Seventy-fifth session
Nessebar, Bulgaria, 13-14 June 2005
Provisional agenda item 3

COMMUNICATION OF THE CHAIRMAN

Note by the Secretary-General

In this document, the Secretary-General submits the communication of the Chairman of the Executive Council for the consideration of its Members.
COMMUNICATION OF THE CHAIRMAN

1. At the end of last year, the unprecedented tsunami in the Indian Ocean took a tremendous toll on human lives and properties in South Asia and devastated tourism industry in the region. The World Tourism Organization, more than any other international organizations, responded to this crisis in an active and swift manner.

For instance, WTO immediately constituted an Emergency Task Force for damage assessment and called for the Emergency Session of the Executive Council for the first time in the history of the Organization. As the result of an active participation by the Executive Council member countries, the entire world has witnessed the solidarity of the global tourism industry expressed by the adoption of Phuket Action Plan. The diverse WTO-led emergency relief enabled the tsunami-stricken region to regain its hope for quick recovery.

Not only WTO member countries, but also private sectors such as VISA Corporate have supported the Phuket Action Plan. With these concerted efforts, the tourist flow to this region is approaching to its previous level. On behalf of the Executive Council, I would like to express my heart-felt appreciation to the WTO Secretariat and the member countries for their dedications to the tsunami relief efforts. I also offer my sincere condolences to all nations who have suffered the tragic crisis.

2. The perception of tourists regarding a specific tourism destination is one of the major factors influencing international tourist flow. Their perception is heavily affected by media coverage and travel advisory. Along this line, it is our responsibility to provide tourists with honest and correct information on each tourism destination.

The Crisis Management Manual co-designed by WTO, PATA and APEC provides wisdoms in minimizing the impacts of the crisis and instructions for swift response in the midst of disaster. It will be greatly useful for WTO member countries to modify the Manual into the one adequate to the environment of their own.

3. At the 75th Executive Council, we will discuss emerging issues ranging from the enhanced development of world tourism to the future of the World Tourism Organization. Transformation into a specialized agency of the United Nations poses new challenges to us. It means that we must take greater responsibility and get actively involved in global burden-sharing for peace and stability.

This new change demands an efficient operation of the Organization and sensitive responses to the needs of member countries. Many recent experiences with the WTO Secretariat have been very positive. I hope the Secretariat to expand this kind of member-serving programmes including HRD programme.

4. Other important matters include: the recommendation of a nominee for the post of Secretary-General for the period 2006-2009 to the General Assembly; the programme of work and budget for 2006-2007; and the ST-EP initiatives. I look forward to your active participation as well as constructive cooperation in putting forward these important agendas.

5. I would like to conclude by expressing, on behalf of the WTO Executive Council, my profound appreciation to the government of Bulgaria and WTO staffs for preparing the 75th session of the WTO Executive Council in optimal conditions and in a climate of warm hospitality. Thank you.