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Tourism and Security: Towards a Framework for Safe, Secure and Seamless Travel

Note by the Secretary-General

The Secretary-General informs the Members of the Commission about Tourism and Security.



Tourism and Security: Towards a Framework for Safe, Secure and Seamless Travel

I. Background

1. Tourism is one of the fastest growing and most resilient economic activities of today. Over the past decades, international tourist arrivals have more than doubled, from 528 million in 1995 to 1.184 million in 2015.
2. Tourism's capacity to distribute wealth, reduce poverty, create jobs, and advance the change towards more sustainable consumption and production patterns has been recognized with the inclusion of the sector as a target in three of the 17 Sustainable Development Goals, namely SDGs 8, 12 and 14.
3. At an aggregated global level, tourism has proven to be quite resilient and constantly growing; the sector is however regularly challenged by natural and man-made risks and crises. These crises have a great impact at the destination level, threatening to destroy the economy and the social structures of affected destinations. Acknowledging that the tourism product is predominantly immaterial and often depends on perceptions, the sector is, thus, highly sensitive to both objective and subjective risks.
4. In order to manage these challenges adequately, relevant structures and processes have to be designed in a robust and resilient, but also flexible manner, with clear understanding of the special needs and concerns of the tourism sector, whilst maintaining a balance between the enhancement of security and the facilitation of seamless travel.
5. 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. Developing more innovative technologies in facilitating seamless travel and in creating a more resilient tourism sector is a collaborative responsibility between the tourism sector and security structures.
6. Currently, the role of the tourism sector is still underestimated and its integration into the national emergency structures and procedures is often only happening as a result of major incidents, which affect the country and cause major losses to the sector and to the national economy.
7. Building resilience within the sector requires a realignment and full integration of tourism systems within the national and local disaster risk and emergency management structure. It further requires this responsibility to be shared amongst all relevant stakeholders.
8. At the same time, current security concerns threaten the recent advances registered in travel facilitation and seamless travel around the world. According to the UNWTO's latest Visa Openness Report, the share of tourists requiring the obtainment of a traditional visa prior to travelling continues to decline and is currently at its lowest recorded level. In 2015, 39% of the world's population could travel without having to obtain a traditional visa prior to departure, as compared to only 23% in 2008.
9. In view of the above, UNWTO's Senior Management proposed the Executive Council to place the promotion of a safe and seamless travel framework as one of the priorities within the Programme of Work 2016-2017 (document A/21/8(I)(b)).
10. In collaboration with the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, November 2015 saw the launch of the joint initiative between the UNWTO and UNODC in El Salvador, which aims to develop a

tourism and security plan for Central America and the Dominican Republic. This is a model that can be replicated in other parts of the world and can address how security impacts the tourism sector and what can be done to ensure continued advancements are made towards safe, secure and seamless travel. As the Secretary-General of UNWTO highlighted at the High Level Meeting on Tourism and Security during FITUR in Madrid, in January 2016, UNWTO is working closely with UNODC towards the common objective of promoting a safe, secure and seamless travel environment.

11. In this context, the High Level Meeting on Tourism and Security, concluded that:

- (a) The current safety and security situation is a global problem and, as such, requires a global response;
- (b) Countries targeted need collective support to get through the difficulty and to build the recovery;
- (c) Clear communication is critical, including adequate media management;
- (d) Public and private sectors must plan, work, communicate, and respond together;
- (e) Accurate and constantly updated travel advisories are critical;
- (f) Experiences and best practices must be shared, so that countries can learn from each other; and
- (g) UNWTO is requested to create a task force to progress these discussions at a global level, which could ultimately lead to creating a safety and security charter for the tourism sector.

II. Objectives

12. The thematic debate aims to:

- (a) Promote innovative approaches in travel advisories and facilitation to integrate tourism and security and develop a resilient tourism sector through adequate mechanisms, resources and technical skills.
- (b) Foster dialogue and understanding between the tourism sector and the security apparatus to strengthen effective coordination, information sharing, and communication in order for critical functions to be prepared before a crisis and to be able to better absorb, restore and recover from crises.
- (c) Discuss the role of crisis management plans and protocols, and the critical issue of crisis communications.

III. Guidelines for discussion

13. For the purpose of a fruitful and lively participation in the discussion, the Secretariat invites delegations to particularly focus on the following areas:

- (a) Share innovative approaches to integrate tourism and security.

- (b) Exchange information on existing challenges and national policies to address them.
- (c) Share best practices on the use of technology in the field of safety, security and seamless travel to ensure that enhancing security and facilitating travel are complementary.
- (d) Formulate possible areas of action for the Secretariat as well for increased cooperation between UNWTO Members on this important issue.

Each statement should not exceed a time limit of 5 minutes.