

DECISIONS TAKEN BY THE WTO COMMISSION FOR SOUTH ASIA
AT ITS FORTY-THIRD MEETING

Kathmandu, Nepal, 01 April 2003

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WTO COMMISSION FOR SOUTH ASIA

Forty-third Meeting

Kathmandu, Nepal

01 April 2003

AGENDA

1. Adoption of the agenda
2. Communication of the Chairman of the Commission
3. Preliminary remarks by the Secretary-General
4. Presentation of the tourism market trends (statistical monograph) of the region for 2002
5. Regional activities
6. Update on the Constitution of the World Committee on Tourism Ethics
7. Update on the preparations of the 15th session of the WTO General Assembly in Beijing
8. Further project proposals for the joint marketing and promotion of the South Asian tourism product
9. Place and date of the forty-fourth meeting of the Commission

PREAMBLE

1. The 43rd meeting of the WTO Commission for South Asia was held in Kathmandu, Nepal at the gracious invitation of His Majesty's Government of Nepal on 01 April 2003. The meeting was held in conjunction with the Asia-Pacific Seminar on Crisis Management which was held on 02 April 2003.
 2. The meeting was chaired by **Bangladesh** who called the meeting to order.
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DECISIONS

ADOPTION OF THE AGENDA

Agenda item 1 (document CSA/43/Prov.Ag.)

3. After reviewing the provisional agenda and taking into account the social events organized by His Majesty's Government of Nepal for the day, the WTO Regional Representative for Asia and the Pacific suggested switching provisional items (4) and (5), and, moving provisional agenda item (6) to item (8) to be able to adapt the agenda to the programme's schedule.
 4. The Commission unanimously approved these proposals and the provisional agenda was **adopted** with these modifications. The final agenda of the meeting is located on page 2.
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COMMUNICATION OF THE CHAIRMAN

Agenda item 2 (document CSA/43/2)

5. The Chairman began his communication by expressing his thanks and gratitude to His Majesty's Government of Nepal for its warm hospitality and excellent arrangements for the meeting. He then provided an overview of world tourism performance in 2001 and 2002 and brought attention to the fact that South Asia was one of the regions whose tourism industry was most adversely affected during those years. He also stated that although tourism in South Asia had, until then, been growing at a pace well above the world average, South Asia, to date, receives a very meagre portion of global tourism traffic. At the same time, South Asia is home to some of the best attractions in the world in terms of heritage sites and nature tourism. He urged the Members to actively undertake projects for infrastructure development, product development particularly with reference to tourist facilities and services development, and, suitable marketing and promotional activities. He also advocated the need for more regional cooperation and cross-border projects especially in the area of intra-regional tourism promotion. Since safety and security is increasingly important to motivate tourists to travel, he felt that it would advantageous to all the countries in the region to work together effectively to promote accurate images of their destinations. Also, given the increased competitiveness between destinations all over the world, human resource development is vital for the success of any tourism destination. He requested the Members to work together to develop strategies which would take the best advantage of each other's human resource development facilities through programmes of exchange of faculty and experts.
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PRELIMINARY REMARKS BY THE SECRETARY-GENERAL

Agenda item 3 (document CSA/43/3)

6. The Preliminary Remarks of the Secretary-General focused on several issues: the conversion of WTO into a specialised agency of the United Nations; the impacts of terrorism and war on tourism and the need for crisis management; tourism development and poverty alleviation and the World Summit on Sustainable Development; the Global Code of Ethics for Tourism; and, liberalization in tourism.

7. When discussing the present situation of the Organization, the Deputy Secretary-General (who delivered the remarks on behalf of the Secretary-General) informed the Commission that the transition from the US\$ to the Euro had been completed in 2002 without difficulty and, because of the appreciation of the Euro against major currencies, assisted the Secretariat to contain costs.

8. Five more countries had indicated their desire to join or rejoin WTO including **Bhutan**, Bahrain, Qatar, Kuwait and Saudi Arabia. Bermudas had also initiated the procedure to join WTO as an Associate Member.

9. He also stated that although all forms of terrorism, war and other conflicts are detrimental to tourism, tourism has become such a fundamental characteristic of modern lifestyle that **people will continue to travel**. This was evident in 2002 where tourism once again grew to new heights and registered 715 million international arrivals. Tourism has proven its resilience and staying power and WTO remains positive and optimistic about the medium and long term prospects for tourism.

10. Tourism performed particularly well in the Asia-Pacific region and became the second-most visited destination of the world in 2002. This was due to the strength of intra-regional tourism in the region. WTO expects the region to further consolidate its position over the coming years.

11. Yet, despite the general positive results of global tourism in 2002, it was obvious that tourism had benefited some destinations and some sectors more than others. Therefore, WTO also urges all members to develop sound crisis management plans as we live in a world of uncertainties where all forms of natural or manmade crises can cause sudden damage to tourism.

12. That tourism is an engine for socio-economic development was officially recognised at the World Summit on Sustainable Development (WSSD) which was held in Johannesburg, South Africa in August 2002. The Action Plan of this Summit makes clear reference to tourism's unique capacity for assisting in poverty alleviation and the constructive role that tourism can play in developing a more sustainable world. As a result, WTO and UNCTAD have decided to cooperate in the field of poverty alleviation by launching the **ST-EP initiative** (Sustainable Development for the Elimination of Poverty) which sets out to establish a new institutional mechanism for financing research and practical projects.

13. After delivering the remarks, the WTO Special Representative took the floor and mentioned that one of the most useful tools for determining the socio-economic importance of tourism and for assisting Governments in developing crisis management plans would be the establishment of **Tourism Satellite Accounts (TSA)** in each country. The WTO Regional Representative for Asia and the Pacific informed the Members that WTO has extended its technical assistance to several Asian

countries in the development of TSA, namely, Philippines, Indonesia, Malaysia and the Islamic Republic of Iran. He also mentioned that WTO organized the first TSA Practicum at its Headquarters in September 2002 and that WTO would be pleased to offer its assistance to any other Member should they request it.

14. The delegate from **India** stated that it was crucial to catch the multiplier effect of tourism but that many gaps existed in collecting statistics. He informed the meeting that India has commissioned a TSA which would be completed by June.

PRESENTATION OF THE TOURISM MARKET TRENDS (STATISTICAL MONOGRAPH)
FOR THE REGION FOR 2002

Agenda item 4 (document CSA/43/5)

15. The presentation of the statistical monograph for the region for 2002 highlighted the following trends:

- World tourism exceeded the 700 million mark for the first time to register 715 million international tourist arrivals in 2002: a growth rate of 3.1 per cent.
- Asia and the Pacific region performed extraordinarily well with a growth rate of 7.9 per cent. with 131 million international tourist arrivals, Asia and the Pacific overtook the Americas to become the second most visited destination of the world after Europe.
- The economic, political and security crises of 2001 and 2002 brought about changes in tourist behaviour: tourists opt more for late-booking; there is a marked preference for intra-regional tourist destinations; price is the key factor when choosing a tourism destination – tourists prefer less expensive destinations and if they opt for an expensive one, they want value for money.
- South Asia received 5.9 million international tourist arrivals in 2002 – a growth rate of 2 per cent. South Asia obtained a share of 0.8 per cent of global tourist traffic.
- South Asia is a region of contrasts: Iran and Sri Lanka witnessed growth rates of 17 per cent and 16.7 per cent respectively whereas India and Bangladesh witnessed losses of 6.6 per cent and 5.6 per cent.
- Although the region was very much affected by the negative global situation in 2001, it recovered well in 2002 namely because of the proactive destination marketing campaigns undertaken by many nations; focused endeavour in crisis management; greater awareness of intra-regional tourism and the tapping of alternative source markets; continued product diversification; and, more support to tourism by governments.
- WTO's prediction for 2003 is that it will be a prolongation of 2001 and 2002: slow and gradual economic recovery and high level of uncertainty due to the conflict in Iraq and other potential conflicts. However, people will continue to travel and the prospects for intra-regional travel are better than that of inter-regional travel.

16. The Members expressed their thanks for this exhaustive report and the WTO Special Advisor requested that when WTO carry out comparisons in tourism performance, the year 2000 should be used as the benchmark rather than 2001 as that was a peak year in international tourism. He also requested that a case study be done of the **I.R. of Iran** to analyse why it has performed so well.

REGIONAL ACTIVITIES

Agenda item 5 (document CSA/43/4)

17. The WTO Regional Representative for Asia presented a summary of the activities carried out by WTO in the region over the past year. Of these activities one could highlight that WTO carried out **2 technical assistance projects to Iran and Nepal and 2 sectoral support missions to India and the Maldives**. WTO expects to launch 3 projects in 2003 in India and Sri Lanka.

18. WTO also reiterated that it had met all the specific requests for technical assistance made by the Members and that the Secretariat was open to any other requests.

19. The Commission complimented the Secretariat for their efforts in implementing the general programme of work of the Organization in the region through a diverse range of sectoral support missions and long-term projects.

20. The representative from **Pakistan** informed the Members that the Government had reviewed the Master Plan prepared by WTO some years back and that some of the recommendations were no longer viable given the current situation. The delegate requested WTO to field a mission to review the Master Plan and its recommendations and identify those which are more viable. He also requested WTO's technical assistance to promote religious and heritage tourism in Pakistan. Both requests were accepted by WTO.

UPDATE ON THE CONSTITUTIONAL OF THE WORLD COMMITTEE ON TOURISM ETHICS

Agenda item 6 (document CSA/43/7 and CSA/43/7 Add.1)

21. It was recalled that in accordance with the Protocol of Implementation of the Global Code of Ethics for Tourism, adopted by the WTO General Assembly at its fourteenth session, one member and one alternate should be appointed to the World Committee on Tourism Ethics on behalf of the WTO Commission for South Asia.

22. It was also recalled that at the time of the 42nd meeting of the Commission in Madrid in March 2002, WTO had only received two nominations from Pakistan, **Mr. Shiraz Poonja and Mr. Iqbal Walji**, and Members requested additional time to propose further candidates.

23. At the time of the 43rd meeting of the Commission, WTO had received four additional nominations: **Mr. Krishnan Nair** (India), **Mr. Abbas Karimi** (Islamic Republic of Iran), **Mr. Pratap Ramanujam** (Sri Lanka) and **Mr. Gamini Seranjith Marapan** (Sri Lanka). The Deputy Secretary-General recalled to the Members of the Commission that each candidate was being presented in his personal capacity and would not, at any time, during his tenure on the Committee, represent an individual country.

24. It was also mentioned that the candidatures of Mr. Abbas Karimi and Mr. Gamini Seranjith Marapan were incomplete because neither candidate had accepted to finance their travel and subsistence expenses to the Committee's meetings nor had they provided an alternative funding agency.

25. The WTO Regional Representative for Asia and the Pacific also recalled to the Members that there was a verbal opinion expressed repeatedly in the WTO General Assembly in Santiago de Chile in 1999 that no civil servants be on the Committee.

26. The meeting broke for a recess and the delegates from **India, Pakistan and Sri Lanka** met to discuss the remaining candidatures. Sri Lanka withdrew Mr. Marapan's candidature since it was incomplete and Mr. Ramanujam's candidature on the account that he is a current civil servant with the Sri Lankan Government and may change portfolios.

27. Out of the two Pakistani nominations, the Pakistan Government recommended Mr. Iqbal Walji.

28. The Commission nominated **Mr. Krishnan Nair** as the **principal candidate** for the **first two years of the term** on the Committee and **Mr. Iqbal Walji** as the **alternate candidate**. **For the second two years of the term, their roles would be switched** with Mr. Walji as the principal candidate and Mr. Nair as the alternate.

**UPDATE ON THE PREPARATIONS OF THE 15TH SESSION OF THE
WTO GENERAL ASSEMBLY IN BEIJING**

Agenda item 7 (document CSA/43/8 and A/15/Com.Reg)

29. In this document, WTO updated the Commission on the preparations of the General Assembly which is scheduled to be held in Beijing, China from 17-24 October 2003. The document provided information on the preparatory and related meetings to be held just prior to the General Assembly and the plenary meetings that would be held during the General Assembly session. The draft provisional agenda of the General Assembly was also enclosed. WTO also informed the Commission of the various elections to statutory organs and their subsidiary bodies which would take place during the General Assembly.

**FURTHER PROJECT PROPOSALS FOR THE JOINT MARKETING AND PROMOTION OF THE
SOUTH ASIAN TOURISM PRODUCT**

Agenda item 8 (document CSA/43/6)

30. The WTO Regional Representative for Asia and the Pacific recalled to the Commission that the project for joint marketing and promotion of the South Asian tourism product arose at their initiative during the South Asia Tourism Ministerial Summit held in New Delhi, India in April 2001 during which Members expressed their concern at the low market share that South Asia received of global tourist arrivals.

31. He mentioned that WTO had been collaborating actively with the **South Asia Travel and Tourism Exchange (SATTE)** to promote South Asia as a tourism destination and their combined activities focused mainly on the **promotion of intra-regional tourism** on one hand, and, on the other, the preparation of an **interactive CD-ROM** featuring the tourism attractions, services and facilities of all the participating countries. The CD-ROM was completed in 2002 and copies were distributed to all participating countries to distribute to major trade fairs and exhibitions and major

source markets. The **Coordinator of SATTE** then gave a brief presentation on the salient features of the CD-ROM.

32. WTO then informed on some of the feedback received from the Members on this project which included joint participation in major trade fairs and exhibitions and conducting an Asia Forum during these trade fairs. Other possible future activities included the publishing of a South Asia tourism newsletter and establishing a South Asia tourism website.

33. Although the Ministerial Summit in 2001 had designated 2004 as Visit South Asia Year, given the turbulent tourism scenario over the past few years, the Members also expressed their desire to **postpone Visit South Asia Year to 2005**.

34. It was also decided that it would be expedient to set up a **satellite centre** in one of the countries to coordinate all promotional activities, carry out market research and keep all Members informed of latest market developments.

35. Finally, WTO informed the Members of the Commission that the Secretariat would be willing to draw up a detailed proposal on the entire joint marketing and promotion project and submit it to the European Union for funding. The WTO Regional Representative for Asia and the Pacific recalled that the European Union had funded several similar ventures in the past with ASEAN, the South Pacific and the Caribbean.

PLACE AND DATE OF THE 44TH MEETING OF THE COMMISSION

Agenda item 9

36. It was recalled that the 44th meeting of the Commission would be held in Beijing, China in October 2003 within the framework of the 15th session of the WTO General Assembly.

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