

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

Geneva, Switzerland, 19 December 2017, 14:00

Opening remarks by Taleb Rifai, UNWTO Secretary-General

H.M. King Simeon

**H.E. Shaikha Mai bint Mohammed Al Khalifa, President of
Bahrain Authority for Culture and Antiquities**

**Dear Marie-Gabrielle Ineichen-Fleisch, State Secretary
Economic Affairs, Switzerland**

**Dear Michael Møller, Director General, United Nations Office at
Geneva (UNOG)**

Dr. Talal

Mr. Huayong Ge

Dr. Michael Frenzel

Querida Gloria

Dear friends,

Welcome to the Closing Ceremony

of the International Year of Sustainable Tourism for Development
2017.

Particular thanks to all our IY2017 official sponsors, partners and
Special Ambassadors who are with us today

You made this year possible, contributing greatly to its success.

A special word to the 7 other Special Ambassadors for the IY that
unfortunately could not join us today:

*President Juan Manuel Santos of Colombia,
President Luis Guillermo Solís of Costa Rica,
President Ellen Johnson Sirleaf of Liberia,
President Marie-Louise Coleiro Preca of Malta,
Prime Minister Tuilaepa Sailele Malielegaoi of Samoa,
First Lady Eliza Jean Reid of Iceland*

Dear friends,

Since the UNGA declared 2017 as the International Year of
Sustainable Tourism for Development,

UNWTO has been promoting with your great support
the value and contribution of sustainable tourism to development,
to economic growth, cultural and environmental protection, mutual
understanding and peace

This has in many ways been a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity
to come together and work closer in making travel and tourism,
one of the biggest human activities of the 21st century,
a catalyst for positive change.

Dear friends,

the International Year will not end in December 2017.

All the work done together as one community during this year
needs to prevail and expand in the coming years

if we are to ensure tourism can make an effective contribution to the
17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

We would like to see all countries

include tourism in their national strategies to achieve the SDGs

and give our sector the recognition it deserves

as a key pillar of efforts to usher in a better world.

And we would like to see all stakeholders,

Governments, private sector and civil society,

make the most of tourism's potential to affect positive,
transformative change

on our economies, on our societies, on our lives.

Dear friends,

As we move ahead guided by a common agenda and 17 clear
Goals,

We invite you to join you on this journey

Today, we will be sharing the findings of the report “Tourism and the SDGs: Journey to 2030”, trusting that these will guide our common road towards a more sustainable sector.

Today, we close one chapter to open a new one

A chapter of a history where if we want, together, we can make a difference.

Tourism represents today 10% of world GDP, 1 in 10 jobs, 7% of trade (3rd export category in the world)

Tourism is also one of the most resilient sectors to crises situations and a viable and competitive option for bettering the lives of millions in developing countries.

Yet to ensure we contribute with the full potential of the sector to a better future for people, planet and prosperity we need to:

- 1. Ensure that we include tourism in national SDG agendas**
- 2. Strengthen private sector commitment to the SDGs**
- 3. Increase financial support for tourism infrastructure, planning and training**

These action steps are also outlined in the

Chengdu Declaration on 'Tourism and the Sustainable Development Goals'

embraced by UNWTO Member States in China during our 22nd General Assembly in September.

As they make clear,

the shift we need requires **all stakeholders** to support sustainable tourism development.

It is now time to take action and be the change we wish to see in the world,

because the changes we are pledging for are achievable today.

Dear friends,

As we are here in Geneva I am reminded of the words of the great Swiss traveller Ella Maillart:

"You do not travel if you are afraid of the unknown,

you travel for the unknown,

that reveals you with yourself.”

Words that will no doubt resonate with

Katie Diederichs, our Travellers’ Competition winner

who today celebrates the end of the journey across the world.

Katie has been travelling across the globe

and in each location she has been invited to

get to know the locals,

experience new cultures,

immerse herself in the nature of the place,

respect differences,

and set an example of how to travel responsibly.

Such examples are necessary if we are to inspire travellers

to travel for the unknown, but to do so responsibly

inspired by the motto of the International Year:

Travel.Enjoy.Respect.

respect people
respect society
respect culture
respect nature
respect history
respect our hosts

and in doing so, respect oneself.

My dear friends, one final thought...

As this is my last official event as UNWTO Secretary-General,

my final message in the framework of this IY is

whatever our business in life,

whatever our business in tourism,

our core business is and will always be

to make this world a better place.

This is a thought I will carry in my heart and soul

long after my humbling, challenging yet rewarding time as UNWTO
SG is over.

Rest assured I will continue to travel to Switzerland,

where the thrill of alpine peaks, glaciers and hidden valleys

can be coupled with the calm of sailing on Lake Geneva,

the buzz of Zurich, or the architectural marvels of Basel.

My final message to everyone is:

Travel. Enjoy. Respect Switzerland!

Thank you. *Merci.*