

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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**Taleb Rifai, Secretary-General, World Tourism Organization
(UNWTO)**

**Ms. Fang Liu, Secretary-General of the International Civil
Aviation Organization (ICAO)**

Mr. Olumuyiwa Benard Aliu, President of the Council of ICAO

**Mr Kunio Mikuriya, Secretary General of the World Customs
Organization**

**Ms. Cecilia Álvarez-Correa, Minister of Commerce, Industry and
Tourism of Colombia**

Ms Natalia Abello Vives, Minister of Transport of Colombia

Honorable Ministers and Special Guests

Dear Richard,

Ladies and Gentlemen, dear friends

On the behalf of the World Tourism Organization, I am pleased to welcome you all to the very first joint UNWTO/ICAO High-level Forum on Tourism and Air Transport for Development.

Let me begin by expressing my profound appreciation to our sister UN agency, ICAO, for the close partnership we have built over the years.

As the global inter-governmental bodies responsible for tourism and aviation, we are obliged to lead by example and pave the way for closer and more effective cooperation at all levels.

I wish to extend my profound gratitude to Ms. Fang Liu, who was just recently appointed Secretary-General of ICAO.

Congratulations on taking the reins of this prestigious Organization, and I look forward to working with you in setting tourism and air transport on a converging path on common issues.

Today's Forum is a milestone event that affirms our close alliance and shared vision.

I trust it will provide us a valuable opportunity to enlarge our common action and ensure that tourism and aviation contribute to inclusive growth and sustainable development.

Let me also thank Richard and CNN for their long term partnership with UNWTO and all speakers (Mr. David Scowsill, Mr. Sergio Pimenta, Mr Mikuriya and Mr Cerda).

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Tourism and air transport share a symbiotic relationship - the dramatic expansion of tourism is closely linked with the advances in air transport, and, conversely, the growth of air transport is intrinsically connected to tourism's expansion.

In 2014, over 1.1 billion tourists crossed international borders, more than half of whom reached their destinations by air, with higher proportions in long-haul destinations.

UNWTO expects tourism to continue along this upward trajectory over the coming decade, with international tourist arrivals forecast to reach 1.8 billion by 2030.

By then, based on ICAO's latest forecasts, we anticipate that 52% will arrive at their destination by air transport, representing a growth from 33 million today to 60 million aircraft departures by 2030.

With increased connectivity warranting long-term growth for aviation and tourism, our interlinked sectors represent lasting opportunities for all those involved in the tourism value chain.

Yet if we are to harness these socio-economic benefits, tourism and air transport must address persisting divergent policies and work towards a stronger, integrated position on inter-sectorial issues.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

In 2010, UNWTO's collaboration with ICAO was strengthened through an agreement which identified several key areas of mutual interest and action, including connectivity, economic regulation, taxation, climate change and consumer protection.

More recently, in 2013, to further optimize the benefits of aviation and tourism, UNWTO and ICAO committed to work together to effectively position aviation and tourism as leaders in the pursuit of sustainable development.

These elements are reflected in today's agenda that covers two key cross-cutting issues: 1) the contribution of tourism and air transport to the development agenda and 2) travel facilitation.

Working on these crucial issues will intensify our respective sectors' and our contribution to the Sustainable Development Goals set to be approved in the coming days by world leaders gathered in NY for the UN Sustainable Development Summit.

Dear Friends

Only through effective and meaningful cooperation at all levels, starting at international and national levels, will our sectors be able write a more stable, sustainable and inclusive future for all.

To close, I wish to thank once again ICAO for the continued partnership as well as all of you for your participation at today's important Forum - working together and speaking as one will lead us to reach even greater heights.

Thank you.