

Expert Meeting on Tourism's contribution to sustainable development

14 March 2013, Opening Session, 10h-13h

OPENING STATEMENT

Mr. Petko Draganov, Deputy Secretary-General, UNCTAD

Mr. Chairman,
Excellencies,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

It is my pleasure to welcome you to this expert meeting on tourism's contribution to sustainable development. We are gathered here today and tomorrow to discuss a topic that is highly relevant for many developing and developed countries alike: how to make tourism more sustainable and contribute to countries' sustainable development objectives.

The tourism industry generates 5 per cent of global GDP and between 6 and 7 per cent of the overall number of jobs worldwide. With increasing globalization and disposable income, tourism has turned into one of the largest and fastest growing industries over the last few decades. It has the potential to generate vast employment opportunities and income through backward and forward linkages in local economies. Tourism can attract large amounts of foreign investment and open up a space for technology and knowledge transfer. Moreover, international tourism constitutes a key source of foreign exchange for many developing countries. In 2012, an estimated one billion tourists have travelled internationally - that is the highest number on record - and the tourism receipts they generated bear tremendous potential for economic progress and poverty reduction.

However, there are a number of serious concerns associated with the industry. Value added that is retained in local economies of developing countries is often low,

and the potential of linkages is only partly or marginally exploited. For instance, in several countries that benefit from a favourable climate and soils for agricultural production, a large amount of food for the industry is imported and not sourced locally due to the constraints to local agricultural supply chains. Given that approximately one third of all tourism expenditure is spent on food items, an important potential source of income is not being tapped. In addition, tourism activities are not neutral in terms of impact on the environment and cultures. Tourism is energy and water consuming, produces large amounts of waste and can affect cultural heritage by attracting large crowds of people to cultural heritage sites. At the same time, adverse impacts have heightened the awareness of policy makers, tourists and tourism business operators about the need and value of conserving unique natural, social and cultural assets of destinations. Tourists are becoming more demanding of the environmental quality of destinations, and tourist destinations tend to have more incentives to conserve and improve the environment, including for creating value.

To ensure that tourism activities are carried out sustainably, and that economic, social and environmental objectives are met, ambitious strategies and policy agendas are required at the national and international level. At the national level, this calls for building adequate infrastructure and supply chains, strengthened institutions and a coherent and comprehensive policy framework. It will ensure that sustainable tourism is integrated into the country's overall national development strategy. At the international level, several efforts that are already underway should be strengthened. For instance, on the initiative of the World Tourism Organization, the Steering Committee on Tourism for Development (SCTD) was created, which brings together the tourism-specific expertise of nine international agencies and programmes. The committee's main objective is to generate synergies for a more

coordinated, effective and efficient delivery of tourism-related technical assistance to developing countries. We will hear more about the SCTD from the Executive Director of the World Tourism Organization, Mr. Favilla Lucca de Paula, during this meeting.

Turning to the programme, I would like to emphasize that this meeting provides us with an opportunity to discuss diverse aspects of sustainable tourism and how it can contribute to economic growth and sustainable development. We want to hear from country experiences, from the private sector and from agencies. I am delighted that in this opening session Mr. Suman Billa, Tourism Secretary of the Government of Kerala, India, has agreed to be our keynote speaker and I look forward to his intervention. In the course of the morning, Ms. Song, from the China Tourism Academy, and Mr. Chauvois, Conseiller Régional de Basse-Normandie and Vice President of the Regional Committee of Tourism in Normandie, will share their views on sustainable tourism with us. The afternoon session will then focus on the economic importance of sustainable tourism, while tomorrow's discussion will draw on the expertise of international organizations and how their work contributes to the development of sustainable tourism sectors.

Most importantly, we hope to have an interactive debate and to hear from experts and representatives of member States on their countries' challenges and successes in sustainable tourism.

Thank you very much.