

Provisional agenda item 2  
**Communication of the Chair**

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Message of the Chair of the 109th UNWTO Executive Council  
Honourable José Gustavo Santos, Minister of Tourism, Argentina

**Your Excellency, Mr. Secretary-General  
Distinguished Members of the Executive Council,  
Ladies and Gentlemen,**

As Chair of this Executive Council, it is an honour to welcome you, in representation of the Government of the Argentine Republic, to the 109th session of the Executive Council of the World Tourism Organization.

First of all, I would like to express my gratitude to the Government of the Kingdom of Bahrain and especially to the Minister of Industry, Commerce and Tourism, Zayed Al Zayani, for his generous hospitality and great professionalism in organizing this meeting, which today brings us together in the ancestral city of Manama, on the shores of the Persian Gulf.

At the same time, I want to recognize before this distinguished Executive Council, the work of the Secretary-General of the World Tourism Organization Zurab Pololikashvili, who, understanding the new challenges facing the tourism sector, is defining and implementing strategies that enhance the direct and indirect contribution of tourism towards the achievement of the 2030 Agenda and its Sustainable Development Goals.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

It is essential to come to an agreement on the World Tourism Organization Strategic Plan towards 2030, in line with the vision proposed by the Secretary-General, which establishes the objectives and programmatic priorities of the Organization and which this Council approved at its previous session held in San Sebastián, Kingdom of Spain. Namely:

- Develop tourism intelligence through innovation and digital transformation;
- Grow the competitive edge of our sector through investments and entrepreneurship;
- Create more and better jobs by developing educational tools to promote employment;
- Build resilience and facilitate travel to ensure safe, secure and seamless travel and,
- Protect our heritage as a factor of social, cultural and environmental sustainability.

Both in San Sebastián and at this Council session, we have worked on the first of these objectives: innovation and technology applied to tourism. Going forward, we will develop the other programmatic priorities we have agreed to adopt. Therefore, distinguished

Members, I would like to invite you, once we finish considering our Agenda, to agree on the subject that we will develop in the framework of the next Executive Council.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Tourism has established itself as one of the most important and fastest growing economic sectors in the world. According to our own Organization's data, in 2017, international tourist arrivals grew by 7% reaching 1.326 billion and contributing more than 1.34 trillion US dollars, which represented an increase in real terms of 4.9% over the year 2016. In 2018, the trend continues to be positive and promises to strengthen the positioning of tourism in national, regional and international economies.

Specifically in my country, in 2017, international tourism has grown to reach nearly 7 million (6,712,700) foreign tourist arrivals and has yielded revenues exceeding USD 5.4 billion, making our sector the fourth largest export segment of the Argentine Republic.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

We are all aware of the importance of this economic contribution and therefore we agree that it is essential to continue working to strengthen its growth. However, tourism is much more than that. Tourism is a tool for sustainable development, as has been recognized by the United Nations, and as we ourselves recognize in our beloved Organization.

Last April, with the support of the Argentine Presidency of the G20 and in collaboration with the World Tourism Organization, we convened the Meeting of the Tourism Ministers of the G20 economies under the theme "*Tourism's leading role in sustainable development: a driver for employment*".

In this context we understood the importance of tourism in the generation of jobs for people of all ages and educational levels, empowering the most socially and economically vulnerable groups, such as young people and women. It is the sector that will generate the most jobs in the next decade, and will minimize the impacts of the transition process from the industrial economy to the digital economy.

Therefore, we reaffirmed in the meeting's Final Statement that tourism is a key economic sector that must be recognized as a political priority in the national, regional and international agendas.

With this conviction, I have asked the Argentine Presidency of the G20 to include a paragraph in the outcome document of the G20 Leaders' Summit, which will be held on 30 November in Buenos Aires, recognizing the importance of tourism as a strategic sector in the world economy.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

The contribution of tourism to the 2030 Agenda and the Sustainable Development Goals is a task that requires the effort and commitment of each one of us and, especially, with respect to our own Organization.

This Executive Council, at its last session, called upon its Members to comply with the payment of contributions, in order to avoid delays that hinder the execution and implementation of the General Programme of Work.

I would like to thank those Members that, despite their constraints, have complied with their financial obligations and, at the same time, invite those that have not been able to do so to redouble their efforts to collaborate in the achievement of the objectives we have proposed, which require the exemplary commitment of Members of this Council.

In this regard, I would like to emphasize that the efficient management of the resources carried out by the Secretary-General in the first 6 months of his mandate has allowed us to successfully execute the General Programme of Work and even overcome the budget deficit and achieve a surplus.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Today, we are all here together, ready to face the challenges of an increasingly complex world. We must work to make tourism more responsible, more sustainable, more innovative and more inclusive. And as I always say:

“If travelling makes us better persons because we learn to get to know others, to interact with our cultural differences, to respect environmental heritage, to value identities and even to love... If this is indeed the case, then it is tourism that will make this a better world.”