Report of the Secretary-General

RECOMMENDATIONS ON TRAVEL ADVISORIES

Addendum

Note by the Secretary-General

The Secretary-General informs the Council in the present addendum of the latest information received by the Secretariat on this subject since the preparation of document CE/75/4.
Report of the Secretary-General

RECOMMENDATIONS ON TRAVEL ADVISORIES

Addendum

1. Through two communications from Portugal, one from Ms. Cristina Siza Vieira, Director-General of Tourism, and the other from Mr. José Sancho Silva, Chairman of the WTO Quality Support and Trade Committee, the attention of the Executive Council was drawn to the report of this Committee, which had been transmitted to it for examination at its last session. Portugal wishes this subject to be discussed anew at the present session.

2. It will be recalled that the Council had indeed decided to discuss this subject anew, but up until the recent communication of the Chairman of the Committee, none of the expected contributions from the Members had been received at the Secretariat.

3. After this communication, Australia through its Embassy in Spain forwarded to the Secretariat a communication on Travel Advice – Policy and Practice, which is annexed to this addendum.

4. The Council will decide whether it wishes to discuss this important subject anew at this session, or to postpone doing so until the reception of the contributions that a certain number of its Members undertook to send to it.

5. It is recalled that two draft texts of "rules" or a "code of conduct" that could be applied to travel advisories were submitted at the session in Salvador de Bahia, the former submitted by the Secretariat and the latter incorporating the suggestions of the Members of the Quality Support and Trade Committee.

6. The Secretariat has copies of this document at the disposal of Members that do not have it.
ANNEX

COMMUNICATION FROM AUSTRALIA
TRAVEL ADVICE – POLICY AND PRACTICE

Introduction

1. Following Australia’s resumption of its membership of the World Tourism Organization (WTO) in September 2004, the Australian Government considers it timely to communicate to other WTO members its policy and practice on travel advisories.

2. The Australian Government has an important responsibility to advise its citizens of potential risks to their health, welfare or safety when they are travelling or living overseas. It places the highest importance on sharing relevant information with its citizens, and travel advisories are the primary vehicle for conveying this information.

3. The sole objective of Australia’s travel advisories is to help Australians to make informed decisions about overseas travel. Travel advisories provide up-to-date information about the safety and security environment in a particular destination, including in relation to possible terrorist threats or problems with law and order. They also give advice on a range of practical issues such as visa requirements, health and medical issues, and cultural or religious issues. Information in travel advisories reflects Australian community views about the issues that should be covered in travel advice.

4. Australian travel advisories are not prohibitions on travel. They are not about undermining the commercial interests of the travel industry or the economic interests of other countries. Australia does not factor in political or commercial considerations when preparing travel advisories.

Preparation of Travel Advice: Key Principles

5. In most respects, Australia’s approach to the preparation of travel advice is consistent with the principles of the WTO Global Code of Ethics for Tourism. Consistent with the Code, Australia is highly conscious of the need to ensure that travel advisories convey accurate and up-to-date information.

6. Australia does not ‘single-out’ or ‘target’ countries when issuing travel advisories. As at 16 May 2005, Australia has 152 travel advisories on destinations that are popular with Australian travellers in all regions of the world. Australia’s overall approach to travel advisories is guided by the need to respond to community demand for advice on travel destinations and to the travel patterns of Australian travel.
Annex

7. The Australian Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade is responsible for preparing and disseminating Australia's travel advisories. Australia's travel advisories draw on a wide range of sources of current information and are kept under constant review. Travel advisories are updated promptly to reflect new information as soon as it is received. The information includes assessments from Australian diplomatic staff on-the-ground overseas. In some instances, staff travel to specific areas within countries to collect accurate information on prevailing local conditions.

8. Travel advisories are the primary means of conveying information to Australians about a country or region that has experienced a security risk, natural disaster or crisis. It would be inappropriate to inaccurately describe or ignore in travel advisories important information about the prevailing conditions in certain areas to satisfy commercial or political imperatives.

9. In providing information on safety and security issues, the Australian Government does not consider the impact that travel advice has on the travel and tourism industry nor are travel advisories influenced by bilateral political considerations. The Australian Government will not allow the safety or welfare of its citizens to be compromised by political or commercial issues or other considerations. Accordingly, Australia does not endorse the proposition - as outlined in Article 6.5 of the WTO Global Code of Ethics for Tourism - that it should, as part of standard procedure, consult other governments and tourism professionals in advance of issuing or changing a travel advisory.

Initiatives aimed at promoting awareness and use of travel advisories by Australian travellers

10. The Australian Government is aware that the effectiveness of its efforts to encourage its citizens to consult travel advisories depends on the support and cooperation of its travel industry. The travel industry in Australia has embraced various government-led initiatives such as the Smartraveller Consultative Group and the Charter for Safe Travel that are aimed at promoting awareness and use of travel advisories.