



Opening Remarks

Expert Group Meeting on Sustainable Tourism: Ecotourism, Poverty Reduction and Environmental Protection

United Nations Secretariat, New York, 29-30 October 2013
Conference Room S 2727 – United Nations Secretariat (27th Floor)
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Distinguished guests,

Colleagues,

Friends,

I am very pleased to participate today in the Experts Group Meeting organized by UNDESA in collaboration with the World Tourism Organization (UNWTO) and UNEP amongst other partners.

This event will contribute grandly to our joint advocacy efforts in positioning the importance of the tourism sector in the Global Development Agenda. We would like to particularly thank UNDESA to have been able to bring together such a rich panel of stakeholders and experts in UN Headquarters.

Over the past decades, tourism has experienced continued rapid growth and diversification, becoming one of the fastest-growing economic sectors in the world. Earnings from tourism today equal or even surpass that of oil exports, food products or automobiles, offering a direct entry point into the workforce, particularly for youth and women in urban and rural communities and a diversity of investment opportunities for young entrepreneurial talents.

Tourism has developed into one of the major sectors in international trade, at the same time representing a main income sources for many developing countries, contributing to their development, though not always in a sustainable manner.

Today, more than **one billion people** are on the move. Last year (2012), one seventh of the world's population crossed international borders in a single year. Some four billion more have been on domestic trips within their national borders. One billion tourists mean one billion opportunities. Hundreds of millions of jobs, higher income possibilities, increased investment in infrastructure and countless paths for development.

Tourism is directly responsible for **5% (9% indirect) of global GDP, accounts for 30% of the world's trade in services and employs one out of every eleven people worldwide**. It's a simple formula that's difficult to dispute: one billion tourists mean one billion opportunities. Hundreds of millions of jobs, higher income possibilities, increased investment in infrastructure and countless paths for development.

After a period of extensive work, UNWTO published last October its new long-term forecast **Tourism Towards 2030**. It shows that by 2030, this number will increase to 1.8 billion a year (5 million a day). Today, emerging economies account for 47% of all international tourist arrivals; in 2015 this share will reach 50% and in 2030 (58%), international tourists arrival in DCs will surpass the number of developed economies.

- The number of international tourists visiting the 49 LDCs jumped from 6 million in 2000 to over 20 million in 2012; in 2012 these tourists generated over US\$

14 billion – this represents 6% of all the exports of LDCs and 10% when we consider non-fuel export countries alone.

- Most important - behind these numbers are thousands of jobs; small and medium companies in tourism but also in agriculture and handicrafts; women entrepreneurs; infrastructure development and foreign income.
- Today, tourism is probably one of the sectors where developing countries have the highest competitive advantage and the one that allows them for a stronger participation in the global economy.
- A point in case is no doubt Cape Vert, Maldives and soon Samoa and the role that tourism has played in allowing these countries (SIDS) to be among the few that graduated or will graduate from the LDCs category.
- Addressing this challenge requires a better understanding of the impact and potential of tourism as a tool for development and a strong advocacy among decision markers as we need to strongly place tourism as one of the priorities in international development aid.
- **In this regard, and though it's clear much remain to be done, some key milestones have been reached:**
 - In 2011 Tourism was for the first time included in the LDCs agenda as part of the IPoA stemming from LD CIV in Istanbul;
 - In 2012, for the first time tourism was included in the G20 Leaders Declaration as a sector fuelling jobs; and

- In 2012, a major milestone was achieved with the inclusion of two paragraphs on sustainable tourism in the Rio+20 Outcome document The Future We Want, including in the 10YFP on sustainable consumption and production.
- In 2013, in the 4th Global Aid for Trade Review, tourism has been identified by WTO and OECD, as one of the key 5 sectors with great potential for high impact through *Connecting global firms through tourism value chains*.

Dear Friends,

The recognition of the importance and potential contribution of tourism in national development strategies and in the global development agenda is becoming a reality. We must remember that meeting the needs of today's tourists and host communities while protecting and enhancing opportunities for the future is key.

A heavy responsibility lies on our shoulders – tourism's public and private sector decision makers. A responsibility to make sure that tourism and sustainability advance together hand in hand. And this responsibility – to reconcile economic, social and environmental ambitions –is being increasingly embraced by the tourism sector. This is being **exemplified** by the fact that this event is taking place.

As the leading organization for tourism, the World Tourism Organization endeavours to maximize tourism's contribution to, inter alia, development and international understanding, while minimizing its negative impacts, paying particular attention to the growth potential of developing countries.

But we cannot achieve this mission alone.

Strategic Partnerships for Development, such as the Steering Committee on tourism for development and the Global Partnerships for sustainable tourism will be key framework for moving towards a collective action. The acceleration of the achievement of the MDGs, the Rio+20 implementation plan, the 10YFP and the post 2015 agenda with the SDGs represents a great opportunity for us to pursue our tourism advocacy efforts.

Yet, to achieve this objective, not only tourism should be placed higher in the development agenda and, but **most importantly, the level of assistance in tourism should match the potential the sector has to contribute to the development objectives.** Today, the tourism sector represents a mere 0.13 % of all Official Development Assistance (ODA) and 0.5% of Aid for Trade. **Tourism should be an integral part of the current discussion in the context of Financing for Development.**

When it comes to looking at result-based investment and aid efficiency in allocating Aid for development, it is essential to give developing countries the capacity to fully gain from the benefits the tourism sector offers, to build a better life for all within a people's centered green development model.

We trust that this event will provide the basis for informed decisions on priorities and actions that need to be taken to ensure tourism's ever growing contribution to the three dimensions of sustainable development – economic growth, social inclusion and environmental preservation - in line with our commitment to a better future.