

**Official Closing Ceremony of the International Year of
Sustainable Tourism for Development 2017**

Geneva, Switzerland, 19 December 2017, 16:30

**Closing remarks by Taleb Rifai, UNWTO Secretary-General
and designation 'Special Ambassadors for Tourism and SDGs'**

Dear friends,

As we bring to a close the International Year of Sustainable Tourism for Development 2017,

I would like to thank your presence with us today as well as your great support during this special year.

I wish to once again thank all our IY2017 official sponsors, partners and Special Ambassadors,

including the 7 Special Ambassadors who could not join us today:

President Santos of Colombia,

President Solís of Costa Rica,

President Sirleaf of Liberia,

President Coleiro Preca of Malta,

Prime Minister Malielegaoi of Samoa,

First Lady Reid of Iceland

All have been fantastic ambassadors for the transformative power of tourism,

Dear friends,

As I mentioned in my opening remarks

Today we close one chapter to open a new one

A new chapter of commitment to work together

Towards our common 17 Goals .

I am thus delighted that today we are launching from UNWTO the Tourism and SDGs Programme

A Programme that includes initiatives such as the Tourism and SDGs online platform that was presented today as well as the Tourism and SDGs Ambassadors Initiative

In that sense, we are very honored to welcome

H.E. Shaikha Mai Al Khalifa

Dr Talal Abu-Ghazaleh

Mr Huayong Ge

Dr Michael Frenzel,

and

HE President Luis Guillermo Solís of Costa Rica (represented here
by Minister Mauricio Ventura)

as Special Ambassadors for Tourism and the SDGs.

Because

if we are to ensure tourism can make an effective contribution to the
17 SDGs,

the universal agenda for people and planet,

we will need them

and we will need each one of you.

It is time the world saw that tourism is not just a party.

It is a transformative sector that has a profound impact on people's lives,

on giving a better life to so many people around the world.

Dear friends,

The International Year will not end here,

its five key pillars:

1. Sustainable economic growth
2. Jobs, social inclusion and poverty reduction
3. Environmental protection and resource efficiency
4. Cultural, diversity and heritage protection
5. Mutual understanding, peace and security

remain entirely relevant to Tourism and the SDGs.

This is my essential message for you today.

This is the reason behind our report and our online platform – to inspire this tourism community

to make this world a better place,

not just as companies or policymakers,

but as people.

In the end, tourism is all about people.

And, my dear friends,

it is the people of tourism I shall miss the most,

every person I have had the pleasure of working with

throughout this humbling, challenging, rewarding journey as
UNWTO SG.

Thank you all for your cooperation and your friendship,

not only this year but on all occasions we have worked together.

I've spent the most beautiful years of my life with UNWTO

and I will miss every one I've worked with.

I leave you with high hopes for the future of our sector,

hopes that we **will** be the change we wish to see in the world,
and that, in the new era of sustainable and inclusive development,
our sector, and our planet,
can continue to thrive
as together we make this world a better place.

Thank you. *Merci.*