

Welcoming remarks

UNWTO/ICAO High-Level Forum on Tourism and Air Transport for Development

21st Session of the UNWTO General Assembly

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Excellencies,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

It is a pleasure to be here with you this morning, and to have the honour to join UNWTO in convening this High-Level Forum on Tourism and Air Transport Development.

I would first like to express my sincere thanks and appreciation to our host, the Government of the Republic of Colombia, for extending such a warm welcome to our participants and providing these excellent facilities.

I also wish to express ICAO's deep gratitude to the World Tourism Organization for inviting us to jointly organize this meeting. Our two Organizations have been seeking to enhance our efforts through greater partnership and this event is a prime example of the success we are now seeing.

From ICAO's standpoint more specifically, the timing of this Joint High-level Forum helps to underscore the strategic importance of tourism and air transport commonalities at an important stage in the history of civil aviation growth and development. Our sector will be doubling in flight and passenger volumes in just the next 15 years, and it is essential that States prepare today to reap the full benefits of this growth in the years ahead.

We are very fortunate in this sense that it is coinciding with the UNWTO's General Assembly, a unique occasion bringing together key decision-makers and stakeholders from both the tourism and air transport sectors.

As we are all well aware, there are tremendous benefits for States which can be derived from optimized air transport connectivity and local and regional tourism development. This is true not only in terms of increased business activity and employment growth, but also improved social welfare and general prosperity.

These principles support ICAO's firmly-held view that the shared objective of all stakeholders involved in tourism and air transport, and in particular governmental authorities, should be to design and implement convergent policy frameworks for these sectors. Only in this way will you maximize destinations for citizens and businesses and expand foreign markets for local products and services, while at the same time ensuring healthy levels of competition and sustainable tourism and job creation.

The work required to achieve this complementary transport and tourism policy framework will be the subject of our discussions in

Session 1. It will identify the areas where coordinated action are needed, and highlight how we can best take advantage of the numerous synergies which present themselves.

Session 2 will be moderated by my colleague Dr. Taleb Rifai, Secretary-General of the World Tourism Organization. Building on the deliberations of the first panel, it will examine the consumer-centric topic of facilitation and the methods we employ to permit people and goods to cross borders safely and efficiently – key accelerators for tourism and economic growth.

There are many decisions which States will be making in the coming months and years, and which will have significant influence on their future prosperity and the socio-economic development of their citizens, cities and regions. It is therefore more critical than ever before that they understand and appreciate the important and complementary roles of air transport and tourism in providing a dependable foundation for their success.

ICAO is very eager to participate in all of these discussions, and to encourage the related policy progress and investments which will be needed in the years ahead to turn the solutions which are proposed here into practical and profitable realities.

As the entire United Nations family of organizations and agencies is now preparing to agree on a new set of Sustainable Development Goals later this month, with the eradication of poverty in all its forms being at the top of their list of priorities, the role of aviation and tourism in fostering general economic growth and socio-economic prosperity across States and regions cannot be over-stated.

Of course, challenges continue to exist, but none which we cannot overcome through concerted dialogue, cooperation and action.

With some of the world's leading authorities taking part in today's panel sessions, I am confident that a strong message (statement) will be derived from the conclusion of this High-Level Forum that will serve as an important step forward towards our long-term and successful cooperation.

Thank you.