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SILK ROAD INITIATIVE

Note by the Secretary-General

In the attached document, the Secretary-General submits to the General Assembly a summary of the UNWTO Silk Road initiative and the draft of a declaration on the Silk Road proposed by the Government of Kazakhstan, for consideration and approval.

SILK ROAD INITIATIVE

REVIEW OF THE UNWTO SILK ROAD INITIATIVE

INTRODUCTION

1. The “Great Silk Road”¹, was an ancient network of trade routes spanning approximately 12,000 kilometres between Asia, the Middle East and Europe which combined trade and commerce with cultural, religious and philosophical exchanges. The UNWTO, in collaboration with its Member States and external partners such as UNDP and UNESCO, developed a Silk Road initiative to use the concept of ancient Silk Road as a modern instrument for tourism development, promotion and cooperation, the starting point of which was the Samarkand Declaration on Silk Road Tourism adopted in 1994 by 19 participating countries. Taking advantage of the fact that UNWTO is holding its 18th General Assembly in Kazakhstan, located in the heart of the ancient Great Silk Road, it was decided to review the progress made in the development and promotion of Silk Road tourism, identify existing and potential constraints, and, propose operational recommendations concerning its future development.

SUCCESSSES OF THE UNWTO SILK ROAD INITIATIVE AND ENCOURAGING FACTORS FOR ITS EXPANSION

2. Over the past fifteen years, UNWTO has undertaken a great number of initiatives with a variety of partners. Conferences and seminars on the Silk Road were organized with participants ranging from Silk Road countries themselves, generating markets interested in Silk Road destinations, local authorities such as mayors of cultural cities, inbound and outbound operators, from inside and outside the region, airlines and investors. Various important Declarations (Samarkand 1994, Khiva 1999, Bukhara 2002) were adopted. The mobilization of efforts was intense and external supports were provided by multilateral sources such as UNDP, and specific donor countries, such as Japan, especially for the preparation of promotional materials. The Silk Road concept and its logotype, adopted in 1994, have become incredibly popular with both government and private sector making ready reference to the Silk Road in their marketing and promotion of tourism.

3. The Silk Road has tremendous potential. Many of the Silk Road countries are already well established tourism destinations. Similarly, the potential source markets, which were originally identified as Western Europe and North America, have diversified to include countries within Central and Eastern Europe, Asia and the Middle East, in response to the growing desire of tourists to discover new destinations. Finally, and most importantly, the increased economic growth of Silk Road countries (e.g. China and Eurasian countries) provides a positive environment for the future progress of the initiative. Regional cooperation institutions such as the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) and the Eurasian Economic Community (EAEC) have the capacity to bring an important contribution to its success.

¹ The name “Silk Road” does not date from Alexander the Great, Marco Polo or Genghis Khan; it was coined by the German Baron Ferdinand von Richthofen in 1877

CONSTRAINTS TO THE FUTURE DEVELOPMENT OF THE SILK ROAD

4. Two shortcomings in the initiative are sources of real concern. The first one is the lack of investments in public infrastructure (especially in the ground transportation sector and in the rehabilitation of cultural monuments) that should be carried out to accompany the efforts of private companies. To become a lasting success, the Silk Road initiative has to appear as a model of public-private partnership between international organizations (UNDP, UNESCO, UNWTO, World Bank and other funding institutions such as the ADB), central governments, local authorities and the private sector.

5. Another serious shortcoming is related to visa constraints and to the procedures governing the facilitation of travel along the Silk Road, including customs, health, safety and security formalities.

PROSPECTS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

6. A Silk Road meeting has been scheduled within the framework of the 18th session of the UNWTO General Assembly in Astana on 8 October 2009. It is expected that useful recommendations on the future of the Silk Road initiative will be adopted during the meeting.

7. A first priority is to resume the efforts for enhancing the visibility of Silk Road destinations among tourism professionals and the public of the major generating markets through branding of the Silk Road, organization of professional workshops and specialized publications. The use of the Internet should make it possible to expand these promotional activities on a wider scale.

8. The recent development supported by both UNDP and the UNWTO involving local authorities, and especially mayors of cultural cities, should be continued. Many of the difficulties could be solved or eased at the local level, and it is at this destination level that public-private partnership, which is key to the expansion of the initiative, should be principally achieved.

9. Silk Road countries and private sector are encouraged to articulate their relations with the Silk Road office in Samarkand to disseminate information on Silk Road attractions and products.

10. It is also important to encourage more cooperation on Silk Road initiatives among interested international organizations, especially within the UN system. In this regard, the appointments of a new Director-General of UNESCO and of a new Secretary-General at the UNWTO can provide an interesting opportunity.

11. Finally, in order to explore initiatives in border facilitation, it is proposed to constitute a working group that brings together representatives of NTAs and of ministries of foreign affairs of the Silk Road countries to study this issue in a pragmatic manner.

ANNEX

ASTANA DECLARATION

Gathered in Astana (Kazakhstan), in a country that in past times was traversed by the ancient and legendary Silk Routes, the representatives of the countries participating in the eighteenth session of the General Assembly of the World Tourism Organization (UNWTO),

Making reference to the Statutes of the World Tourism Organization and to the Global Code of Ethics for Tourism, which underline the role of this activity as a factor of economic and social development, but also as a vehicle for peace, understanding, cultural enrichment, environmental preservation and dialogue among peoples,

Aware of the exceptional value and diversity of the tourism potential, both cultural and natural, of the countries that in the past were traversed by the ancient Silk Roads,

Underlining the importance of the initiative of the World Tourism Organization and of the United Nations system, which for fifteen years now has aimed to revive the ancient Silk Road as a supporting element of the tourism development of the immense region of Eurasia and the Middle East,

Recalling the commitment of 24 countries in favour of this initiative and calling upon the other members of the UNWTO that are interested to join it or to provide their support to it,

Recalling the declarations of Samarkand (1994), Khiva (1999) and Bukhara (2002), as well as the conclusions of the meetings organized by the UNWTO on the subject of the Silk Road in Xian (China) in 1996, Nara (Japan), Tehran (Iran) and Istanbul (Turkey) in 1997, Kyoto (Japan) and Almaty (Kazakhstan) in 1998, Beijing (China) in 2003, and once again in Almaty in 2008,

Underlining the growing interest of local authorities, and, in particular, of the representatives of the cultural and touristic cities situated along the Silk Road, as manifested by the Mayors' Forum held in Almaty in September 2008,

1. Welcome the success that the raising of the subject of the Silk Road has already met among operators of the tourism sector as well as among the media and the general public;
2. Underline the remarkable capacity for growth and for the sustainable development of products based on the cultural and ecological riches of the sites and attractions that lie all along the 12,000 kilometres of the ancient Routes;
3. Draw the attention of governments to the obstacle posed to visitors who wish to discover these riches by the multiplicity of visas and administrative procedures that make it difficult to cross borders, and request the UNWTO Secretary-General to take all necessary initiatives in consultation with the pertinent administrations of countries concerned on this issue;

4. Express their wish for the UNWTO to continue to support the promotion efforts aimed at enhancing the visibility and market access of the Silk Road destinations among the professionals of the countries that generate tourists who travel to these destinations;
5. Lend their support to the initiatives of the municipal and local authorities, based on public-private partnership, aimed at building new tourism attractions themed on the Silk Road;
6. Request the UNWTO Secretary-General a) to further increase the effectiveness of the means the Secretariat of the Organization applies in favour of the initiative, b) to strengthen the coordination among Member States and c) to revisit the cooperation agreement with the Support Office opened in Samarkand in 2004, with the assistance of Uzbekistan, in line with the current review process concerning all UNWTO external entities and with the aim to further support the Silk Road initiative;
7. Appeal to the United Nations agencies and programmes, in particular the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and UNESCO, which have shown interest in the initiative on various occasions, to lend it stronger support in conjunction with the UNWTO; and
8. Decide to once again discuss this subject and to take stock of the progress made, on the occasion of the nineteenth session of the General Assembly of the World Tourism Organization in 2011.