Preliminary Remarks of the Secretary-General

INTRODUCTION

1. The present report for the fifty-fourth meeting of the Commission for Americas briefly addresses the following subjects:

   • Update on International Tourism in 2011 and Prospects for 2012;
   • Mainstreaming Tourism in the Global Agenda;
   • Implementation of the Programmes of Work 2010-2011 and 2012-2013; and
   • Administrative and Financial Matters.

Some of the above-mentioned subjects have constituted the object of dedicated reports for this meeting.

A. Update on International Tourism in 2011 and Prospects for 2012

2. **International tourist arrivals in 2011**: International tourist arrivals grew by 4.6% in 2011 to a total 983 million, up from 940 million in 2010. In a year characterised by a stalled global economic recovery, major political changes in the Middle East and North Africa and natural disasters namely the terrible earthquake and tsunami in Japan, overall results were clearly above expectations. Growth was only slightly higher in advanced economies (+4.9%) than in emerging ones (+4.4%), due largely to the strong results in Europe, and the declines in the Middle East and North Africa.

3. **By region**, Asia and Europe (both at +6%) were the best performing regions in 2011, while by sub-region South-East Asia (+10%) topped the ranking. The Americas (+4%) saw an increase of 6 million arrivals, reaching nearly 157 million in total, Africa (+0.4%) maintained international arrivals at 50 million, as the gain of two million by Sub-Saharan destinations (+6%) was offset by the losses in North Africa (-9%). The Middle East saw arrivals decline by 7%.

4. **International tourism receipts** exceeded US$ 1 trillion in 2011 for the first time, up from US$ 928 billion in 2010. In real terms (adjusted for exchange rate fluctuations and inflation), receipts grew by 3.8%, following a 4.6% increase in international tourist arrivals. An additional US$ 196 billion in
receipts from international passenger transport brought total exports generated by international tourism in 2011 to US$ 1.2 trillion. By region, the Americas (+5.7%) recorded the largest increase in receipts in 2011, followed by Europe (+5.2%), Asia and the Pacific (+4.3%) and Africa (+2.2%). The Middle East was the only region posting negative growth (-14%).

5. In the Americas (+4%), South America, one of the fastest growing sub-regions in the world in recent years, consolidated its results with a 9% growth in the number of international tourists. Arrivals grew at a slower pace in the Caribbean (+4%) and in Central America (+4%), but yet stronger than in 2010. North America (+3%) slew down its performance as compared to 2010 (+7%).

6. International tourism receipts grew stronger than arrivals in the Americas during 2011 led by the strong performance of North and South America (both up by almost 7%). Total export earnings from tourism in the Americas grew by 6% to reach US$ 199 billion up from US$ 181 billion in 2010 (19% share in the world). The Caribbean and Central America, where arrivals grew by 4%, saw growth in receipts of only 1% in 2011.

7. Prospects for 2012 – international tourist arrivals to reach one billion: UNWTO forecasts international tourism to consolidate its growth in 2012 although at a slower rate. Arrivals are expected to increase by 3% to 4%, reaching the historic one billion mark by December 2012. Emerging economies are expected to regain the lead with stronger growth in Asia and the Pacific and Africa (4% to 6%), followed by the Americas and Europe (2% to 4%). The Middle East is forecast to recover part of its losses from 2011. As international tourism receipts tend to be more affected in times of economic constraints, receipts are expected to lag somewhat behind arrivals in 2012.

8. Estimates for the first four months of 2012 show that international tourism worldwide continues to grow strongly in spite of increasing economic volatility. International tourist arrivals grew by 5% with demand stronger in advanced economy destinations (+6%) than in emerging ones (+5%) despite economic constraints in many of the source markets of Europe and North America.

9. Growth was positive in all regions during the first months of the year, namely in the Middle East (+1%). Asia and the Pacific and Africa were the fastest-growing regions (+6%) followed by the Americas with a 6% growth. In Europe (+4%) results were rather positive in view of the existing economic situation.

10. In the Americas, South America (+7%) continued to grow above average while all other three sub-regions started 2012 growing at a stronger pace than in 2011: North America (+6%), Caribbean (+5%) and Central America (+7%).

B. Mainstreaming Tourism in the Global Agenda

11. The Secretariat continued to work in raising awareness of tourism’s contribution to economic growth and sustainable development in order to move the sector higher on the global and national political and economic agendas.

12. Two significant milestones were achieved in this regard at two major global summits: the United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development (Rio+20) and the G20 Leaders’ Summit.

13. At the Rio+20 Conference world leaders agreed on the Outcome Document, The Future We Want, emphasizing that “tourism can make a significant contribution to the three dimensions of sustainable
development, has close linkages to other sectors, and can create decent jobs and generate trade opportunities. The inclusion of tourism in the Outcome Document of a UN Conference on Sustainable Development for the first time was the culmination of year-long efforts by UNWTO Member States and the Secretariat. Further achievements in this area include tourism's inclusion in the Joint Statement of the UN Chief Executive's Board (CEB) to the Rio+20 Conference and in the Oceans Compact, an on-going UN initiative to address the most pressing issues regarding the sustainable management of oceans.

14. For the first time, the Leaders of the G20 recognized the role of tourism as “a vehicle for job creation, economic growth and development”. This acknowledgment came on the back of the T20, a Members-driven initiative started in 2010 with the full support of UNWTO that gathers the Ministers of Tourism of the G20 (T20 meetings were held in 2010 in South Africa and the Republic of Korea, in 2011 in France and in 2012 in Mexico). Furthermore, the G20 committed to "work towards developing travel facilitation initiatives in support of job creation, quality work, poverty reduction and global growth", a major breakthrough in the drive to promote visa facilitation. This was the result of the work of the 4th T20 Ministers’ Meeting, held in Mexico (15-16 May 2012), which focused on tourism as an alternative to job creation. The meeting looked into how visa facilitation can act as a lever to stimulate demand and create jobs and adopted a landmark declaration encouraging the G20 to “recognize the role of travel and tourism as vehicle for job creation, economic growth and development and commit to travel facilitation as a conduit for job creation, decent work, poverty alleviation and global growth”. UNWTO and World Travel and Tourism Council (WTTC) research, presented to the 4th T20 Ministers Meeting, shows that improving visa processes and entry formalities could generate an extra US$ 206 billion in tourism receipts for G20 countries and create as many as 5.1 million additional jobs.

This is a significant success for the sector and could not have happened without the support of President Calderon and without the commitment of the Minister of Tourism of Mexico, who so successfully chaired the 4th T20 Ministers’ Meeting.

15. Within the objective of positioning tourism as a priority in the national agendas, the ‘Global Leaders for Tourism’ campaign has advanced substantially during 2011 and 2012. The campaign, a joint initiative by UNWTO and WTTC, comprises the presentation of an Open Letter to Heads of State and Government worldwide, seeking their acknowledgement of the relevance of tourism in facing today’s global challenges. Between 28 February 2011, when President Felipe Calderón of Mexico first received the Open Letter, and the end of July 2012, 35 leaders had joined the Campaign.

16. Out of the 35 Heads of State and Governments who have received the Open Letter, four are from the Americas: Mexico, Colombia, Jamaica and Peru.

17. Travel facilitation, taxation and consumer protection have been identified as key policy issues in 2012:

a. Travel facilitation: As destinations worldwide look to stimulate travel demand under pressing economic conditions, UNWTO has been working with several industry bodies and governments to advance visa facilitation, an area in which in spite of the great strides made so far, there is still much room for progress. The Secretariat has been raising awareness among all countries of the potential of maximizing new technologies in improving visa application and processing formalities, as well as the timings of visa issuance, and advising them to analyse the possible impact of travel facilitation in increasing their tourism economies.
b. **Taxation**: The recent trend of introducing new and/or increasing existing taxation on travel and tourism continues to represent a serious setback to the sector. The Secretariat has been raising awareness of this issue in several international fora and coordinating with industry bodies to voice the concern of the tourism sector in this respect.

c. **Consumer Protection**: please see point 19 e).

C. Implementation of the Programmes of Work 2010-2011 and 2012-2013

C.1 Programmes of Work 2010-2011 and 2012-2013

18. An important number of activities has been implemented since the fifty-third meeting of the Commission for the Americas and since the report prepared by the Secretariat to the 19th session of the General Assembly covering the period up to June 2011.

19. Detailed information on the activities carried out is provided in documents CAM/54/6 and CAM/54/6.2. Some of the global activities are as follows:

a. **Events**: Major global events held include:

- the World Tourism Day High Level Dialogue on Tourism, Linking Cultures in the framework of the celebrations of World Tourism Day 2011 in Aswan, Egypt (September 2011);
- the 1st UNWTO International Conference on Tourism and the Media in Zagreb, Croatia (September 2011);
- the 1st International Congress on Ethics and Tourism in Madrid, Spain (September 2011);
- the 2nd International Conference on the Measurement and Economic Analysis of Regional Tourism, in Bilbao, Spain (October 2011);
- the UNWTO & WTM Ministers’ Summit on *How Tourism Can Prosper in Times of Uncertainty* at the World Travel Market in London, UK (November 2011);
- the Sixth EXCELTUR Tourism Leadership Forum in Madrid, Spain (January 2012);
- the 1st Meeting of the Global NTO Think Tank – Creating value through collaboration, a joint initiative of UNWTO and the European Travel Commission (ETC), at ITB Berlin, Germany (March 2012);
- the 7th World Congress on Snow and Mountain Tourism in La Massana, Andorra (April 2012);
- the UNWTO Conference “The Future of Mediterranean Tourism” in Djerba, Tunisia (April 2012);
- the 2nd Tourism and the Media Conference in Marsa Alam, Egypt (April 2012);
- a Tourism Side Event at the 13th Session of the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD XIII) in Doha, Qatar (April 2012); and
- the 4th T.20 Ministers Meeting, a Members driven initiative in Merida, Mexico (May 2012);
- the International Conference on “Seizing Market Opportunities in Times of Rapid Change” in the Dead Sea, Jordan (June 2012);

Several other technical and regional conference, seminars and workshops took place during this period, the detail of which is presented in the corresponding reports.
b. **Publications**: Among the outputs of UNWTO’s extensive research programme during the period under review it is worth highlighting the publication of the following reports:

- the UNWTO long-term forecast *Tourism Towards 2030 – Global Overview* presented at the 19th Session of the General Assembly in October 2011;
- the *Tourism Chapter of the Green Economy Report: Investing in Energy and Resource Efficiency*, jointly produced with United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP);
- the *Toolbox for Crisis Communications in Tourism*;
- a series of reports on outbound travel including *The Chinese Outbound Travel to Africa*, *The Spanish Outbound Travel Market to Africa and the Middle East*, and *The Middle East Outbound Market with Special Insight into the Image of Europe as a Destination* done in cooperation with the European Travel Commission (ETC);
- the 2012 edition of the UNWTO *Tourism Highlights*;
- the *Affiliate Members Report on LGBT Tourism*;
- the report *Challenges and Opportunities for Tourism Development in Small Island Developing States*; and
- the 2012 editions of the UNWTO *Yearbook* and of the *Compendium of Tourism Statistics*.

Moreover, the Secretariat has during 2011-2012 increased the frequency of the *UNWTO World Tourism Barometer* to a total of three full issues, two interim updates and one advance release allowing Members a more effective monitoring of short-term tourism trends.

c. **Technical Cooperation and Development Assistance**: By the end of 2011, a total of 38 ST-EP projects were under implementation in 29 countries; four new projects have started in 2012 (Bolivia, Burundi, Jordan and Timor-Leste). Furthermore, several technical cooperation projects are currently underway, including eight MDG-F Achievement Fund (MDG-F) projects in Ecuador, Egypt, Nicaragua, Panama, Peru, Serbia and Turkey. MDG-F project was concluded during 2011 in Honduras and the one in Senegal will be in September 2012.

d. **Education and Capacity Building**: Through the UNWTO Themis Foundation, UNWTO’s executive arm for education, several training courses were held in the various regions covering areas such as statistics and Tourism Satellite Account (TSA), marketing and promotion, tourism and development, risk and crisis management and sustainable development.

e. **Special Initiatives and Projects**: Four special initiatives and projects have been further advanced during the period under review:

- **Hotel Energy Solutions**: Following three years of testing and research, the Hotel Energy Solutions online toolkit was officially launched in August 2011. The e-toolkit created to help hotels evaluate their energy consumption and assist in improving their energy management and cutting costs. Though it was developed for European Union Member States in line with EU Energy Policies, it is expected to be rolled out globally. (Discussions on the adaptation and/or translation of the online tool to other languages and regions are on-going). The online toolkit, alongside other web-based resources – ‘Energy School’, a series of research reports to better understand energy efficiency and renewable energy technologies and
promotional materials for hotels to sensitize their guests on energy saving – are available free of charge to all accommodation establishments registered with the project at http://www.hotelenergysolutions.net.

- **Knowledge Network:** The UNWTO Knowledge Network, an important part of the Affiliate Members programme, currently counts 122 knowledge-based tourism-related institutions, organizations and universities from the public and private sectors. UNWTO is strengthening the capacity of the Knowledge Network as an extensive research body of UNWTO to support innovation in policy, governance and other areas of tourism, closely connecting with its Member States and the global tourism community. Some of the planned activities for 2012 include the launch of an interactive virtual home of the UNWTO Knowledge Network and the 2012 edition of the UNWTO Ulysses Prize and Awards (4th quarter of 2012).

- **Legal instrument on tourist/consumer protection:** In response, and mandated by the 19th session of the General Assembly, the Secretariat has set up a Working Group on the Protection of Tourists/Consumers and Travel Organizations to draft an international convention for the protection of both parties. The convention will be the first legally-binding instrument to be proposed by UNWTO, highlighting the growing relevance and recognition of the tourism sector. In 2011, the Working Group met twice to discuss the content of the legal instrument, as well as to define its scope and level of application. The convention, it was decided, will cover issues including providing assistance to, and ensuring the repatriation of, consumers, particularly in cases of force majeure; the supply of accurate and timely information to tourists including how to handle bankruptcy situations of travel organizers; and issues related to accommodation. In 2012, the Working Group met twice (in February in Milan, Italy and last week at UNWTO HQ in Madrid, Spain) advancing substantially this process.

- **DEVCO Project:** The European Commission (Directorate General Development and Cooperation – DG DEVCO/EuropeAid) has requested UNWTO to assist in the creation of a Guidebook on Sustainable Development as an engine for development, trade in services, job creation and poverty reduction. The project will deliver a *Sustainable Tourism for Development Study* - an instrument that will enable EU services and other development institutions to include sustainable tourism development projects in their programme cycles.

**C.2 Specific UNWTO Activities in the Americas**

20. In line with the Organization’s Programme of Work and strategic objectives, the primary focus of the activities carried out in the Americas has been on improving competitiveness and capacity building. These include:

a. In the area of capacity building:

   - **UNWTO Course on Tourism Planning and Product Development**, (State of Yucatán, Mexico, 28 November to 2 December 2011): This UNWTO.Capacity initiative aimed to strengthen participant’s skills and practical experience in identifying the tourism vocation of a destination, tourism development initiatives, planning and design of innovative tourism products according to supply and demand characteristics. The course was attended by more than 40 officials from national, regional and / or local governments, as well as from the private and third sectors from Mexico, Argentina, Brazil, Chile, Costa Rica, Colombia, El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras, Panama, Paraguay, Peru, Uruguay and Venezuela.
- **UNWTO International Course on the Management of Public Use in Protected Areas** (Puerto Madryn, Argentina, 9 to 15 June 2012): The 8th edition of the UNWTO courses in Argentina aimed at familiarizing participants with technical criteria for planning, designing and implementing tourism programmes and activities in protected areas, as well as providing practical tools to enhance their knowledge and technical criteria with concepts of sustainability, quality and marketing.

b. In the field of improving competitiveness:

- **Caribbean Tourism Summit & Outlook Seminar 2012** (Montego Bay, Jamaica, 14-16 June 2012): Joint event organized with the Caribbean Hotel and Tourism Association (CHTA), WTTC, the Caribbean Tourism Organization (CTO) and the Ministry of Tourism of Jamaica, to debate issues such as aviation and facilitation policies and their impact on the Caribbean, the revision of air interconnection policies in the Caribbean and the short-term outlook, and the competitiveness of destinations in the region.

- **Seminar on “The role of Municipalities in Tourism Development in the Americas” and Seminar on “Tourism Security in the Americas”** (Lima, Peru, 18-20 June 2012): The seminars were inaugurated with the presence of the President of the Republic of Peru, Humala Tasso, to whom UNWTO and WTTC have presented the Open Letter on Travel and Tourism.

  The first seminar was attended by mayors from all regions of Peru and other Latin American countries and analysed major issues related to tourism activity at local level such as territorial planning for tourism uses, local tourism management, experiences at the municipal level, and individual success stories such as the tourism management of World Heritage cities like Quito, in Ecuador or Cartagena de Indias, in Colombia.

  The Seminar on “Tourism Security in the Americas” gathered important Latin American and European experts to discuss tourism safety and security in the region. Presentations covered a wide spectrum of topics including the private sector’s role in visitors’ safety and security and crisis communication with the contribution of several case studies such as the crisis communication strategy of Chile during the earthquake and the mining accident.

D. **Administrative and Financial Matters**

21. In 2010, the Secretariat undertook a review of its structure by moving towards a programme-based distribution of posts, more attuned to on-going and emerging needs of the Organization. In 2011, as part of this process and with the expertise of an external consultant, post profiles were reviewed and redefined to better meet the objectives of the various programmes. Subsequently, a professional growth plan was introduced during the second half of 2011. Based on factors such as updated post profiles, positive performance evaluation, objective eligibility criteria, and on-going training of staff, the professional growth plan opens new perspectives to staff members on board by providing them with career growth options and incentives. This is essential when, like in the case of the Organization, the workforce is very limited in numbers but entrusted with a very wide scope of activities and responsibilities. In addition, the professional growth plan is also expected to constitute an incentive to attract highly qualified candidates to fill future vacancies that may be issued as part of the Organization’s business continuity scheme. The professional growth plan will be progressively carried out through annual review exercises.
22. The financial implementation for the biennium 2010-2011 has been made in accordance with the approved budget and as anticipated by Member States through the interim Financial Reports and as confirmed by the External Auditors’ reports on the accounts for the years 2010 and 2011.

23. The main issue faced in this period has been the challenge of transforming a zero nominal growth into an opportunity to further rationalize expenditure and programme delivery. While the Organization has done well in this regard, a continuation of such policy into the current 2012-2013 biennium may jeopardise outputs or quality. The Secretariat remains actively engaged in avoiding negative impacts from such risk, as described in the following sections.

24. The Secretariat has noted with appreciation efforts made by the large majority of Member States to keep current on their financial obligations and, in some cases, to advance the payment of accumulated arrears, particularly in the current economic context. Without the continuous financial means provided by its Members, it would not be possible for the Organization to operate adequately.

25. Regarding the preliminary financial implementation for 2012, the Secretariat has elaborated a plan of expenditure based on prudent financial estimates and will continue monitoring its implementation as the year progresses. Member States will be kept abreast of any development in this regard.

26. The Secretariat continues strongly committed to strengthening its efforts in raising extra-budgetary funds for technical cooperation activities as well as for other programmes. The establishment of a dedicated fund-raising programme within the Secretariat has been a milestone in this endeavour. This new programme is focused on tapping into extra source of funding which allow expanding the Organization’s outreach and the service to Members without increasing the regular budget and the Members’ contributions. Within the work of the Organization in this regard, and as reported to the 19th session of the General Assembly, UNWTO is now recognized as an ODA Eligible Organization for Bilateral Aid, which means that funds channelled through UNWTO for projects in ODA eligible countries can now be considered as an official development assistance amount. For the next programming period UNWTO would need to increase its extra-budgetary resources so as to meet the DAC’s present minimum threshold of US$ 20 million of overall resources annually directed at ODA recipient countries in order to become a fully-fledged ODA eligible international organization.