

D-8 Summit: Strengthening Global Partnerships

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(Views expressed in the brief are those of the author, and do not represent those of ISSI)



The 11th Developing-8 (D-8) Summit was held in Cairo, Egypt, on 19 December 2024, with the thematic focus on “Investing in Youth and Supporting SMEs: Shaping Tomorrow’s Economy.” The Summit was preceded by the 21st Session of the D-8 Council of Ministers and the 48th Session of the D-8 Commission. The theme highlighted the unified vision of D-8 countries aimed at enhancing economic cooperation and confronting critical challenges.¹

Egyptian President Abdel Fattah al-Sisi chaired the Summit. The summit was attended by Bangladesh’s Chief Advisor Professor Muhammad Yunus; Indonesian President Prabowo Subianto; Iranian President Masoud Pezeshkian; Pakistan’s Prime Minister Muhammad Shehbaz Sharif; Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan; Malaysia’s Higher Education Minister Zambry Abdul Kadir; Secretary-General of the D-8 Ambassador Isiaka Abdulqadir Imam; Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas; Lebanon’s caretaker Prime Minister Najib Mikati; Azerbaijan’s Prime Minister Ali Asadov;

¹ “D-8 summit: Sisi says global landscape exacerbated by rise of protectionism, double standards”, Egypt Today, December 19, 2024.
<https://www.egypttoday.com/Article/1/137139/D-8-summit-Sisi-says-global-landscape-exacerbated-by-rise>

Secretary General of the OIC (Organization of Islamic Cooperation); Ahmed Aboul Gheit, Secretary General of the League of Arab States; and high-level representative of the United Nations.²

The D-8 Organization for Economic Cooperation (D-8) was established in 1997 as a forum for its member countries from the developing world to work together on resource-sharing, exchanging ideas, and promoting sustainable development initiatives. It is an inter-governmental organization of eight developing countries: Bangladesh, Egypt, Indonesia, Iran, Malaysia, Nigeria, Pakistan, and Türkiye.³ The objective of the Organization is to enhance member states' positions in the global economy, diversify trade relations, promote the participation of developing countries in international decision-making, and improve living standards. Primary areas of collaboration encompass transportation, agriculture, tourism, industry, energy, and trade.⁴

Cairo Declaration

The “Cairo Declaration” issued by the D-8 leaders reiterated their dedication to working together under the leadership of Egypt, following the D-8 Decennial Roadmap for 2020-2030 for enhanced economic cooperation.⁵

Expansion of the D-8

The Declaration endorsed the expansion of the Organization in accordance with Articles 3 and 4 of the Charter and extended a warm welcome to Azerbaijan's on full membership.⁶ This marks the first-ever expansion of the Organization since its establishment, highlighting its growing significance in promoting economic collaboration among member states. The Declaration further tasked the Council of Ministers with overseeing and facilitating the necessary procedures to ensure Azerbaijan's smooth integration into the D-8 framework.

² “D-8 Summit backs membership expansion, names Indonesia host for 2025”, *AA World*, Middle East, December 20, 2024.
<https://www.aa.com.tr/en/middle-east/d-8-summit-backs-membership-expansion-names-indonesia-host-for-2025/3429555>

³ “11th D-8 Summit”, *D-8 Organisation for Economic Cooperation*.
<https://developing8.org/>

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ “Cairo Declaration reaffirms D-8 leaders’ commitment to sustainable development, economic cooperation”, *State Information Service*, December 21, 2024.
<https://www.sis.gov.eg/Story/203753/Cairo-Declaration-reaffirms-D-8-leaders%E2%80%99-commitment-to-sustainable-development%C2%AC-economic-cooperation?lang=en-us>

⁶ “Cairo Declaration sets ambitious goals for D-8 Summit”, *Egypt Today*, December 19, 2024.
<https://www.egypttoday.com/Article/3/137140/Cairo-Declaration-sets-ambitious-goals-for-D-8-Summit>

Implementation of Key D-8 Agreements

The Declaration reaffirmed the importance of fully operationalizing key D-8 trade agreements, including the Preferential Trade Agreement (D-8 PTA), the Multilateral Agreement on Administrative Assistance in Customs Matters (D-8 Customs Agreement), and the Agreement on the Simplification of Visa Procedures for Businessmen (D-8 Visa Agreement). These agreements are expected to accelerate economic cooperation, facilitate trade, ease customs procedures, and enhance business mobility, fostering a more integrated and dynamic economic framework. The Declaration emphasized the effective implementation of the D-8 PTA, urging contracting members to complete internal procedures and commence trading without delay while also calling for capacity-building programs to support this process.

Furthermore, it welcomed the adoption of the Dispute Settlement Mechanism (DSM) Protocol, recognizing it as a crucial step in streamlining trade resolution and ensuring the seamless enforcement of agreements. The D-8 Trade Facilitation Strategy was also highlighted as a key measure to simplify customs procedures and trade regulations, reinforcing the Organization's role in global trade and economic collaboration. Furthermore, the transformation of the D-8 PTA into a Comprehensive Economic Partnership Agreement (CEPA) was identified as a means to broaden trade opportunities, attract investment, and drive economic growth, strengthening intra-D-8 trade and deepening economic integration among member states.

Enhancing D-8 Intra-Trade

The “Cairo Declaration” reaffirmed the importance of the effective implementation of the D-8 Preferential Trade Agreement (D-8 PTA), including capacity-building programs for officials. It acknowledged that five contracting members had completed internal procedures and urged others to commence trading under the PTA immediately. A major milestone was Egypt’s ratification of the D-8 PTA, marking the achievement that all D-8 member states are now contracting members of the agreement. The Declaration emphasized the target of US\$ 500 billion in intra-D-8 trade by 2030, as outlined in the D-8 Decennial Roadmap (2020-2030), and supported the expansion of the PTA’s scope to include a wider range of traded products, further enhancing economic cooperation.

It also highlighted the D-8 Trade Ministers Council (TMC) as instrumental in strengthening trade, recognizing past meetings in Bangladesh and Türkiye and announcing Egypt’s hosting of the Fourth TMC in 2025, which will focus on digital trade, e-commerce, and AI-driven technologies. The adoption of the Dispute Settlement Mechanism (DSM) Protocol and the Trade Facilitation Strategy were also recognized as crucial steps in streamlining trade procedures, ensuring smoother and more

efficient economic integration among member states. Strengthening Private Sector Engagement in D-8

The Declaration underscored the importance of private sector-led initiatives in strengthening economic cooperation among D-8 member states. The Declaration also called for closer collaboration with the D-8 Secretariat to assess the feasibility of key initiatives, including the D-8 Payment Card to facilitate seamless financial transactions, the D-8 Creative Economy and Financial Center to support entrepreneurship and innovation, and the D-8 New Generation Barter Trading system to enhance trade flexibility. It further highlighted the role of the D-8 Chambers of Commerce and Industry (D-8 CCI) in boosting investment, cross-border trade, and business-to-business engagement through forums, matchmaking events, and trade missions. These initiatives aimed to enhance economic connectivity, promote innovation, and expand private sector participation within the D-8 framework.

Advancing Research and Innovation in D-8

Pakistan introduced the D-8 Network of Pioneers for Research and Innovation (D-8 NPRI) to enhance scientific collaboration and technology commercialization among Developing-8 (D-8) member states. Chaired by COMSATS University in Islamabad, the initiative connects 28 universities from six member states, fostering joint research and knowledge-sharing. The “Cairo Declaration” recognized Pakistan’s efforts and encouraged broader participation. Strengthening the D-8 NPRI will boost scientific cooperation and innovation-driven growth. The Declaration also commended Nigeria for successfully hosting the third meeting of the D-8 NPRI in November 2024, reinforcing the network’s expansion and impact.

Youth Empowerment and Sustainable Development

The Declaration also emphasized the pivotal role of youth in economic growth, diplomacy, and technology across Developing-8 (D-8) member states. A key initiative was the establishment of the D-8 Youth Council, which Bangladesh will host in Dhaka, with a call for member states to support its functioning to foster youth cooperation within the D-8. The Declaration also appreciated Bangladesh for hosting the First Ministerial Meeting on Youth on May 22, 2024, and looked forward to Nigeria hosting the Second Ministerial Meeting on Youth.

Additionally, the Declaration endorsed a Cooperation Action Plan for Youth to enhance collaboration, encouraging joint activities and knowledge-sharing among member states. Iran proposed a mechanism to support youth innovation and entrepreneurship, while the declaration

promoted the role of micro, small, and medium enterprises (MSMEs) in digital trade, e-commerce, and fintech. To strengthen youth engagement in diplomacy, Bangladesh, Pakistan, and Türkiye launched diplomatic training programs, and Egypt proposed the D-8 Network for Economic Think Tanks to facilitate information exchange, policy recommendations, and capacity building in key areas such as trade facilitation, entrepreneurship, innovation, and the digital economy, further reinforcing economic cooperation among D-8 member states.

Strengthening Global Partnerships

The Declaration reaffirmed the D-8's commitment to strengthening cooperation with international organizations, including the United Nations (UN), the Standing Committee for Economic and Commercial Cooperation of the Organization of Islamic Cooperation (COMCEC), United Nations Trade and Development (UNCTAD), the United Nations Industrial Development Organization (UNIDO), the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO), the World Intellectual Property Organization (WIPO), the World Trade Organization (WTO), the United Nations Tourism (UN Tourism), the Organization of Islamic Cooperation (OIC), the Islamic Development Bank (IsDB), the Islamic Organization for Food Security (IOFS), the Standards and Metrology Institute of the Islamic Countries (SMIIC), the Islamic Cooperation Youth Forum, the World Tourism Forum Institute, the Economic Cooperation Organization (ECO).⁷ These partnerships aimed to enhance trade, investment, food security, digital economy, infrastructure development, and sustainable growth among member states while fostering South-South cooperation and addressing global challenges such as poverty, climate change, and inequality.⁸

New D-8 Leadership: Chairmanship and Secretary-General

The “Cairo Declaration” also marked a leadership transition in the D-8, with Indonesia set to assume the Chairmanship and host the 12th D-8 Summit, with details to be announced later. It also confirmed the appointment of Pakistan’s former Foreign Secretary, Ambassador Sohail Mahmood, as the next Secretary-General, beginning January 1, 2026. This is the first time that a Secretary General from Pakistan will assume this position.

⁷ “11th Summit of the D-8 Organization for Economic Cooperation”, *United Nations*, December 19, 2024. <https://www.un.org/sg/en/content/sg/statement/2024-12-19/secretary-generals-message-the-11th-summit-of-the-d-8-organization-for-economic-cooperation>

⁸ “Cairo Declaration reaffirms D-8 leaders’ commitment to sustainable development, economic cooperation”, *State Information Service*, December 21, 2024. <https://www.sis.gov.eg/Story/203753/Cairo-Declaration-reaffirms-D-8-leaders%E2%80%99-commitment-to-sustainable-development%C2-economic-cooperation?lang=en-us>

Opportunities for Pakistan

Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif's participation underscored the importance Pakistan attaches to D-8 and its commitment to upscaling collaboration with developing nations.⁹ The address delivered by Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif at the Summit exuded a message of Pakistan's pragmatic and ambitious approach. Emphasizing the social and economic significance of the youth and Small and Medium Enterprises (SMEs), he pointed out that more than 60% of Pakistan's population comprised of individuals under the age of 30, representing a significant potential for economic growth and innovation.¹⁰ He stressed: "Investing in the youth and SMEs is not just desirable, but indispensable for socio-economic development."

The Prime Minister highlighted the pivotal role of connectivity as a "Force Multiplier" for peace and prosperity. He stressed the establishment of effective intra-trade corridors and supply networks among the member states of the D-8. Further, he described the Islamabad-Tehran-Istanbul Road Transport Corridor as a model initiative, underscoring its capacity to enhance road and transport connections and enable the effective flow of goods among South Asia, Europe, and the Middle East.¹¹ This initiative highlights Pakistan's geopolitical salience and its determination to emerge as an important player in enhancing connectivity and regional trade. The Prime Minister also stressed that through the integration of South Asia with Central Asia, the Middle East, and other regions, Pakistan seeks to enhance regional trade opportunities, attract foreign investment, and promote collaborative growth among its partners.

In addition to fostering economic cooperation, the Summit gave leaders a forum to deliberate on important global issues. There was a Special Session on the humanitarian situation in Gaza and Lebanon where Prime Minister Sharif condemned Israel's aggression and called for an immediate truce.¹² Furthermore, Ambassador Sohail Mahmood's appointment as Secretary General is set to further elevate Pakistan's role in D-8, including through enhanced policy coordination, trade, and regional integration.

⁹ "11th Summit of the D-8 Organization for Economic Cooperation", *United Nations*, December 19, 2024. <https://www.un.org/sg/en/content/sg/statement/2024-12-19/secretary-generals-message-the-11th-summit-of-the-d-8-organization-for-economic-cooperation>

¹⁰ "PM Shehbaz reaches Cairo for D-8 Moot", *Dawn*, December 20, 2024. <https://www.dawn.com/news/1879678/pm-shehbaz-reaches-cairo-for-d-8-moot>

¹¹ Ibid.

¹² "PM for global action on Gaza, Lebanon", *Business Recorder*, December 20, 2024. <https://www.brecorder.com/news/40338677/pm-for->

Conclusion

All in all, the D-8 Summit showcased a unified commitment to fostering economic growth, enhancing multilateral cooperation, and leveraging emerging technologies to address global challenges. The leaders' resolve to implement the 2020-2030 Roadmap and promote inclusive development reflects their dedication to achieving sustainable progress. The "Cairo Declaration" stands as a testament to the group's vision for a resilient and prosperous future for its member states.

For Pakistan, Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif's high-profile participation reflected a focused approach aimed at deepening Pakistan's international engagement and fortifying its economic stability. His perspective on connectivity, commitment to human capital development, and emphasis on regional collaboration aligned effectively with the Organization's overarching objectives. The Prime Minister presented Pakistan as a nation dedicated to growth and development through effective multilateral cooperation. Through the advocacy of youth empowerment and the advancement of SMEs, he underscored Pakistan's commitment to the Summit's theme as well as the long-term, objectives of the Organisation. Furthermore, his active engagement in the Summit proceedings underscored the importance of strategic and collaborative diplomacy as a powerful tool for fostering progress.