STI Forum - Session 6: Advancing Sustainable Development with Women-centred Science and Technology solutions.

Speech – ED Natalia Bayona

- Good afternoon:
  - Dear Excellencies:
    - Ms. Christina Markus Lassen, Ambassador and Permanent Representative of Denmark to the United Nations, and Co-Chair of the STI Forum 2024.
    - Ms. Jelena Begović, Minister of Science, Technological Development and Innovation of Serbia.
    - Ms. Doreen Bogdan-Martin, Secretary-General of the International Telecommunication Union (ITU).
    - Representatives of the United Nations Member States.
  - Dear Representatives from the private sector and non-governmental organizations.
  - Ms. Aree Moon, our esteemed moderator, and fellow high-respondents and panelists.

- It is an honor to be here today at the UN Headquarters representing tourism, youth and women as pivotal figures in the realms of science, technology, and innovation.

- Tourism stands as the most human economic sector:
  - Communities are once again benefiting from tourism economic and social impacts resulting from 1.3 billion international arrivals (2023)\(^1\) and their spillover effect in both mature and emerging destinations.
  - Youth represents 18% of the sector’s employment\(^2\).

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\(^1\) UN Tourism Data Dashboard (2024)
\(^2\) ILO (2023)
And, most significantly, tourism is the primary employer of women accounting for 45% compared to 41% across all industries\(^3\).

- Women are at the heart of every tourism experience, particularly in key sub-sectors such as accommodation and food & beverage\(^4\).
- Today, they are rapidly carving out their space in entrepreneurship and technology.
- For this reason, I am proud to share that UN Tourism’s Innovation Network is witnessing a growing number of female members in each of its programmes.
- While globally only 15% of global tech startup founders are women\(^5\), in tourism tech and social impact solutions, this number rises to an encouraging 24%.
- Despite these inspiring figures, women in the sector still face critical challenges\(^6\): pervasive informality, and wage disparity, amongst others.
- In fact, our analysis of the International Labor Organization (ILO) data base for 65 countries across all regions reveal alarming informality rates of up to 95% to 99% alongside instances where women earn as little as 50% of their male counterparts in certain countries\(^7\).
- Addressing these disparities, UN Tourism promotes more inclusivity and strategically aligns challenges with opportunities for growth. Allow me to elaborate:
  - Focusing on the limited access to resources and gender equality in education and careers, UN Tourism prioritizes education as a cornerstone of its approach and advocates for increased investment in this area.
    - By leading accessible tourism initiatives spanning from high school to graduate levels, the organization leads skill development efforts that are poised to impact salary and career prospects positively in the future.

\(^3\) ILO (2023)  
\(^4\) ILO (2023)  
\(^5\) Startup Genome (2023)  
\(^6\) ILO (2023)  
\(^7\) Based on ILO (2023)
By creating the Tourism Education Toolkit to introduce tourism as a subject in secondary education aiming to strengthen the sector’s appeal as a viable professional career path.

Similarly, the UN Tourism Online Academy, currently offering 50 courses from leading institutions, boasts a student body where 54% are women.

Furthermore, in 2023, UN Tourism introduced a new investment framework. While recognizing the significance of Foreign Direct Investments, this framework places a greater emphasis on funding avenues dedicated to women and technology.

- Addressing underrepresentation in leadership roles and science, technology, and innovation, UN Tourism anticipates economic growth driven by women’s leadership in entrepreneurship:
  - According to our recent Survey on the Gendered Impact of the COVID-19 Pandemic on Tourism Employment found that in key markets such as Costa Rica, Dominican Republic and Mexico, women expressed a heightened intention to pursue entrepreneurship during the pandemic.
  - And they need out support not to leave this path.
  - Moreover, the UN Tourism Women in Tech Startup Competition – the Middle East exemplifies the transformative power of innovation on empowerment. With over 140 participants from the region resulted in 4 winners, all with Artificial Intelligence-based business models.
  - Notably: women have proposed tangible, ready-to-implement solutions to tourism challenges:
    - For over tourism: AI-driven routes to distribute tourism flows in the territory by simultaneously enhancing experiences (such as MyStreetBook from Spain).
    - For waste management: biotech startups to convert organic waste into bioplastics (such as Platus Biotech from USA).
    - Or, for education for fellow women: gamified learning platforms (such as Xenios Academy from the UAE).
  - These are just some examples of the multiple ways tourism and innovation can help women to thrive and foster empowerment.
In brief, adopting a more women-centered approach would also mean a more gender equal tourism innovation ecosystem.

With the sector's vast potential, we believe collective efforts can create a more inclusive environment, offering value-added opportunities for all.

We urge for concerted action to advance in data collection, analysis, education and training, innovation research and development, and targeted financial mechanisms, serving as catalysts for our common future.

Let us not forget that women represent 49.7% of the global population, yet they contribute over 100% in a sector equipped to accelerate their growth in the most human economic sector.