

Speech at 22nd Session of the UNWTO General Assembly

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**“TOURISM AND THE SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT GOALS: JOURNEY TO
2030”**

Madam President

Dr Taleb Rifai, Secretary General of the UNWTO

HE Mr. Li Jinzao, Chairman, China National Tourism Administration

Honourable Ministers of Tourism

Heads of Delegations

Distinguished delegates

Ladies and Gentlemen

On behalf of the Mauritian delegation, I have the pleasant duty to congratulate the UNWTO under the very able leadership of the outgoing Secretary-General H.E. Dr. Taleb Rifai for the excellent arrangements made for this 22nd Session the UNWTO General Assembly. May I congratulate the Secretary General elect and assure him of our support.

Let me reaffirm our commitment to this Organization which is destined to play an increasingly important role in alleviating poverty and implementing the Sustainable Development Goals.

I also must place on record our deep appreciation for the friendship and generous hospitality of the People's of the Republic of China and the Chinese authorities for sparing no effort to make our stay in this vibrant city of Chengdu in Sichuan Province so enjoyable.

Ladies and Gentlemen

This General Assembly is being held in China which has initiated the "Belt and Road" Initiative which we are confident will further enhance the overarching programme for Sustainable development in the world at large. Tourism will be one of the major beneficiaries of this mega initiative.

Year 2017 is the International Year of Sustainable tourism for Development. Tourism depends on security and safety to thrive. Tourism and terrorism can never co-exist. This is why I consider that it is imperative for the UNWTO to work on an international mechanism for the sharing of information and intelligence in order to pre-empt all attacks against tourism enterprises. It is our hope

that this Assembly will favourably entertain this idea. A regular exchange of information about the risks of terror attacks and the movement of persons with terrorism links will be most helpful. Tourist establishments, airports and such facilities are soft targets for those determined to kill, disrupt and destroy. Special attention must be given by the international community to pre-empt any event likely to imperil the tourism industry which contributes so much to make the world such a great place.

Tourism needs years and massive investments to develop but it can be wrecked in an instant by violence, natural disasters and disease. Developing countries that have been the victims of such events find it very hard to recover. Hurricane Irma has just inflicted relentless destruction on the tourist destinations of the Caribbean. We feel their pain because we understand.

Ladies and Gentlemen

We are all here in China to celebrate the wonderful industry which tourism is. A world without tourism or a world without aviation or other means of transport would be incredibly dull. People have been travelling since times immemorial, as the need for discovery is unstoppable. We who are deeply engaged in tourism, have an

obligation to respond to that need and to care for all travellers. Travel involves learning, discovering, adapting, adopting, sharing and, above all, understanding.

Ladies and Gentlemen

2017 so far has been both good and bad for tourism. Terrorist attacks in major European countries have unsettled the industry. What we as the international community cannot overlook is the devastating consequences of terrorist attacks on the tourism industry in the developing countries. Well established destinations like Paris, London, New York and Brussels can weather any such attacks much faster than destinations in countries like my own. I am confident that tourism will continue to be resilient and withstand all negative influences.

Ladies and Gentlemen

Tourism has already helped in the alleviation of poverty through a partnership between the public and the private sectors with the

active involvement of the local communities. The challenge in the future will be to mobilize popular support for sustainable tourism.

We must, however, be careful that any influx of tourists does not disrupt the way of life of local communities. This is important in order to forestall any hostility towards those who are perceived as 'invaders'. This reflects what our Secretary General mentioned as "Tourism Phobia". Tourism is like a baby, we need to look after it at all times and in all places.

We must look at the broader picture and take steps to mitigate any likely negative impact. But the development of tourism must not stop. The competition between local communities and tourist enterprises for resources and utilities will exacerbate as tourism develops. Tourism is a force for good. We all want a bright future for tourism. There is a need to educate local communities and civil society on the immeasurable benefits of tourism.

A well-run tourism industry has the potential to improve the lives of everyone, covering the whole gamut from the totally unskilled to the very qualified professionals. We encourage the UNWTO to

continue its capacity building programme. Acquisition of skills in and for tourism is of the utmost importance for the industry.

As tourism increasingly becomes an industry which countries will prioritize in their development strategy, it is inevitable that there will be an impact on natural resources, the environment, social systems, consumption patterns, noise and other sources of pollution. This calls for well-designed, inclusive and sophisticated planning and management.

Ladies and Gentlemen

Island destinations were optimistic after the Paris Agreement on climate change because they are the first to endure its terrible consequences. When the dangers of climate change loom, business as usual for islands can no longer be business as usual as their very survival as tourism destinations is at stake. Let us pray for Mother Nature and let us hope that no one preys on her.

Ladies and Gentlemen

Along with UNWTO, we consider cultural tourism as a major component of sustainable tourism. Cultural tourism needs to be protected but it can also have pitfalls. In Germany some Chinese tourists stood before the Bundestag and posed for pictures with a

Hitler salute. They were seen by guards and they were arrested and had to pay a fine as taking the Hitler salute is an offence in Germany. Naturally, the Chinese tourists did not know that. Awareness of what is allowed and what is offensive is what will make tourism sustainable over the very long term. Cultural sensitivities should not be overlooked.

Ladies and Gentlemen

Tourism is no longer for the rich alone, tourism is for all. It is an engine for economic development and an instrument for peace. Tourism must be affordable to and for all. Tourism is the common heritage of mankind and it is an exquisite form of people to people diplomacy.

Ladies and Gentlemen, Dear Colleagues

In Mauritius, tourism has been a buoyant growth sector of the economy; travel and tourism account for about 10% of our GDP.

Mauritius, with its high quality resorts, unique landscapes and nature-based activities, modern shopping malls, a friendly, tolerant and culturally diverse population, believes in the potential for

tourism as the trigger for moving from a middle income country to a high income one. We are a mosaic nation and we intend to showcase our uniqueness. Outside this hall we have a photo exhibition. I wish to invite you to see it.

The tourism sector has created around 100,000 both direct and indirect jobs. It is expected that the tourism sector will grow at a rate of 5% yearly up to 2020 and 3% yearly from 2021 up to 2030.

However, a growing and successful sector requires a constantly innovative approach, improvement in quality, excellence in service delivery, diversified product portfolio, skills and infrastructure. Mauritius is attached to protecting its environment and it will take all necessary measures to ensure that sustainable tourism development does not remain a mere slogan but becomes reality.

Ladies and Gentlemen

We are confident that, in Mauritius, tourism will contribute immensely to realisation of all the SDGs before the cut-off date of 2030.

We agree with the UNWTO that sustainable tourism development should 'meet the needs of present tourists and host regions while protecting and enhancing opportunities for the future'.

Mauritius supports the UNWTO and is confident that the decisions which will be taken during this General Assembly will shape the world of the future and have far reaching results for mankind. We are preparing for a world which will make use of technology for smart tourism. The challenge we face is how to harness the potential in the Internet of Things and Artificial Intelligence to guarantee the sustainability of travel and tourism. There is no other option than to get technology and tourism to partner in order to herald smart and sustainable tourism.

I thank you for your attention