



22nd UNWTO General Assembly

Official Opening

Chengdu, China, 11 September 2017, 8:30

Opening remarks by Taleb Rifai, UNWTO Secretary-General

Mr Wang Yang, Vice Premier

Your Royal Highness

Your Majesty

Dear Sandra Howard, President of the General Assembly

Chairman LI

Dear friends,

It is a pleasure to be here with you all opening the 22nd session of the UNWTO General Assembly here in Chengdu. Over the last decade, China has become a world leader in all paths of life tourism is no exception.

China is today:

- #1 tourism source market in the world in terms of spending
- #4 most-visited country in the world
- 59 million international arrivals in 2016
- US\$ 40 billion earned in tourism receipts in 2016
- #1 domestic tourism market
- 4.4 billion trips made inside China in 2016
- Totalling revenue of around US\$ 600 billion

But China is also an inspiration to all of us in terms of its supportive tourism policies of the clear political will exercised by government at all levels of how it has placed tourism at the centre of its poverty alleviation and national development strategies.



And, dear friends,

I am very proud to be with you today to open this GA at a moment where we celebrate 2017 declared by the UN as the International Year of Sustainable Tourism for Development.

It is no accident that we meet in China as we work hand in hand to make travel and tourism a true transformative force guiding our common action towards a better future for people and planet.

Dear friends,

We can all be very proud to be part of our sector, one that has come of age in its contribution to sustainable development, people's wellbeing and a better understanding among nations and people of all backgrounds. Much has been achieved, yet much remains to be done.

We need to:

1. Decouple growth from environmental harm and fight climate change;
2. Ensure the benefits of the sector remain within communities and build linkages; and
3. Address global security challenges.

Global challenges require global solutions. These challenges, therefore, need to be tackled with increased cooperation and by informed and committed leadership.

Dear friends,

Our sector is at a crossroads. Last year, 1235 million travellers crossed international borders. By 2030, this 1.2 billion will become 1.8 billion. The way we manage, or how we choose to manage, the growing number of people travelling around the world will determine our success to turn the 1.8 B arrivals into 1.8 B opportunities.

1. Opportunities for inclusive economic growth - Buy local
2. Opportunities for more and better jobs, decent jobs - hire local
3. Opportunities to protect our natural and cultural heritage - use tourism revenue
4. Opportunities to better know and respect each other - inquire and engage
5. Opportunities to bond people, bond hearts and minds - reach out
6. Opportunities to distribute wealth and share prosperity - spend fairly

We must drive a change in policies, business practices and consumer behaviour towards a more sustainable and robust sector. A cleaner, fairer and more equal planet for future generations to live on.



Dear Friends,

Our sector is at a crossroads. Sustainability, safety and security, and technology are shaping a new tourism sector. These challenges, though not new, demand, now more than ever, cohesion and common action if we are to build a stronger and more responsible tourism sector. A sector that contributes to the 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs); the 2030 agenda our common roadmap for people, planet, prosperity and peace. This is the message of the International Year of Sustainable Tourism for Development that we are celebrating this year; this has been UNWTO's priority since its creation.

As tourism leaders from across the world convene in Chengdu to discuss how to advance our common goals, we have a unique opportunity to send a clear message to the international community. "Tourism can and should be one of the most effective tools to address current world challenges. Job creation, poverty reduction, climate change mitigation, community development, intercultural understanding, peace and gender equality are just some of the SDGs to which tourism can contribute but only if we work closer, and better, together.

Dear friends,

We can look back on all that we have achieved together with great pride and gratitude to you all throughout this humbling, rewarding yet challenging, journey my message to you is, whatever our business in life, our core business is and will always be, to make this world a better place. A thought and a mission that I will carry in my heart and soul, way after my time as SG is over.

Dear friends,

Henry Ford said: "*Coming together is a beginning; keeping together is progress; working together is success.*" This should be the spirit guiding us in making UNWTO and our sector stronger and more responsible. Let's each and every one of us contribute to the change we want to see.



One final thought...

We travel to places that we respect, respect the civilization, respect the history, respect the culture, respect the nature, because in doing so, we respect ourselves. We find our reserves of self-respect. This is why all of us will continue to travel to China. China, the rich past, China, the prosperous present. China, the promising future.

In this International Year of Sustainable Tourism for Development our message is, TRAVEL ENJOY RESPECT

RESPECT NATURE

RESPECT CULTURE

RESPECT YOUR HOST

Don't wait – travel, enjoy and respect China!

Thank you. Xie, xie.