



1st Tourism Ministerial Meeting of Countries along the Silk Road Economic Belt

Xi'an, Shaanxi, China
Wyndham Grand Xi'an Hotel
18-20 June, 2015

Minutes

Meeting jointly organized by World Tourism Organization (UNWTO), China National Tourism Administration (CNTA) and People's Government of Shaanxi Province

Friday 19 June

Watch Part I of the Meeting video online:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FyY3IJpoahE&index=8&list=PL1J3wwM1RSVGwdyMYW0Ht1EA7CAKQxTM3>

Opening Remarks by Mr. Li Jinzao, Chairman of China National Tourism Administration (CNTA)

China National Tourism Administration (CNTA) has enjoyed vigorous support from UNWTO and Secretary-General Mr. Taleb Rifai as well as assistance from different departments of Shaanxi Province. On behalf of CNTA and China's tourism industry, extended appreciation to UNWTO and Secretary-General Mr. Taleb Rifai, and warm welcome to all the distinguished guests coming all the way to attend this event.

In his land and maritime Silk Road initiative, Chinese President Xi Jinping stressed the importance of Silk Road tourism and hand-in-hand development of tourism cooperation and connectivity. Today's Silk Road is not only a long-standing road for commerce, but also a golden travel route for tourists around the world. It is well-known for its large populations, splendid cultures, beautiful landscapes and numerous cultural and historical sites. Nearly 500 sites of world cultural and natural heritage are located along the Silk Road, accounting for half of the world total. Therefore, Silk Road tourism has great potentials and bright prospects.

At the same time, Silk Road tourism market is not integrated, travel remains inconvenient and tourist flow is imbalanced due to restraints in transport, visa policy, marketing, and safety and security. Take China for example, Chinese tourists visiting other countries along the Silk Road only account for one fifth of its total out-bound tourists.

Themed on "the Building of an Integrated Tourism Market along the Silk Road", this meeting will discuss such issues as expanding the scale of interchange of visitors, raising the level of travel facilitation, conducting joint marketing, and boosting the quality of tourism service and management.

The theme and topics are in line with the current development of Silk Road tourism and up to the needs of countries along the Silk Road in their tourism development. I'm confident that the theme and topics can help us lay a good foundation for building a new platform for Silk Road tourism cooperation. Given differences in their stages of development, cultures, tourism resources, ways of thinking and approaches in tourism development, countries along the Silk Road naturally have divergent aspirations in their tourism cooperation. Centered on the theme and topics and in light of the principles of seeking common ground while putting aside differences, complementarity and mutual benefit, participating countries need to identify where our interests converge,

accommodate comfort levels of each side, and work together to achieve common prosperity of tourism markets in countries along the Silk Road.

Opening Remarks by Mr. Taleb Rifai, Secretary-General, World Tourism Organization (UNWTO)

The concept of Silk Road was established a long time ago, and it should be given a new life in the modern world. To kick off discussions of substance, these are the three areas UNWTO believes should be focused on for the Silk Road Economic Belt tourism initiative:

1. Infrastructure

Currently there are significant infrastructure gaps along the Silk Road Economic belt. Connectivity is still limited across the regions and continues to affect tourism growth. UNWTO encourages the Silk Road countries to create a positive business environment for supporting air route development, cross-border railway and highway infrastructure; and to work on improving the transport conditions for domestic and international travel.

2. Visa facilitation

UNWTO research shows clearly that visa facilitation is central to stimulating growth and job creation through tourism. Many countries have advanced visa facilitation policies by implementing regional agreements, outsourcing visa processing, issuing visas on arrival and establishing e-visa systems. These measures make a welcome contribution to increasing the 'openness' of the Silk Road and breaking down the barriers for travel. The meeting is an opportunity for participating countries to share best practices, promote openness and gaining momentum for a 'common visa' for the Silk Road.

3. Regional cooperation

The ancient Silk Road was a network of routes promoting integration, exchange and dialogue; a network which contributed to the common prosperity and development of humankind for almost two millennia.

Let us continue to embrace the Silk Road and the opportunities it presents, particularly in terms of strengthening regional cohesion, solidarity and peace. In this regard, it is important to create effective mechanisms of coordination as part of regional integration policies.

Mr. Rifai thanked CNTA for leading this initiative and bringing together such a wide representation of the Silk Road countries. The meeting marked a new milestone in the development of tourism along the Silk Road and UNWTO looks forward to see tourism become one of the pillar of the Silk Road Economic Belt.

Ministerial Discussion on Topic 1: Expanding the scale of interchange of visitors and raising the level of travel facilitation

The Silk Road Economic Belt is a regional network that opens up new opportunities for trade and tourism development. Ministers will be asked to comment on what they see the most effective strategies for expanding the scale of tourist exchange, raising the level of travel facilitation and improving the environment for tourism development and cooperation among all countries along the Silk Road.

Indonesia:

Indonesia recognizes the importance of cultural heritage tourism as a tool for deepening regional cooperation. To ensure our commitment to boost the programme, Indonesia puts forward two proposals:

- i. Focus on sea or maritime routes, not only land routes (Fuzo to South East Asian countries, India, Africa, Middle East, Europe).
- ii. Visa facilitation is a priority identified by 5th UNWTO Silk Road Ministers' Meeting and Indonesia invites all countries to facilitate visas for global positive economic impact. To implement its commitment, Indonesia now has a visa free policy for 45 countries, 6 of those 45 are members of Silk Road Programme (China, Japan, South Korea, Russia, Italy, Spain)

Bulgaria:

Expanding the scale of the interchange of visitors is crucial in removing barriers to growth along the Silk Road. This can be achieved through festivals, creative industries and incorporating other routes such as maritime Silk Road. The major challenge is to safeguard cultural and natural heritage sites, and capacity building programmes focused on destination management and heritage conservation need to be implemented in regional areas to help

diversify business and reduce seasonality. Both shared and unique values need to be appreciated and preserved. Silk Road should remain a crossroad of exchange and development. Building links between people along the routes is key to promoting sustainable development by education, creative activities and sustainable tourism. Public private partnerships for joint marketing initiatives can showcase Silk Road destinations products to travel trade, travel consumers and potential investors.

Travel facilitation is one of the main concerns, inefficient policies impact negatively on growth. Improved policy alignment and further liberalization should lead to Silk Road multi-entry visa which will trigger growth. Active collaboration between airlines and airports and aviation ministries must be promoted. Bulgaria was an active player in Destination Europe 2020 which defined a long term strategy for establishing Europe as a destination. Bulgaria is also a member of the China operation group in the European Travel Commission which aims to increase inbound numbers from China.

Ministerial Discussion on Topic 2: Conducting joint marketing and carrying out the program of “Visit the Silk Road”

The Ministers were asked to comment on how to conduct joint marketing and build the brand of Silk Road Tourism, carry out the program of ‘Visit the Silk Road ’, promote countries along the Silk Road as one tourism destination, attract more tourists from outside the region.

Jordan:

For the success of the Silk Road, we must work as one. With regards to branding – a unified brand for all nations involved including a logo for marketing tourism product is needed. This will create initiative among other nations about the importance of the Silk Road programme. This could also be used for a website and brochures to initiative additional information and encourage trade to market the Silk Road and its heritage sites. If we work collectively we can encourage our nationals to travel to other Silk Road destinations. China could be one of the leading countries to take this initiative. As we understand, China’s outbound tourism has been growing continuously. By promoting intra-regional travel we will be able to promote our Silk Road initiative. We should highlight one distinct destination per country, to encourage people to travel between destinations.

Mongolia

The Government regards tourism as a highly priority sector for the development of Mongolia. Mongolia has a unique history and environment for the future development of tourism. Mongolia participated in ITB Berlin as Partner Country and Mongolia would like to make this a platform for public private sector development in the future. Joint promotion at major fairs such as ITB and WTM are key priorities for all Silk Road countries. Mongolia is establishing a Silk Road promotion unit under the Ministry of Environment and Green Development, to develop a Mongolian Silk Road corridor connecting Mongolia with China and Central Asian countries. Mongolia is pleased to announce that author and explorer Mr Tim Cope is going to be invited as a Silk Road tourism ambassador for Mongolia. Silk Road countries need a shared vision for peace and economic benefits and cultural heritage to be shared amongst all the nations. We must work together to establish strategic partnership for joint marketing to support our Silk Road brand.

Armenia

A shared vision and active, productive cooperation between all stakeholders is needed at public and private levels for the success of the Silk Road. Familiarisation trips should be organized on the Silk Road for all representatives from public and private sector as well as press.

The President of Armenia visited China and the two presidents agreed to enhance cooperation, including on Silk Road tourism. Now they are looking at engaging private sector and organizing more fam trips.

ST-EP Foundation

MDGs aimed to cut poverty in half by 2015. There has been a lot of success and this year the SDGs for 2030 will be launched. The Silk Road is an economically viable project. ST-EP Foundation has been focused on tourism as a means for alleviating poverty and ST-EP Foundation is willing to pledge a small amount of funding for the creation of a Silk Road logo. A small group of countries and people should develop a plan for a Visit Silk Road year to be established. This type of marketing initiative has been very successful in Korea in the past.

Hungary

There are six major topics between China and the 16 Central and Eastern European (CEE) countries and Hungary is responsible for tourism. 2105 is the year of tourism promotion between China and the CEE countries. No doubt, the Silk Road project is the largest tourism project of the world. Peace, partnership and friendship are the three key notions we need to build on for tourism. Hungary enthusiastically promotes this initiative and will proudly support Visit the Silk Road concept to the other 15 European countries. This will be an important topic at a high level meeting in Bled this September. Hungary's two main suggestions to facilitation tourism- firstly, simplifying visa policies and secondly, developing high speed rail links.

Slovak Republic

The Silk Road depends on connectivity and trade, transportation, security, people to people, diplomacy, etc. should all be considered. UNWTO must be the leader in creating a website, logo and brand and a system of quality for the Silk Road. Slovakia is willing to actively participate in all of this process.

Italy

Four important points to stress: 1) Italy joins Jordan for a unified branding and the development of a common framework to establish the possibility of taking initiatives at national level 2) The second element is to emphasise the need for more cooperation between public and private sector 3) There is a need to reenact the past to remember how the Silk Road was to preserve our heritage, engage local communities and to reenact local cultures. Cultural diversity is what makes us what we are, and enables us to create a very fruitful dialogue 4) Creative industries have to work efficiently with tourism industries. There should be a possibility for all countries at a national level to work with creative industries to develop new routes and products, to tell the story and reach the souls of people.

Cambodia

Tourism is a driving force for stimulating socio-economic rehabilitation and promoting the sustainability of conservation and the protection of natural and cultural resources. Silk Road tourism is all about the reflection of historic past, historic interrelationship and promotion of heritage and relationship between China and other countries. Cultural heritage can achieve sustainability by responsible governance structure, assuring protection, promoting investment and working for poverty alleviation.

Cambodia supports Ambassador Dho's notion for year of Silk Road tourism, this is important for all countries on the Silk Road. Cambodia also thanks the Minister of Indonesia for raising the point about the maritime Silk Road. Cambodia is a full-fledged member of the Most Beautiful Bays in the World Club, we should launch Maritime Silk Road project.

We should build a responsible governance structure. We should further intensify tourism bilateral cooperation relations, support and assist each other for social economic, regional and global, wellbeing of people, harmony, safety and security. The Ministries of Foreign Affairs should work together to improve visa policy. Cambodia has been a leading country in visa issuance, especially for visas on arrival.

Sri Lanka

Sri Lanka had the first tourist from China, the Buddhist monk Faxian, who travelled by foot through India from China to and Sri Lanka believes that this was the first tourist from China.

We could take the example from China with visas for cities. One idea could be to give free visa zones for World Heritage Sites, this would stimulate visitation. Illegal immigration is a challenge, but if you look at the zones and heritage sites, visa free zones this could improve connectivity and travel.

Sri Lanka is keen to get the Silk Road connection back through land or sea, and the Government is considering building a bridge to India from Sri Lanka which will also improve connectivity.

Ministerial Discussion on Topic 3: Deepening regional cooperation and boosting the quality of tourism service and management

The Ministers were asked to comment on how to deepen regional cooperation and boost the quality of tourism services and management and share opportunities of tourism development, and jointly respond to the difficulties and challenges of tourism development.

Russia

Russia and China have strong ties and agreements in the field of economic integration and growth.

Russia has a great tourism potential – according to UNWTO, the overall volume of tourist arrivals has augmented by 13% (in 2013 – a 9% growth, 2014 – 5%, 2015 – a 16% increase during the first quarter of the year). For 2020, Russia seeks to achieve the following objectives: improve tourist infrastructure, and improve the security and consumer rights of tourists. As to foreign arrivals, visitors from the CIS countries represent 60% of the total number.

The Shanghai Cooperation Organization has a working group dedicated to the field of Tourism. In March 2015 there was a meeting between the tourism administrations of the involved countries where a closer cooperation/association was discussed, drawing hereby upon the tight geographic, economic, ethnic and cultural ties. The relations with China are especially strong, there is a permanent work group on both sides dedicated to the coordination of joint actions (bilateral reunions, etc.)

Thanks to tighter cooperation amongst the countries of the region (Asian, Central Asian countries), the arrival of tourists from these regions has grown substantially, for example, tourist arrivals from Mongolia have increased by 10%, and in the last five years, the arrival of Chinese tourists has increased three-fold.

As to the development of Silk Road tourism, Russia proposes:

- Intensify the cooperation and exchange amongst the countries of the region
- Stronger cooperation between involved International Organizations
- Coordinate and facilitate international travel among the involved countries
- Develop tourist infrastructure in order to facilitate travel
- Establish a Silk Road fund aimed at financing projects, work towards a Silk Road Brand, augment the online presence of the Silk Road, etc.

Iran

The Silk Road is a symbol which has overcome geographical, political and cultural obstacles. Regardless of colour and race, people walked and interacted with each other on this route. Silk Road has given us many lessons: 2,000 years ago we could travel the Silk Road without visas – the lesson from that is that we should improve visa facilitation. Iran as an important part of the Silk Road is determined to use this potential. Cultural interaction and cooperation between the nations of the Silk Road, adding to economic, social, cultural benefits, has social consequences. By creating a working group of relevant authorities, Iran is planning to facilitate visas for tourists, particular for Silk Road country nations. It is due to increase the visas on arrival from 2 weeks to 4 weeks.

Iran is connected by rail with Turkmenistan and Kazakhstan. A luxury train has arrived from Iran from these countries comprised of European tourists and this event is happening this year too. Iran encourages the development of the road to connect from rail from east to west, so that we can create Silk Road by rail. Iran has paid attention to preservation and restoration of the historic monuments of the Silk Road. Iran is trying to get a common inscription on the UNESCO World Heritage List by for the Silk Road.

Sporting competitions by Silk Road co-op, special tours of the Silk Road, food festivals, crafts exposition, are some examples of initiatives that can be implemented. Iran is ready to expand its cooperation with the other countries on the Silk Road.

Georgia

We all agree about the transnational, economic, political and social importance of Silk Road but now we need to enter the new step of Silk Road tourism potential to the world. Potential customers are those living in Silk Road countries and those from outside of the region. We need to identify the philosophy, what does it offer, why should people travel to the Silk Road. What is the main motivation for travel? The scope of the Silk Road in historical,

economic, political and travel context is so significant. The slogan can be connected to a lifetime experience- the route of a lifetime, the travel experience of a lifetime. Tourists could make repeat visits and collect piece by piece the countries to complete the entire Silk Road journey.

Japan

China, Japan and Korea had hosted many Silk Road meetings in the past. A series of cooperation has been initiated since those meetings. Japan agrees it is meaningful to hold Silk Road ministerial meeting, however, further discussion and consultation are needed for the proposed themes and topics.

Afghanistan

Historically, Afghanistan was historically a crossroad of the civilization, culture and values along the Silk Road. It connected China and Central Asia with the Middle East and beyond.

Silk Road connected people for commercial and economic ties, and it also exchanged the ideas, culture, values of civilizations. Today Afghanistan still has significance in terms of connecting countries of the Silk Road.

Afghanistan agrees with Secretary General to boosting trans regional cooperation to enhance tourism.

Organizations such as Shanghai SAARC and ECO have activities and plans to enhance tourism but we have to unify and coordinate all efforts to enhance tourism.

Looking at the historical role Afghanistan played and its present due strategic location along the Silk Road, without Afghanistan, the Silk Road chain is incomplete. There is a need to focus on the comprehensive revival of this connection and through regional cooperation we can boost the tourism industry of the Silk Road.

Pakistan

There is general consensus on one issue, the need for visa facilitation. Pakistan endorses the notion put forward by Sri Lanka.

UNWTO has a very realistic fruitful agenda for tourism promotion as elaborated by UNWTO Secretary General, but there are financial constraints to achieve this agenda. Therefore, Pakistan proposes that a common fund should be created by Member countries for UNWTO to carry out its agenda in a better manner.

UNWTO could also develop a programme for enrolling tourist membership, under the title of 'International Tourism Friends Club' (or any other title). This will generate handsome amounts of funds to execute plans of UNWTO but also to be used to give incentives to tourists for air ticketing and hotel discounts.

Bulgaria

All the countries agree that we need to promote the Silk Road, perhaps we need to think how to fund these exercises. This could be through a common fund, or by public-private partnership, an important step forward after this meeting, is how we can financially back up this initiative, especially if we want to have a common logo, common website, etc.. We are all in favour of having a common promotion, but we need to have the funding to implement it all.

Discussion on the Xi'an Initiative of Tourism Ministerial Meeting of Countries along the Silk Road Economic

Comments made by Ministers:

Indonesia

Regarding the definitions of Silk Road, we often only think of it as from China west, maritime tends to be neglected. Indonesia should be redefined by mentioning both land and sea Silk Road.

Hungary

Regarding point 10, we have to focus on involving as many tourism colleges and universities as possible, because our young people are the future of this whole vision of this Silk Road Economic Belt. Hungary requests that all countries involve the tourism colleges and universities in this project.

Italy

Supports Indonesia to emphasise on the maritime Silk Road elements. Venice is the terminus of the maritime Silk Road and a lot of work is being carried out by the Italian government to promote this.

Watch Part 2 of the Meeting video online (from this part onwards):

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FyY3lJpoahE&index=8&list=PL1J3wwM1RSVGwdyMYW0Ht1EA7CAKQxTM>

Iran

Syria and Iraq are two important Silk Road countries, many of the monuments in these countries are under attack and need our support. Regarding the 3rd paragraph, we would like to emphasise increasing the number of tourists by facilitation, particularly by visas.

Sri Lanka

Regarding carrying capacity, Sri Lanka suggests that UNWTO looks at how we can protect heritage sites from the negative impact of the increasing number of tourists travelling globally.

Mongolia

Mongolia fully supports draft of signed initiative of Silk Road Economic Belt as an outcome of today's meeting. For the success of the Silk Road programme and to reach expected outcome, we definitely need some financial sources. Let us share the experience to establish the new Silk Road project unit under the Ministry of Mongolia. We should also think about common standard for quality and training for staff along the Silk Road.

Armenia

Armenia supports the initiative, this will contribute to intercultural dialogue, cultural diversity, peace and international understanding. Armenia supports the proposal of protecting heritage sites.

UNWTO Secretary-General

1st paragraph, add 'land and maritime' to the text. On paragraph 3, to respond to Iran, we would add 'stepping up travel facilitation, marketing and promotion.' On the issue of cultural protection, add in paragraph 9, 'including the protection of valuable cultural sites'. The last comment, that we take note of Japan's need to refer back to its Ministry.

Adoption of the Xi'an Initiative of Tourism Ministerial Meeting of Countries along the Silk Road Economic Belt

Closing Remarks by Mr. Li Jinzao, Chairman of China National Tourism Administration (CNTA)

All ministers have made very good remarks, shared with us their observation the three topics of today's meeting, and put forward valuable suggestions on Silk Road tourism cooperation.

In this meeting, we have shared with each other experience and insights on tourism development and cooperation, increased understanding and trust, and built important consensus for tourism cooperation and development in the future. We agreed that promoting Silk Road tourism cooperation serves the common interests of participating countries and would create important opportunities for their development. In particular, we discussed and adopted Xi'an Initiative of Tourism Ministerial Meeting of Countries along the Silk Road Economic Belt. It will become an important guiding document for tourism cooperation among countries along the Silk Road.

It is hoped that we will seize this ministerial meeting as an opportunity, continue our efforts in building an international cooperation platform for Silk Road tourism, gradually expand the interchange of visitors in Silk Road tourism, promote travel facilitation in an orderly way, add more and more tourism products, improve tourism service quality, and jointly create a new future in Silk Road tourism cooperation. CNTA accepts the proposal from Russian delegate on establishing a Silk Road tourism website; let us work together to realize this aim.

On behalf of CNTA and China's tourism industry, takes this opportunity to express appreciation to all the distinguished guests here for their support and contribution to this ministerial meeting. Thanks Mr. Zoltán

Somogyi for your moderation. Also thanks CPC Shaanxi Provincial Committee, Shaanxi Provincial Government, Shaanxi Provincial Tourism Administration and other departments for the wonderful organization and preparation for this meeting.

Wishes all a pleasant stay in Xi'an, China.

Conclusion by Mr. Zoltán Somogyi, Executive Director for Programme and Coordination, UNWTO

Thanks Chairman Li for highly comprehensive summary of the outcomes of this important meeting. Extends gratitude to the Ministers and representatives for attending the meeting, to co-hosts China National Tourism Administration and UNWTO for their efforts and contribution to the success of the meeting, and to the Shaanxi Provincial People's Government and Shaanxi Provincial Tourism Administration in particular for their warm and considerate reception.