

UN convenes world tourism leaders to plan recovery after economic crisis



7 October 2009 – Some 360 delegates from 112 countries are meeting under United Nations auspices in Astana, Kazakhstan, to determine how the tourism industry can surmount the decline brought on by the economic crisis while responding to the twin challenges of climate change and poverty alleviation.

Convened for the 18th session of the UN World Tourism Organization (**UNWTO**) General Assembly, tourism ministers and senior officials from national organizations, as well as public, private and academic affiliate members, will discuss the agency's Roadmap for Recovery, which calls on world leaders to place tourism and travel at the core of stimulus packages and the transformation to the Green Economy.

Travel and tourism have the potential "to play an essential role in post-crisis recovery by providing jobs, infrastructure, stimulating trade and development and should be a key consideration at future global economic summits," UNWTO said in a statement, noting that they are among the largest employers in most countries and a fast entry vehicle into the workforce, directly or through related services such as construction and commerce.

Other key issues to be addressed include the facilitation of tourist travel, pandemic preparedness in the framework of influenza (H1N1), and technical cooperation to promote sustainable development through travel.

On the recommendation of the Executive Council, UNWTO Secretary-General ad interim Taleb Rifai is expected to be appointed Secretary-General for 2010-2013.

Overall, the tourism market is starting to indicate stronger prospects for recovery in 2010, with preliminary figures until August this year suggesting some moderation in the declining results of the first half of this year. International arrivals declined by 4 per cent in July, compared to decreases of 10 per cent in May and 7 per cent in June.

In absolute terms, international tourist arrivals worldwide reached 500 million in the first seven months, down from 540 million in the same period of 2008. Arrivals in 2009 are currently between the levels of 2007 and 2006. The first seven months of the year generally account for roughly 57 per cent of the total annual number.

"As the latest economic data and prospects indicate that the world economy may be starting to emerge from its most severe recession of the post-Second World War period, in tourism

too there are signs that confidence is returning and that demand is improving for both business and leisure travel," Mr. Rifai said.

The economic conditions, combined with the uncertainties brought about by the influenza (H1N1), are expected to continue to affect tourism demand, at least in the short term. But as decline rates are anticipated to ease, international tourism is forecast to decrease by between 4 per cent and 6 per cent this year.

Although many sub-regions might return to growth in the last months of 2009, this will not be enough to compensate for the losses felt so far. Growth for the full year is projected to be negative in all regions, except for Africa.

"Long-term prospects remain positive if the sector is able to address its challenges in a coordinated and effective manner," Mr. Rifai said. "Today, world leaders are working together in ways that would have been unimaginable at any time in the past, to coordinate and collaborate on economy, climate response and the development agenda. The tourism sector should do the same on the road to recovery and towards a more sustainable industry."

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