Ministers’ Summit

“Responding to the Economic Downturn & Staying on Course with the Climate & Poverty Reduction Agenda”

11 November 2008, Excel grounds, Conference Set, Platinum Suite, 4, level 3

Background

As part of World Travel Market’s Ministers’ Programme, the United Nations World Tourism Organisation (UNWTO) will once again work in partnership with World Travel Market (WTM) to host a one day Minister’s Summit at this year’s event in London on Tuesday 11 November on Responding to the economic downturn and staying on course with the climate and poverty reduction agendas.

Faced with the global economic uncertainty this year, the tourism sector must seriously examine how these reservations will affect the industry while making sure to not lose sight of its commitment to provide solutions to global challenges, particularly global warming, sustainable development and poverty.

Ministers of Tourism are formally invited to participate at this important international event. The objective is to assist in deepening the debate on the economic downturn and its effects on climate change and poverty reduction agendas.

Evolving United Nations Framework

The United Nations (UN) is working to create the necessary frameworks for international agreements, including government participation to enable private action. The UNWTO is working hard to ensure that tourism plays its part within this important framework.

Together with the UN Environmental Programme (UNEP) and the World Meteorological Organisation (WMO), the UNWTO have established a set of guidelines for the entire tourism sector including the business and leisure markets, to help respond to climate change in coherence with the Millennium Development Goals.

In 2007, the UNWTO, with the partners listed above and the support of the World Economic Forum representing global business, held a multi-stakeholder conference in Davos, Switzerland, followed by Minister level meetings at World Travel Market and the UNWTO’s General Assembly in Cartagena de Indias, Colombia, to produce updated guidelines for climate change.

The resulting conclusions - The Davos Declaration Process, were presented as input to the UN Secretary General and to the Bali meeting in December 2007.

The commitment means an immediate and progressively intensive action, within the evolving UN framework of response for a globally comprehensive climate neutral system based on adaptation, mitigation, technology and development financing.

The Djerba Declaration on Tourism and Climate Change in April 2003 emphasised the relationships between climate change and tourism, given the economic importance that the sector is having on many countries, especially small island and developing
Tourism, Development and Climate Change

The short term economic perception has turned downward, however global efforts to address poverty and climate imperatives within a 30-year framework of change continue to progress. These efforts must be understood and embraced by the tourism industry along with its role as an undisputed economic growth engine for rich and poor nations alike, as a force for social and cultural cohesion, and as a vehicle for environmental stewardship – particularly in emerging and least developed markets.

Many long-haul trips are often to countries that are home to the planet’s poorest populations, which in turn stand to benefit the most from international tourism. Climate change response, therefore, must avoid punishing travel.

Communities in developing countries, where the capacity to adapt is weakest, will be the first victims of global warming and these populations will be doubly affected if we also deprive them of the economic contribution from tourism.

With some 900 million international flight arrivals last year and 1.6 billion forecast in 2020 the challenge to consolidate and focus the benefits of air travel, while continuously reducing the carbon footprint is imminent.

The tourism sector must act now if it is to develop a truly sustainable future, reducing its own greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions intelligently and expeditiously reacting to the impacts on its own operations.

Actions are required to:

- **Mitigate** GHG emissions from the sector, derived especially from transport and accommodations activities,
- **Adapt** tourism businesses and destinations to changing climate conditions,
- Apply **existing and new technologies** to improve energy efficiency, and
- Secure **financial resources** to assist regions and countries in need.

Present and future action requires differentiated approaches, acknowledging that developing countries tend to bear a disproportionate share of the burden of climate change. Sustainable development is the best form of adaptation.

Against this background, the 2008 WTM Ministers’ Summit will follow on from the past landmarks on climate change, now including the short term economic dimension.