

**World Tourism Day 2014: High Level Dialogue on Tourism
and Community Development**

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Excellencies,

Ladies and Gentlemen, dear friends

Buenos días.

Allow me to first of all, express on behalf of UNWTO and the international tourism community, our full support to the government and the people of Mexico in the impressive recovery efforts being deployed in Baja California following the impact of hurricane Odile.

Queridos amigos

Es un placer estar de nuevo en Mexico. It is truly a great pleasure to be back in Mexico.

Mexico is a living work of art. From the colorful modern streets to the standing monuments of ancient civilizations; the diverse landscapes from the Pacific to the Caribbean; the World Heritage Sites and world-class gastronomy - everything here is so alive and imaginative, portraying the creative spirit and warmth of the Mexican people.

In each of my visits, it becomes clearer to me why Mexico captures the imagination of millions of travelers from around the world.

Indeed, despite the global challenges that the tourism sector faces around the world, not the least a lingering economic recovery; 2014 is proving to be a remarkable tourism year for Mexico.

The number of international tourists visiting this amazing country has increased by 20% generating a growth in exports from tourism of some 18%.

I must thus take this opportunity to praise the consolidation of Mexico's tourism in terms of income generated by the sector. Exports from tourism have been growing exponentially in the last years contributing in a decisive manner to the Mexican economy.

Such impressive tourism growth could not have been possible without support from the highest level and cross-cutting national policies supported by effective governance models such as the tourism cabinet.

Dear Friends,

It is my pleasure to welcome you all to the High Level Dialogue on Tourism and Community Development, the highlight of today's World Tourism Day official celebrations.

I would like to extend my deepest gratitude to our esteemed hosts for making us feel at home and to our dear speakers who have come from all over the world to impart their knowledge and experience with us today. We are privileged to have you with us in what is set to be the best attended World Tourism Day ever.

Queridos amigos

As we gather from all corners of the world to celebrate World Tourism Day, this is the ideal moment for all of us to pause and reflect on tourism's profound and global impact.

Tourism has become one of the leading social, economic and cultural phenomena of our times.

Today, tourism is a trillion-dollar economic sector that moves over a billion people across the world every year.

In spite of persistent global economic and geopolitical challenges, tourism's progress shows no signs of slowing down.

On the contrary, international tourism continues to power ahead with exponential growth. Last year, the number of international tourists travelling the world reached 1,087 million, generating a record-breaking total of US\$1.4 trillion in exports.

Such expansion has made the sector a global stronghold capable of responding to the most pressing challenges facing the world today.

Indeed, few economic sectors are as strategically positioned as tourism to address the critical challenges of mass unemployment and protracted economic growth - by providing jobs and sustainable livelihoods, fostering inclusive development and uplifting millions from poverty.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Tourism's global impact has a local reach.

Indeed, it is able to reach into the very heart of human society – the community.

By its very nature as a people-oriented activity and service sector, tourism fosters community development as it engages local populations in the tourism value chain, empowering them through education, skills and local governance.

Giving the community a greater voice in the planning and decision-making of tourism fosters leadership and social cohesion.

In this respect, communities cannot be just passive observers to the tourism that impacts their homes and their heritage, but active partners in their own sustainable development creating new enriching experiences for both visitors and hosts.

Examples of such experiences can today be found in many parts of the world.

The programme Pueblos Magicos promoted by Mexico on the occasion of World Tourism Day is an example that captures very well the true spirit of community, and the true spirit of tourism itself – that of understanding, shared experience and cooperation.

Ladies and Gentlemen, dear friends

There can be no real tourism development if it damages the values and culture of host communities, or if the socio-economic benefits generated by tourism do not trickle down to the community level.

Sustainable community development thus requires the strong commitment and cohesive efforts of all stakeholders in tourism - embracing the public sector, private enterprises and civil society.

In light of today's discussions, allow me to highlight some key policy issues that need to be considered if we want to tourism to be a true driver of community development:

1. Promote inclusive tourism policies

Local populations should be able to benefit from clear policies favoring local employment, participation and local governance capacities.

Ensuring local ownership and support of tourism development also contributes to a more equitable distribution of the benefits stemming from tourism.

2. Encourage stakeholders' collaboration

This calls for detailed consultation with all stakeholders, including central, regional and local government, the private sector and local communities, in the planning and development of tourism services and facilities, infrastructure, and marketing and promotion.

3. Promote value chains and integration

Tourism is part of a bigger value chain which integrates diverse activities such as agriculture, handicrafts or construction. It is thus fundamental to create mechanisms and develop skills that allow for a full integration of all activities and different people in the tourism value chain.

For example, hotel investment legislation can create conditions for local employment or outsourcing of agricultural products from local farmers can make a real difference.

Queridos amigos,

On the occasion of World Tourism Day, we have the opportunity to better understand the full potential of tourism to drive sustainable development for local communities worldwide.

We also have the opportunity to, together, devise the best ways to ensure that tourism development does not damage in any way the values and the culture of host communities and that the socio-economic benefits generated by the tourism sector do trickle down to the community level.

This is, dear friends, the message at the heart of our World Tourism Day Celebrations; the same message that echoes from UN Secretary-General, Ban Ki-moon words on the occasion of World Tourism Day and which I would like to share with you.

“This year’s observance of World Tourism Day focuses on the ability of tourism to fully empower people. Engaging local populations in tourism development builds stronger and more resilient communities.

Tourism helps people to develop a variety of skills. As a service sector with cross-cutting impact on agriculture, construction or handicrafts, tourism creates millions of jobs and business opportunities. Its capacity to lift people from poverty, promote gender empowerment and help protect the environment has made it a vital tool for achieving positive change in communities across the world.

Harnessing tourism's benefits will be critical to achieving the sustainable development goals and implementing the post-2015 development agenda.

On World Tourism Day, I encourage the international tourism community to commit to sustainable policies and ensure that host communities' worldwide share in the benefits generated by tourism".

I trust these words will inspire you in what I am confident will be a very fruitful debate.

Gracias y feliz dia mundial del turismo