MINISTRY OF TOURISM

Sixtieth meeting of the UNWTO Commission for the Americas
Havana, Cuba, 3 May 2016

Communication of the Chairman of the Commission (Haiti)

Honourable Secretary-General, Mr. Taleb Rifai,

Honourable fellow Ministers of Tourism and delegates from the countries of the Americas region present here today,

The Government of Haiti and the Haitian people express their deep and warm gratitude for the support and the opportunity given to our country by the UNWTO Commission for the Americas, to assume the chairmanship of the deliberations of the sixtieth meeting of the Commission for the Americas to be held today in the magnificent and historic capital city of Havana.

We fully appreciate the privileged place enjoyed by the Caribbean region on this occasion since two of its nations, Cuba and Haiti, which among most emblematic countries in terms of the revival of tourism throughout the Americas, will be playing special roles: Cuba as host of the Commission meeting, and Haiti serving as Chairman responsible for directing the work of this important meeting. We, the countries of the Caribbean, express once again to all the member countries our gratitude and pride in being able to present the significant advances in the tourism sector, at a time when we are witnessing the emergence of a new path, the original and promising concept of multidestination, launched a year ago in Port-au-Prince.
The declaration adopted by the Commission in May 2015 emphasizes the commitment of governments to work together to promote tourism routes and destinations for the benefit of visitors and peoples; the establishment of a joint system of cooperation in order to establish travel facilitation policies in order to implement a multidestination product for the region; fostering the analysis and the creation of joint promotional policies among countries, together with their public and private sectors, to identify shared tourism products.

Looking at the latest data published by the World Tourism Organization, we see that the sector’s situation in the Americas has been steadily improving each year for 5 years now, with exceptional growth of 5% sector for 2015 in terms international tourist arrivals. All factors indicate that this strong trend will continue at around 4% to 5% for the coming years.

The theme for World Tourism Day launched by our Secretary-General in 2015, “1 Billion Tourists, 1 Billion Opportunities”, was prescient, as evinced by the positive results in our area.

We recall the high level of excitement at the 58th meeting held in Port-au-Prince in 2015, as we congratulated our colleague from Cuba on the new situation of our neighbouring country resulting from the historic agreement that was signed by Presidents Raúl Castro and Barack Obama, turning over a new page after half a century of misunderstanding. Just think of Cuba becoming a centre of attraction for visitors from entire world in less than a year! What a challenge! Just five years ago, and for different historical reasons, Haiti was still seeking recognition despite the efforts it had made. Today it is a full-fledged destination, due to having joined the rest of the region in the affirmation of the political will to make tourism one of the key drivers of economic growth. The numbers are there to give the back up this new situation, with the growth in
foreign visitors at similar levels as that of the region, at 5%, representing 1 million additional overnight visitors and cruise passengers. Today, tourism is the third biggest export sector of the national economy: it accounts for $345 million of direct investment, more than 10,000 jobs created, and a 40% increase in the number of hotel rooms, which means we now have more than 10,000 hotel rooms on offer.

Today, tourism is the Haitian economy’s third biggest generator of foreign exchange receipts. How did we achieve this in five years?

With will and determination, believing that fortune would smile on us, and based on the undeniable attractions we possess for building up an international-calibre destination, we decided first of all to generate confidence among our leaders, among economic actors and then gradually in all segments of the population both in urban centres in the provinces. Creating confidence leads to the creation of an image—the image of a country that has come out of isolation and which intends to play its rightful role on the Caribbean tourism stage. The objective is and continues to be to project the most fascinating aspects of Haiti, given that it is an expression of constant movement, day and night, a torrent of activity, featuring an equally fascinating lead character: the Haitian people. It must be repeated—nay, reaffirmed—that our greatest asset as we open up to the world consists of the Haitian people themselves, given their radiant and welcoming nature, their generosity and their exuberant creativity.

We have built on the work done by our predecessors in the Ministry of Tourism in order to readdress land-use planning starting with high-priority historical sites, and to improve the image of Haiti across the world through our participation in major events such the ITB in Berlin, FITUR in Madrid, TOP RESA in Paris and the Montreal Tourism Fair. All this is intended to position ourselves on the world tourism map while keeping the
essence of our unique history. Our history has given us veritable treasures of heritage in the form of important vestiges of pre-colonial structures and, in every corner of the country, monuments erected to the glory of the freedom and heroism of a people that deeply feels and is proud of its independence. At this point it was enough to merely stir the earth in order to extract all the riches that lay there, both cultural and gastronomic.

It was while working on these major endeavours that we came to understand how much of a contribution was brought by regional cooperation, which gave us that "extra boost" needed to build a destination by implementing regional integration. It is this testimony that we wish to give today before this audience in order to say that it is the entire community of States of the region that have stood by our side on the road to success.

Indeed, this spectacular result is the fruit of a real synergy among the countries of the Americas, which, through exemplary international cooperation, have provided the support of their expertise, experiences, lessons learned from challenges or failures, towards the emergence of our destination.

From among the most valuable contributions that allowed us to build our destination to make it internationally marketable, I would like to highlight several concrete cases:

- The contribution of Mexico with the concept of Integrated Tourism Development Regions, which enabled us to give an overall consistency to the juxtaposition of priority sites and areas with high potential. This was the case of our Grand Sud area that links the south-east of Jacmel that you all know, with the rich area of Côtes de Fer to reach the resorts of Port Salut, ensuring a quality environment and added value to the specific destination project of Île-à-Vache.
- The support project for the promotion of the north in order to develop a “culture of maintenance” in partnership with the IDB and the CECI, with the objective of ensuring that the benefits of investments are long-lasting through good management. Here, the destination management organizations, or DMOs, become responsible for the creation of added value.

- The Inter-American Development Bank, IDB, approved last year a donation of $36 million to boost the historical, cultural and natural sites of the south coast of our country.

- Cuba and Venezuela have come together to help us build the airport of Cap Haitien, in order to open it up to medium-haul routes of international airlines.

These are some of the most important partnerships for our destination that have emerged through intensive cooperation between Haiti and the countries of the American continent and the Caribbean countries, but also thanks to a very strong partnership with international and national private-sector developers, often joining up to work together. All these partners were able, after several decades, to reconnect with our expressed desire to include Haiti among the important stops on the highways of the world tourism. We have proudly witnessed the establishment of:

- The Best Western Premier in Pétionville,
- The Marriott, the first prestige hotel in our capital city of Port-au-Prince,
- The Marriott Habitation Jouissant in December 2015 in the tourism capital of the North,
- The NH-El Rancho,
- The new Kinam,
- The Royal Decameron Beach Indigo.
Not to mention the expansion of the Karibe hotel with 103 new luxury rooms, reaching a total of 190 rooms.

In the process of establishing the legal and regulatory framework of our hotel sector, we made an assessment of the various structures and subsequently granted them internationally-recognized ratings.

This rise of the tourism sector in our national economy was made possible because we have affirmed our determination and willingness to adhere to an ethical and conscious tourism based on respect for our heritage and our environment. In addition, we encourage the acceptance on the part of our people of the idea of opening up to the world and to earn respect as a sustainable development actor for a "better-living" society, as we said at the unforgettable Quito encounter.

Yes, it is important to grow our foreign exchange earnings, but we remain concerned about the quality of the revenue from tourism activity that is aimed at contributing to the economic well-being of our population.

This tribute to regional cooperation is important in order to keep always in mind what we proclaimed at the opening of the 58th Commission meeting: “As before, one cannot think it is possible to move forward in splendid isolation, it is together with all friendly countries and partners of the continent that the challenge must be met.”

The next steps are therefore marked out:

- Develop creative industries by implementing handicraft villages in both rural and urban areas.
- Reinforce our tourism police, which is a key factor for our new image of providing security everywhere in the service of visitors;

- Train managers for the management of multifaceted tourism areas that we are able to offer visitors today;

- Restructure training with a view to preparing human resources in the tourism chain so that they reach the level of international standards;

- Encourage a common framework for sharing tourism experiences to contribute to the dissemination of a positive image of Haiti;

- Reinforce reception facilities for tourists at ports and airports in urban and rural areas of the country in order to attend to visitors until their final destination.

This may look like a roadmap, but it is actually a list of fundamental elements for sustainable tourism that ensures a better life today and a better future tomorrow for the greatest number of people.

When we sought the chairmanship of the Commission for our subregion at the 21st General Assembly of the World Tourism Organization in Medellín, our intention was to make Haiti the depositary country of the "International Decade for People of African Descent" declared by the United Nations starting 1 January 2015, constituting a veritable running thread that connects our destinations with each other, and comprises three important areas for our multidestination efforts: consideration, justice and development.

The year our chairmanship was destined to be particularly rich in initiatives and events marking the life of our UNWTO region, such as:

- The 21st UNWTO General Assembly in Medellín, Colombia, on 11-15 September
2015, which allowed us to develop examples to support the concept of multidestination;

- The UNWTO conference on "Tourism Destination Management: Innovative Tourism Experiences" in Pachuca, Mexico, 21-25 September 2015;

- First International Seminar on Multidestination, Asunción, Paraguay, 14-18 October 2015;

- The Congress on “Tourism and Security, a space to facilitate the safety of tourist flows in Central America and the Dominican Republic”, in San Salvador, El Salvador, 15-17 November 2015;

- The UNWTO and the Themis Foundation scholarship for a Master's in tourism destination management, Anahuac, Mexico, 15-30 May 2016;

- The UNWTO symposium on "The potential tourism flows represented by the Chinese market for Latin American destinations" Sao Paulo, Brazil, 29 March 2016.

It goes without saying that the intense cooperation we have carried out in our region was decisive in creating the strong power to attract tourists that we observe in our destinations. We wish to emphasize the additional impact made by the rise of emerging economies in our region on the flow of visitors interested in discovering a region that is truly taking off.

While we strive to develop new products, we cannot forget the considerable contribution
and richness of our relationship, both historically and culturally, favouring the concept of multidestination as we have presented at Port-au-Prince. To remind you, among the possible route concepts are:

- "The route of fortifications" starting from Guadeloupe with the well-known product of "the Forts Circuit" going through St. Kitts, which is proud of its "Brimston Hill", a citadel-type fortification built in an old volcanic crater, and arriving in Haiti to feature our independence-era fortifications such as the Citadelle Henri, currently listed as a UNESCO World Heritage Site;

- The route of active volcanoes, which created the greater part of our archipelago and which are of interest to researchers;

- The route of the peaks of the Andes that would link countries from both Central America and South America.

- The slave route and the coffee route to revitalize the export or the gastronomy market of the Caribbean starting with the archaeological landscape of the first coffee plantations in the south-east of Cuba and the vestiges of colonial coffee plantations of the Chaine Matheux in Haiti.

These examples illustrate both the historical connections and the natural conditions that constitute the source of our diversity.

If we are conclude these remarks with final recommendations that we have drawn in the course of the exercise of the chairmanship, a post that obliged us to gain a mastery of the subject, we can only urge the countries of the region to assist and support each other, given the great need we have of each other: this mutual need is determined by the fact of
our unique morphology consisting of continents and archipelagos. We must work tirelessly to share successful experiences, dedicating ourselves each time we meet on promoting tourism that features innovative or even entirely new products, in keeping with the wealth of our diversity, and especially, in line with the level of the expectations of our people, respecting their uniqueness: this is what sustainable development entails.

It is for all these reasons that we encourage the countries of our region that have not yet joined the UNWTO Commission for the Americas to rapidly contribute to the construction of models whose attractiveness is based on Peace and Security. In this way we can achieve integrated tourism development that includes every bit of land of our large region, and it is this unity that will reinforce the image of an area that is rich in shared histories and humanity to be discovered.

Port-au-Prince, March 2016