



Statement by Laziz Kudratov
Minister, Ministry of Investments, Industry and Trade, Uzbekistan
24th Ministerial Conference
Central Asia Regional Economic Cooperation Program
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Dear Mr. Kasymaliev,
Dear Mr. President Kanda,
Honourable Ministers,
Dear Friends and Partners,

First of all, I would like to express my deep gratitude to the Asian Development Bank and the Central Asia Regional Economic Cooperation Program for their consistent efforts in strengthening economic connectivity, sustainable development and integration of our region.

Special words of gratitude to the organizers and host country for the high level of preparation and holding of the current Ministerial Conference. This forum has become an important platform for an open and meaningful dialogue, where the countries of the region jointly form an agenda for sustainable growth and prosperity in Central Asia.

Over the years, the CAREC program has implemented more than 270 projects totaling more than \$50 billion, covering the areas of transport, energy, trade, digitalization, and human capital development. These results are clear evidence that our partnership brings real benefits and tangible results to millions of people in the region.

This has been a busy year for CAREC. We are pleased to note that all CAREC activities scheduled for this year are being successfully implemented with the active and engaged participation of countries.

This made it possible to prepare and submit a number of important documents for consideration and adoption by the current conference in a timely and complete manner.

The agenda of the CAREC Ministerial Conference reflects a major shift in this year's CAREC priorities, which focus on specific projects and regional cooperation initiatives.

At the same time, we are all aware that Central Asia is facing new global challenges – climate change, water scarcity, food insecurity risks, vulnerable energy infrastructure, and limited transport connectivity.

With your permission, I would like to outline a number of initiatives that, in our opinion, can make a significant contribution to solving these problems and give a new quality to our cooperation within CAREC.

The first area is green and sustainable energy. Large-scale projects are already being implemented in Uzbekistan with ADB and other partners: over the past three years alone, more than 2 GW of solar and wind power plants have been built and launched, and by 2030 the share of green energy will reach 40%.

We propose to intensify work on the creation of a regional energy market within the framework of CAREC in order to improve the efficiency of resource allocation and ensure energy security throughout the region.

The second area is food and water security. Climate change and water scarcity threaten millions of rural people in Central Asia.

In this regard, we propose to create the CAREC Regional Food and Water Resilience Platform, which brings together scientific institutions, donors, and the private sector to invest in modern irrigation technologies, digital farming, and agricultural processing. This will not only reduce climate risks, but also strengthen the food independence of our countries.

The third area is transport and logistics. Over the past five years, Uzbekistan's trade turnover with the countries of the region has almost doubled, but the transit potential remains far from being exhausted.

We propose to focus on the digitalization of borders, the modernization of transport corridors, and the development of multimodal hubs. In particular, the development of the Trans-Afghan and Trans-Caspian routes, with the support of ADB and CAREC, will open up new routes to the Indian Ocean and Europe, strengthening the connectivity of Central Asia with global Markets.

The fourth area is the development of financing and the private sector. To achieve sustainable growth in the region, it is necessary to increase the involvement of private capital in the implementation of infrastructure and energy projects.

We propose to make wider use of blended finance mechanisms to attract grant and private investment in projects on renewable energy sources, infrastructure modernization and development of the agricultural sector. ADB and the CAREC program can play a key role in mobilizing such resources, providing significant financial and social impacts.

The fifth area is digital transformation and human capital development. The main value of Central Asia is people. Uzbekistan, together with the CAREC Institute, is ready to initiate the Digital CAREC program aimed at developing digital skills, supporting women entrepreneurs, introducing telemedicine and online education. This is an investment in the future that will create new jobs and strengthen the social sustainability of the region.

Dear Colleagues,

Our initiatives are aimed not just at the implementation of individual projects, they create a systemic response to the main challenges of the 21st century:

- climate risks;

- food shortages;
- energy instability;
- Disruption of logistics links;
- and inequality of access to knowledge and finance.

By implementing these initiatives together with CAREC, ADB, and other IFIs, we can transform Central Asia from a vulnerable region to a source of sustainable growth, new technologies, and human development.

Uzbekistan is ready for a close partnership, for co-financing priority projects and for coordinating regional efforts. We are confident that through joint actions we will be able to lay the foundation for long-term prosperity and stability for the entire region.

In general, the delegation of Uzbekistan supports the documents submitted for consideration and approval by the Ministerial Conference and will actively participate in the implementation of the agreements reached.

Thank you for your attention.