

*UNWTO Conference on “the Future of Mediterranean Tourism”
Djerba, 16 April 2012 -9-00 a.m.*

**Speech of Dr. Piero Gnudi
Minister for Regional Affairs, Tourism and Sport – Italy -**

Good morning,

First of all, I would like to thank the Tunisian Government and the UNWTO for organizing such an important conference in this enchanting isle of Djerba, one of the most beautiful pearls of the Mediterranean Sea.

We all are aware that tourism is a major source of income and employment for millions of peoples in the Mediterranean basin. **The Euro-Mediterranean area plays a pivotal role on the scene of global tourism, both in economic terms – it is the first tourism destination in the world – and in terms of history and traditions.** Furthermore, we cannot forget that tourism took its first steps in Italy and on the southern shores of the Mediterranean Sea.

Moreover, we can now give tourism an important mission, the mission that no other sector has succeeded in yet of promoting the economic integration in the Mediterranean area, that very integration envisaged by other programmes, like the Barcelona process of 1995 and - more recently - the Union for the Mediterranean, that, unfortunately, are still disregarded or not fully implemented.

Integration is all the more important in this historical phase, where political changes and social and economic challenges are creating number of opportunities but also real risks, which makes our destinies more and more inter-dependent.

For all these reasons, the Italian Government is willing to pay the greatest attention and provide full support to integration programmes in the tourism sector.

Even in these times of crisis, Tourism is among the most dynamic sectors in the Mediterranean economy. We need to fully exploit its potential of growth in a sustainable way to the benefit of all citizens. Because only a sustainable development of tourism activities, in economical, social and environmental terms, can assure long-lasting growth for all of us.

As a matter of fact, Tourism has become one of the leading economic activities in number of Mediterranean regions, that is why we are called to fully consider also the side-effects engendered by the tourism industry : high demand for land and rapid changes in land use often have negative consequences on the environment, local traditions and local identities. It is therefore very important to carefully plan and efficiently manage tourism-related activities and to learn lessons even from the mistakes of other countries of longer tourism tradition. Systematic sharing of experience helps **to design adequate strategies for sustainable and long lasting development.**

Among EU countries, Italy is the third tourism partner of Tunisia, in terms of arrivals and overnights. The interest for Tunisian destinations among Italian tourists has been steadily growing during the last years, made apart the sharp fall of the last two years, related to the events of the “Arab Spring”. However, expectations of leading Tour Operators show that the situation is rapidly coming back to previous levels and projections agree on the fact that as from 2012 and for the following years, Italians will return numerous to this enchanting country.

I am therefore particularly pleased to announce that just after this opening session, I will sign together with my colleague the Minister of Tourism of the Republic of Tunisia, a Joint Declaration in the framework of a bilateral Cooperation Agreement dating from 2006, and intended to:

- Reinforce exchange in tourism flows;

- Develop joint programmes of professional education and training, also through the exchange of tourism experts;
- Start programmes of managerial education for civil servants in the field of tourism;
- Launch twinnings initiatives between public administrations including also travels to Tunisia of Italian highly-skilled professionals;
- protect investments of both Tunisian and Italian operators in both countries;
- enhance cooperation within multi-lateral organisms;

I do hope that this declaration will soon come into effect, with full awareness that Tourism acts in both countries as a leverage for starting a strong economic recovery.

I wish to all delegations attending this conference a fruitful work.

Thank you for your attention.