

Marriott CEO Calls for Better Visa and Entry Systems to U.S.

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Also Says U.S. Must Find Way to Make Immigration Work

In an increasingly interconnected world, governments should focus on both improving the efficiency of travel between countries and security, Marriott International Chairman and Chief Executive Officer J.W. Marriott, Jr. said here last night.

Speaking at a meeting of the American Chamber of Commerce in Mexico City, Marriott said that while security is a priority, "we need to have a better visa and entry system, enabling an open exchange of people, ideas, services and products."

Marriott said that, "as the world is getting smaller, global opportunities are growing." He compared travel to trade between nations. He said that whenever an international visitor spends money, that transaction represents an export just as much as the sale of a good or commodity abroad.

Marriott said only 320,000 -- less than one percent -- of the more than 34 million Chinese who traveled abroad in 2006 came to the U.S. -- in part because of a less-than-efficient visa process. Marriott also asserted that Mexico would have had many more visitors from China if they had been able to get transit visas to travel through the United States to Mexico.

"Estimates are that 100 million Chinese will travel outside of their country in 2020. Both Mexico and the U.S. need to make sure that we get our share of those visitors. That's why we need to get better visa and entry systems," said Marriott.

Marriott said that global companies also have a responsibility to be global citizens. He described how Marriott's system of doing business outside the U.S. involves working with local business partners and seeking as many local suppliers and employees as possible, providing ongoing economic opportunity.

"An important part of being a good neighbor means contributing to the communities in which we do business. We call it sustainability," said Marriott.

Marriott also noted how the company was providing opportunities to at-risk youth in Mexico City as part of its global Youth Career Initiative. The program provides both on-the-job and classroom training from the company's manager ranks in the market.

Marriott said being a responsible steward of our natural resources means action at both the local and global levels. In Mexico, the company is working with the U.N. on the Riviera Maya to help protect World Heritage Sites and the local environment. He noted the company's drive to reduce carbon emissions by one million tons in the next few years and to become waste neutral. He announced a new effort at Marriott's Washington headquarters, beginning today, to use plates, cups and cutlery that are completely biodegradable.

Speaking of the importance of immigrant workers to the U.S. lodging industry, Marriott said that we must develop an immigration system that enables hard-working people to have an opportunity to better their lives and contribute to our economy.

"At Marriott, we're very proud of our efforts to help immigrant associates assimilate into the American culture. We teach them English through a computer literacy program call 'Sed de Saber' or 'Thirst for Knowledge.' But our government needs to do its part, too.

"Movement of people and ideas in the global arena is a sure bet, we must find a way to make it work," said Marriott.

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