

MEETING OF THE CORE GROUP OF SAARC IMMIGRATION AUTHORITIES AND  
VISA EXPERTS TO REVIEW AND FINALIZE THE RFPs FOR SAARC VISA  
EXEMPTION SCHEME, SAARC SECRETARIAT, 28 JUNE 2018

STATEMENT BY H. E. MR. AMJAD HUSSAIN B. SIAL, SECRETARY GENERAL OF SAARC

Distinguished Delegates,

I wish to extend a very warm welcome to all of you to the SAARC Secretariat for this Meeting of the Core Group of the SAARC Immigration Authorities and Visa Experts.

As you are aware, the Fifth SAARC Summit held in the Maldives in November 1990 had decided to launch the SAARC Visa Exemption Scheme. The Scheme became operational in 1992. This is considered as a milestone step towards enhancing people-to-people contacts in the region. It is essential for promoting regional integration; economic relations and tourism. The ultimate goal is to have a visa free regime in the SAARC region.

The First Meeting of the Core Group was held in October 2017 in the SAARC Secretariat to deliberate on the RFPs for development of a security software for the SAARC Visa Exemption Scheme. The RFPs are prepared by our Consultant M/s Three60 as mandated by the Eighth Meeting of SAARC Immigration Authorities held in July 2017 in Colombo.

The First Meeting of the Core Group, having considered all the documents, directed the SAARC Secretariat to address the observations of the Member States and the process for inviting tenders may be initiated according to SAARC's financial regulations and international standards. I am happy to inform you that the observations/inputs of the Member States have been reflected in the revised RFPs and circulated among the Member States.

The Secretariat had also circulated a Paper on the steps to be taken on the SAARC Visa Exemption Scheme project as suggested by M/s Three60 for views/comments of the Member States. The views/comments on and concurrence to the Paper have been received from four Member States. I request the remaining Member States to convey their views/comments and concurrence during this Meeting so that the bidding process may be initiated at the earliest.

I am confident that this meeting will make important recommendations for smooth, efficient and effective functioning of the revised SAARC Visa Exemption Scheme and for ensuring speedy implementation of the new electronic visa, contributing to the overall goal of facilitating and enhancing people-to-people contacts across the region.

We are committed to provide efficient services to the Member States for further strengthening the SAARC process. We have introduced a number of measures in this regard. The Secretariat has been completely renovated. After completion of retrofitting work by the Government of Nepal by August 2018, we will be able to host even Ministerial Meetings at the Secretariat. Our IT infrastructure has also been upgraded. You can see this hall equipped with state-of-the-art video conferencing facility.

The Secretariat is at the disposal of the distinguished delegates for making this Meeting a success and your stay here comfortable.

I am personally available for any consultation. I look forward to seeing you again during our working luncheon today and welcoming you to a dinner this evening. All of you are cordially invited.

I wish the distinguished delegates fruitful deliberations and a pleasant stay in this beautiful city of Kathmandu.

Thank you.

\*\*\*