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Report of the Secretary-General

Annex 3. rev.1 Recommendations on the Use of Georeferences, Date and Time in Travel Advice and Event Information

Recommendations on the Use of Georeferences, Date and Time in Travel Advice and Event Information

Background - Work of the Secretariat

1. The 2009 General Assembly of UNWTO approved by Resolution A/RES/578(XVIII) the Declaration on the Facilitation of Tourist Travel and entrusted the Secretary-General “to promote the principles set in the Declaration, including the use of modern information and communication technologies, in relation with travel advisories and visa facilitation”.

2. In this Resolution the General Assembly also requested the Secretary-General to report to its next session on the follow-up of the Declaration.

3. As it may be recalled, the Global Code of Ethics for Tourism adopted by Resolution A/RES/406(XIII) at the thirteenth session of UNWTO General Assembly (Santiago, Chile, 27 September – 1 October 1999), outlined in its Article 6 the obligations of stakeholders in tourism development as follows:

- *“Tourism professionals have an obligation to provide tourists with objective and honest information on their places of destination and on the conditions of travel, hospitality and stays...”* (paragraph 1)
- *Governments have the right – and the duty – especially in a crisis, to inform their nationals of the difficult circumstances, or even the dangers they may encounter during their travels abroad; it is their responsibility however to issue such information without prejudicing in an unjustified or exaggerated manner the tourism industry of the host countries and the interests of their own operators; the contents of travel advisories should therefore be discussed beforehand with the authorities of the host countries and the professionals concerned; recommendations formulated should be strictly proportionate to the gravity of the situations encountered and confined to the geographical areas where the insecurity has arisen; such advisories should be qualified or cancelled as soon as a return to normality permits...”* (paragraph 5)
- *“The press, and particularly the specialized travel press and the other media, including modern means of electronic communication, should issue honest and balanced information on events and situations that could influence the flow of tourists; they should also provide accurate and reliable information to the consumers of tourism services; the new communication and electronic commerce technologies should also be developed and used for this purpose...”* (paragraph 6)

4. The Secretariat initiated in 2010 a careful examination of Travel Advisories, especially focussing on the need to maximize the relevance and efficiency, increase the transparency and help to limit unnecessary repercussions.

5. A first result of the analysis was that, besides travel advisories, event-related information provided by the affected destinations and/or countries is also of relevance and should also be referred to in order to cover the subject in a comprehensive manner. While the main focus still lies on the analysis of travel advisories, it became clear that destinations providing event-related information could contribute to reducing the impact of negative events, as it was done for instance by the Tourism Authority in Thailand in 2010.

6. It became also clear that since the introduction of Google Maps in 2005, georeferenced information plays an increasingly important role for the global travel and tourism sector.

7. While information provided relating to natural disasters is making frequent use of georeferences, travel advice and event information have so far not made use of this element. Only text information is used when confining negative events to geographical areas in countries.

8. The use of date and time information related to travel advice and event information was furthermore analyzed with a view of supporting efficiency and reliability in the use of this information, especially within the context of modern information and communication technologies.

9. The Secretariat therefore invited all interested Member States, Affiliate Members and Members of the Tourism Emergency Response Network (TERN) to a Technical Consultation on Georeferences and Time Stamps for Event Information and Travel Advisories, held at UNWTO Headquarters on 29 March 2011, to discuss the above-mentioned issues and to develop possible recommendations.

10. The draft Recommendations were prepared by the Secretariat following the discussions of the meeting particularly on four core areas:

- (a) The first area of recommendations takes into account that technical measures shall be taken to help identify clearly important elements within travel advice and event information especially the country name, date and time components (whether this is the event date and time, issuing date and time or any other concept of date and time) and the geographical area for which the advice is issued. The recommendations are formulated in a generic manner, stressing the need for consistency and bearing in mind that experts suggested that RSS (Really Simple Syndication) feeds as a standard for frequently updated information on the Internet would be an ideal form to transmit this information.
- (b) The second area of recommendations focuses on the description of the geographical areas, which are subject to the travel advice or event information. As mentioned above the increasing use and importance of georeferences within the travel and tourism sector and its wide use for information related to natural disasters call for an application of the same techniques. This would help to clearly confine the advice to the area concerned and help limiting their undesired repercussions.
- (c) The use of date and time information varies widely across the travel advisories analyzed. Date and time information is, among others, important to identify the occurrence of a specific negative event and the issuing and/or updating of the information. It is therefore within the third area of recommendations proposed that date and time information shall be provided, whenever possible, describing when the information was issued for the first time and/or updated last. To facilitate clear interpretation it is also recommended that this information shall make use of at least one international time standard, ideally the Universal Time Code (UTC). The need to clearly distinguish updates, especially during fast developing situations, where it is possible that several information updates are provided within a day, calls for measures which help to distinguish the updates easily from each other, whether in form of a sequence, date and time stamp or other measure.
- (d) The final recommendation focussed on the need to facilitate the exchange of information and especially the support of modern information and communication technologies. It is therefore recommended that provisions shall be made, which enable and facilitate the machine-readable dissemination and/or retrieval of the information, ideally in form of RSS feeds.

11. The Recommendations have no binding character.
12. The Secretary-General transmits to the Members the enclosed draft text of the Recommendations for their information.

Recommendations on the Use of Georeferences, Date and Time in Travel Advice and Event Information

Identification of Relevant Information

1.1 Travel advice and event information published and/or disseminated through the Internet and other forms of electronic communications shall incorporate technical measures to help identify clearly and easily relevant information especially country names, geographical areas affected, date and time,¹

1.2 The technical measures shall be documented and described by the issuing institution to facilitate their consistent and correct use. This documentation shall be made easily accessible.

Geographical Areas

2.1 The description of geographical areas for which the travel advice and event information is issued shall be supported, whenever possible and useful, in such a manner that Geographic Information Systems (GIS) can interpret and display the areas concerned easily using common standards for the exchange of these data.²

Date and Time

3.1 Date and time information shall be provided, whenever possible, describing when the information was issued for the first time and/or last updated,

3.2 When providing updates of travel advice and event information on fast developing situations, all reasonable measures shall be taken to support the fast and clear identification of those elements updated,

3.3 On an exceptional basis, date and time information can be limited to the raw data of a website and not visible to the reader, to avoid misinterpretation,

3.4 Time information shall be used in relation to at least one international time standard, ideally the Universal Time Code (UTC) to support its clear and consistent interpretation.

Interfaces

4.1 Provisions shall be made by the issuing institution, whenever possible, which enable and facilitate the machine-readable dissemination and/or retrieval of the information.

¹ This could be for example the use and application of variable names in a consistent form. Examples of such variable (tag) names in a XML based file format are <country_name> </country_name>, <issuing_date> </issuing_date>, <issuing_time></issuing_time>.

² Examples of those data standards are Geo RSS (RSS extension), Geography Markup Language (GML), Keyhole Markup Language (KML)