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Communication of the Chairman of the Commission (Bahamas)

On behalf of the government and people of the Commonwealth of The Bahamas I would like to thank you for the confidence and trust placed in us by electing our country to chair this august body – the Regional Commission for the Americas of the UNWTO. We are cognizant of the role that the tourism economy plays in advancing the social and economic well-being of not only this important region of the world representing some thirty plus countries, but other regions globally. The Americas region, blessed with a plethora of built and natural assets, cultures, music, languages and exotic cuisines is in an ideal position to attract and capture a significant share of an expanding global tourism market.

As decision makers and leaders, we are fortunate to be at the helm of our respective tourism organizations at a time when globally tourism is experiencing the strongest growth rates in modern times. As we all know, international tourism arrivals increased by 7% compared to 2016. This is the eight-consecutive year of growth in international tourism arrivals, above the consistent average growth rate of 4% since 2010, following the world economic crisis in 2009. It is predicted that this robust growth rate is expected to continue in 2018.

Tourism contribution continues to play an increasingly important role on our global economy representing 9% of GDP; one of every 11 jobs and with 30 % of service exports this sector ranks third overall in exports trade globally.

In the Americas international arrivals in 2017 recorded a 3% increase, well below the global average of 7%, due to a sluggish 1.6% increase in arrivals to North America. However, collectively, the Caribbean, Central and South America posted a more robust 5.4% increase in arrivals relative to 2016.

As a region our strategy should not only be focused on increasing the number of arrivals to our respective destinations but also to increase visitors spend and maximize the benefits of this vibrant industry to existing suppliers, future investors and residents of host communities. As full members of the UNWTO we have pledged to utilize our tourism sector to achieve the elements of the Sustainable Development Goals, in

particular SDG 8 to promote sustained economic growth, creating meaningful jobs, poverty reduction, developing opportunities for the disadvantaged and economically empowering women, among many other benefits.

Recognizing the power of this global industry in transforming economies we must, as a region, convince our respective governments to invest the necessary resources (financial and human) in ensuring that our tourism offering is of the highest quality which will strengthen our competitive position and increase market share. These are all important steps in our efforts to grow our economy and provide economic opportunities and good salaries for our people.

Of critical importance to the continued development of the industry and enhancing our competitiveness in the region are our collective efforts to promote travel facilitation, provide reliable and current market information, combat climate change, reduce seasonality, and the use of innovation and technologies in tourism structure among other activities. The above are part of the two strategic objectives identified by the UNWTO for the 2018-2019 period.

The issue of existential global warming is both an urgent and challenging one. It has recently demonstrated its ability to disrupt and destroy the very assets that tourism economies rely on for development. The Islands of The Bahamas have been adversely impacted by the wrath of climate change in many ways. In just the past three consecutive years our islands have been hit by hurricanes of a category 4 or higher. The onslaught of Hurricanes Joaquin and Matthew in 2015 and 2016 respectively resulted in losses of some \$600 million to our economy. It is imperative that respective governments develop and implement strategies to mitigate CO2 emissions as well as increasingly adapt to the impact of climate change on our tourism economies.

There is also a paradigm shift taking place in travel and tourism where travelers are moving away from being merely spectators to becoming active participants in their travel experiences. Destinations which provide authentic experiences for their guests will differentiate themselves and enhance their competitiveness. Geographically positioned with multiple diverse cultures, languages and rich gastronomy, the Americas region has all the necessary amenities to deliver lasting authentic and rewarding experiences to our visitors.

It is my humble view that we ought to explore new innovative ways to utilize technology to market our products and grow our business. For example over half of the world now uses a smart-phone and roughly two-thirds of the world's population has a mobile phone and some 70% of North Americans, Germans, UK and other major European population (source markets) are in possession of smart-phones.

I would like to challenge all members of this regional body to follow the example of other industries that have embraced technology to creatively reach those discerning customers to increase business.

It is my distinct pleasure to serve as your Chairman and I look forward to working collectively with you to continue to sustainably grow our business for the benefit of our people.