

Safety: an Eternal Theme for Sustainable Development of Tourism

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(December 19, 2017, Geneva, Switzerland)

Mr. Taleb Rifai, Secretary-General of UNWTO, distinguished guests, ladies and gentlemen,

It is a pleasure to be here with you in Geneva, a winter tourism attraction, to discuss the sustainable development of tourism. Safety has always been the top consideration for any travel. It is not only the precondition of the sustainable development of tourism, but also the guarantee of it.

A safe and stable social environment is the precondition of the sustainable development of tourism industry. With its continuous development, tourism has been increasingly contributing more to the global economy. According to the *Economic Impact 2017* Report jointly published by WTTC and Oxford Economics, global tourism is expected to generate 7.9 trillion USD in 2017, up 3.8% YOY, marking another consecutive year that tourism's growth surpasses that of global economy; in the next decade, tourism is expected to account for over 11% of the global GDP and, together with relevant industries, will create a quarter of the global jobs, making tourism a pillar industry to the global economic development. We need to focus on travel safety to ensure a sustainable growth of tourism. Only when the destinations are safe will people be willing to travel and local businesses able

to benefit from the increased foot traffic. There are three features to such safe environment: **1. Extensiveness.** Modern tourism is a highly comprehensive industry that involves dining, accommodation, transportation, sightseeing, shopping and entertainment, making travel safety a broad issue. **2. Openness.** Tourist activities are of great openness. Tourists are engaged in highly frequent contact with the outside world during travel, meaning there are high expectations on a safe environment for travel. **3. Significance.** Criminal activities, public health issues, traffic and other accidents, natural disasters and other mishaps bring threats to the property and lives of tourists and inflict losses on tourism companies. They are detrimental to the sustainable development of tourism where the issues occur and may even bring harm to the international image and reputation of the nation involved.

Creating a safe and stable environment for tourism is the common responsibility of society as a whole, and it is an essential prerequisite for facilitating sustainable development of tourism. Therefore, I call for:

1. A strong condemnation of terrorism. In recent years, some resorts and entertainment venues were targeted by terrorists. In the regions suffered from terrorist attacks, various indicators of tourism industry saw catastrophic tumbles soon after. According to the 2002 report by World Tourism Organization, after the 9.11 terrorist attacks in the US, the number of tourists heading to the Americas, Middle East and North Africa declined significantly; as a result, only 705 million people travelled across border in the whole year, a growth of merely 1%, down from the expected 3%. Government of all countries should establish strong counter-terrorism alert mechanisms and quick

response mechanisms, and form an effective information exchange and communications system. Embassies and consulates shall investigate local security risks and terrorist-related incidents on a regular basis and issue warnings and guidelines in a timely manner for tourists' informed judgement.

2. The creation of a safe and sound environment and infrastructure for travel, such as transportation, telecommunication, dining, lodging and payment. Governments and tourism authorities shall work jointly to build safety. Efforts should be made to ensure the safe operations of public transportation in attractions such as buses, ferry boats and cable cars and to prevent public health incidents such as food poisoning or outbreaks of infectious diseases. From the perspective of payment industry where our company is primarily engaged, with the rapid development of card payments and card-based mobile payments, secure and convenient payment service has become a critical impetus to the sustainable growth of tourism.

3. Better emergency response to travel accidents. On one hand, work needs to be done to continuously improve tourism infrastructure, enforce safety checks, identify potential risks and make timely corrections to mitigate potential safety hazard; on the other hand, an emergency response system should be put in place which will allow tourism authorities to carry out work quickly and orderly and tackle issues in case of any emergency. In addition, it is also necessary to educate tourists about safe travel and remind them of local laws, regulations and customs.

4. A mechanism for reputation comeback. Travel safety incidents are serious as they deal a heavy blow on the market and put a dent in confidence.

Destinations with a history of such incidents, with improvement of safety precautions, shall build an effective travel safety reputation comeback mechanism. Such a mechanism should include safety information exchange, tourism safety promotion and presentation, tourism safety quality inspection, demonstration of good travel experience, etc., so as to regain trust and bring the local tourism to a full recovery.

Distinguished guests, ladies and gentlemen, tourism industry, as an epitome of globalization, has become a significant bridge for people from different countries to enhance communication and mutual trust. It also drives the growth of global economy. We shall spare no efforts to promote a harmonious and safe environment for travel, work together and contribute to the sustainable development of tourism industry so that tourists can have the best travel experience.

Thank you!