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COMMUNICATION OF THE CHAIRMAN

Message of the Chairman of the UNWTO Executive Council, Mr. Carlos Ricardo Benavides Jiménez, Minister of Tourism of Costa Rica

Ladies and Gentlemen,

In my capacity as Chairman of the Executive Council of the World Tourism Organization, it is a great pleasure to bid you a most cordial welcome to these South American lands and especially to Puerto Iguazú, a natural balcony affording visitors to the Argentine Tri-Border Landmark a view of Brazil over the Lower Iguazu River and of Paraguay across the Upper Paraná. I present my compliments to the people and Government of Argentina, especially our host and friend, the Minister of Tourism, Dr. Enrique Meyer.

This has been a year of transition: while at our last session we continued to analyse the effects of the crisis, now we are in the process of worldwide recovery, each country at its own pace, but all with the optimism inspired by the great powers of recovery of tourism, which is a principal source of many of our economies.

The crisis has left behind many lessons: there was a renewed coming together between the public and private sectors of tourism, which is a positive thing when it comes to each country's planning for the future; there was a radical change in the interaction between credit institutions and tourism entrepreneurs and developers; the world of airlines is substantially different from the one we knew before the crisis; the UNWTO's role was strengthened thanks to its hard work--especially by the Secretary-General, Dr. Taleb Rifai--to provide the necessary instruments and forums to address our problems in a joint manner.

It is also true that the recent events caused by the Icelandic volcano showed us that, despite all the technological advances of our era, we continue to be mere spectators of nature's power. This event also enabled us to draw important lessons, especially regarding the need for greater protection for travellers in the event of disasters in all parts of the world.

But it is not just the business of tourism that has changed radically, the World Tourism Organization is also undergoing a necessary change, an *aggiornamento* of its structure and functioning, a change that many of us have been awaiting for some years now and which we had entrusted to the new Secretary-General, Dr. Rifai, as one of his principal tasks at past sessions of this Council and the General Assembly in Kazakhstan.

Today and tomorrow, we will be able to see an important part of this restructuring which will be presented to us by the Secretary-General in the White Paper, which we believe is geared towards making the work of the UNWTO more efficient by fully harnessing the human and material resources the Organization has at its disposal at this time.

We are happy to learn that new States have joined the Organization and that many public and private institutions have also wished to become part of it as Affiliate Members. This shows that, far from losing significance, the UNWTO is gaining in importance and relevance for the world of tourism with each passing day.

Ladies and Gentlemen, I invite you to begin our work with the hope that we can have two very productive days in this beautiful country of Argentina.

Thank you very much.