

## Tourism will Grow Smartly - World Tourism Day 2008 Think Tank

2008-10-01

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Tourism growth must be pursued with increasing emphasis on ethics, local community involvement as well as reducing carbon emissions systematically. This is the main conclusion of this year's World Tourism Day (WTD) Think Tank held on the theme 'Tourism Responding to the Challenge of Climate Change'. The official celebrations took place in Lima, Peru.

The Think Tank was chaired by H.E. Mrs Mercedes Araoz Fernandez, Minister of Foreign Trade and Tourism of Peru, and moderated by UNWTO Assistant Secretary-General, Geoffrey Lipman.

A group of leading public and private tourism stakeholders, representatives of civil society and of the UN system highlighted the inter-relationship between climate response and global poverty reduction efforts. Simultaneous efforts on both fronts are key to effectively meet and promote sustainability goals by the tourism sector.

'Tourism must grow in a smart way. The commitment to credible sustainability criteria will represent big opportunities for new entrepreneurs in this smart growth economy, involving businesses, communities and innovative governments', said Geoffrey Lipman.

The experts convened by UNWTO agreed that special consideration must be given to the world's poorest countries. While these are the least contributors to global warming, they will face the worst hardship of its consequences.

'The climate challenge must not displace global poverty reduction efforts. Both should be pursued simultaneously', said UNWTO Deputy Secretary-General Taleb Rifai.

This will require new metrics to reflect the importance and positive role of tourism, to go beyond existing measurement tools. The legal and the ethical base need to be developed side by side and factored into this measurement, together with new databases to cover areas of intersect between public and private sectors.

While most of the world's poor countries are in Africa, also Latin America faces severe challenges from the climate shift. All over the world, national and regional level Initiatives are emerging based on the Davos Declaration Process:

The Amazon - shared by Brazil, Colombia and Peru - can become part of the solution as a preserver of biodiversity and a massive carbon sink with a huge ecotourism potential.

Particular note was taken of the Peruvian forest conservation plans.

The Sri Lanka Earth Lung has galvanized and engaged the entire sustainability movement from industry to local community and non governmental organizations.

In Africa, the close and evolving linkages between climate and poverty response initiatives stand out, evidenced in Ghana. Furthermore, the massive transborder conservation areas, represented by the Peace Parks, can also become earth lungs.

Argentina offered an example on the discussions to consider and integrate tourism activities with other ministries, taking note of the sector's horizontal socio-economic impact.

Against this background, tourism has to take advantage of its potential as a global communications industry. The sector can be used as a platform to help educate the world on the need for action on climate change coherent with the UN Millennium Development Goals (MDGs).

Participants of the Think Tank welcomed two new initiatives:

ClimateSolutions.travel: Built with support of Microsoft, this portal will be a global repository of good practice for all tourism stakeholders to replicate.

Tourpact.GC: The first sectoral initiative of UN's Global compact. It links the Corporate Responsibility Principles and Processes of the Compact with UNWTO's Global Code of Ethics for Tourism. The UN Secretary-General has welcomed it as an initiative to be followed by other sectors.

ClimateSolutions.travel and Tourpact.GC represent innovative and concrete steps to keep the momentum on the Davos Declaration Process, to help advance replicable good practice and to engage the private sector.

The Davos Declaration Process encourages all tourism stakeholders to adapt to changing climate conditions, mitigate greenhouse gas emissions from the sector, apply existing and new technologies to improve energy efficiency, and secure financial resources to assist regions and countries in need.

The Peru Think Tank was mirrored by similar events around the world and conclusions will be carried to the upcoming Ministers' Summit on 11 November in London, during this year's World Travel Market.

World Tourism Day 2008 is an occasion to highlight the need for a coherent global climate response of the tourism sector while stimulating continuous action in support of poverty alleviation and the MDGs.

World Tourism Day is commemorated on 27 September each year by appropriate events on themes selected by UNWTO's General Assembly, on recommendation of the Executive Council. This date was chosen to coincide with the anniversary of the adoption of the UNWTO Statutes on 27 September 1970 and designated as World Tourism Day such by the UN General Assembly.

### **World Tourism Day 2008 Think Tank - Issues and Conclusions**

The discussions raised the following issues:

A clear and formal link between the development and the climate agenda has to be established.

Tourism growth must be pursued with increasing emphasis on ethics, local community involvement as well as reducing carbon emissions systematically to meet sustainability goals.

This quality oriented growth pattern will provide major opportunities for new entrepreneurs, creating a shared space for business, communities and innovative governments.

More sustainability goals and climate targets need to be included in corporate objectives.

Intelligent growth calls for new metrics which go beyond existing measurement tools. The legal and the ethical base need to be developed side by side and factored into this measurement, together with new databases to cover areas of intersect between public and private sectors.

Responsible government policies must set the framework to lead the drive to this new approach, which will need transition strategies.

Climate change has multistakeholder impacts and calls for multistakeholder response including the public and private sector, travellers and local communities.

Against this background the following conclusions were reached:

Tourism can be a positive catalyst for national, regional and local change. The private sector can be a leader but must also be a partner to governments and non governmental organizations.

Tourism must be proactive and integrate the deep change in culture and in operations that are required.

Tourism is a communications industry for the world and it should be used to help educate the world on the need for action on climate change coherent with the UN Millennium Development Goals (MDGs).

Sustainability in action requires increased awareness and must be factored into general education policies and programmes, putting tourism and climate change into curricula.

Climate and poverty response need special support for the poor. The poorest nations are also the least contributors to global warming but will face the worst hardship.

Poor states should not pay for past excesses of rich nations.

The new initiatives ClimateSolutions.travel and Tourpact.GC were welcomed as innovative and concrete ways to keep the momentum on the Davos Declaration Process, to help advance replicable good practice and to engage the private sector.

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