives, including development of corridor 5 and 6, which are of particular interest for Pakistan.

Development partners need to develop work-around strategies to restart projects of regional importance. We heard yesterday that projects like CASA 1000 are being put back on track, which is a very welcome news.

5. I sincerely hope that the theme of this Ministerial Conference that is “**building a more integrated and resilient CAREC region**” will provide another opportunity to translate the knowledge and ideas accumulated through numerous events into planning and designing of vibrant projects that are the essence of regional connectivity initiatives to realize the spirit of the theme of the MC. There is a lot of scope for increasing Intra-regional trade, including transit trade, regional energy markets, digitization and tourism, to name a few. More focus on soft infrastructure, like early operationalization of CAREC Advanced Transit System and Information Common Exchange for all CAREC member countries can go a long way in facilitating regional trade. Pakistan would like to be part of CATS pilot. I am pleased to informed that Pakistan has joined and successfully integrated into eTIR , the paperless operation of the United Nations TIR Convention (the so-called eTIR) - the only global customs transit system, facilitating trade and the seamless and secure movement of goods across borders. CAREC Program can assist member countries in joining this system, that will greatly improve efficiencies at border crossing points along CAREC corridors. Pakistan has also integrated with e-phyto hub of International Plant Protection Convention, which is helping in facilitating trade in plant products. CAREC countries can learn from this experience for increasing their regional and international trade in plant products.

Let me now address the main deliverable for today, the **Midterm Review of the CAREC 2030 Strategy**.

6. Pakistan supports the CAREC 2030 Midterm Review² recommendations, particularly those advocating for a more **focused project pipeline and a commitment to transformational initiatives acquiring more focus as suggested in the MTR**. By concentrating on high-impact projects, CAREC can better utilize its resources and expertise to deliver meaningful benefits across the region. Pakistan sincerely believes that MTR will help program to make course correction wherever needed.
7. Additionally, we recognize the importance of tailoring CAREC’s approach to **each country’s unique context within the overarching theme of regional integration**, as recommended by the MTR. A more adaptive and responsive CAREC Program—one that addresses individual country needs, establishes open communication with national stakeholders, fully involves in project inception, design, and monitoring stages, effectively captures outputs from working groups, and maintains transparent communication with development partners. The MTR’s recommendation for a **comprehensive action plan with defined timelines is especially important**, setting the stage for a collective commitment to high-impact regional cooperation.

Now turning to the **Climate Change related efforts**:

8. **Pakistan greatly appreciates CAREC’s enhanced focus on climate change**. It has emerged as **the defining crisis of our time, and it is happening even more quickly than we feared**. Climate crisis is fueling environmental degradation, natural disasters, weather extremes, food and water insecurity and economic disruption. **The CAREC region is particularly vulnerable to adverse impacts of climate change**.

9. Pakistan **experienced a series of climate change induced extreme weather events** over the last two decades despite its minimal carbon footprint. The catastrophic floods of 2022 inflicted colossal loss of lives, livelihoods, property and infrastructure. Articulating a **common strategic vision** for a **resolute collective action** to fight the rapidly unfolding climate crisis is the need of the hour. Other aspects of environment, like air quality in some major cities in Pakistan, as well as threats to country's unique hydrology due to melting of glaciers pose a real and present challenge for Pakistan. Pakistan fully endorses CAREC's climate change action plan and establishment of Climate and Sustainability Project Preparatory Fund and expects that the initiatives will leverage approaches and finances for climate action. The four action areas of CAREC Climate Change Action Plan cover important areas of Climate Risk Preparedness, and Health, Water-Energy-Food Security Nexus, Low-Carbon Growth and CAREC Climate Platform covers key areas of climate action relevant for the region.
10. Pakistan proposes a simple and swift mechanism for supporting the feasibility of preparing bankable climate-related projects. Additionally, we recommend that the CCAP **prioritize financing mechanisms** tailored to the specific vulnerabilities of each member state, with a primary **focus on adaptation and resilience-building**.

Let me now touch upon the **Revitalization Plan for the CAREC Institute**

11. In line with the critical role of CAREC Institute (CI) as envisioned in the Inter-Governmental Agreement (IGA)³, CI needs to enhance its role as a **premier knowledge hub, focusing on actionable, demand-driven research that addresses national priorities and informs policy decisions**.
12. Preparation of the concept note for revitalization of CAREC Institute (CI) is a welcome development. I would like to make a few observations. More discussion will be held in governing council meeting tomorrow.

Excellencies,

13. **In conclusion**, I would reaffirm Pakistan's continued support to CAREC Program and CAREC Institute for reinvigorating their respective roles in deepening regional economic cooperation and integration in the face of enormous challenges.

Once again, I wish to convey thanks to the Government of Kazakhstan for excellent arrangement and chairmanship of the program for current year, while conveying best wishes to next year's Chair of Kirgiz Republic. I would also like to convey my appreciation to Dr. Lyaziza and her team at CAREC Secretariat for meticulous arrangements and excellent support to member countries.