Thank you Secretary General, H. E Zurab Pololikashvili, Co-Chair Hon. Dr. Noor Zari Bin Hamat and representatives of Member States.

It is an honour and pleasure for me to Chair the 32nd CAP-CSA Joint Virtual Meeting today. It is indeed unfortunate that due to the Covid-19 pandemic with closed borders and global travel restrictions, we were unable to hold the 32nd CAP-CSA Meeting in Sri Lanka as agreed before. However, I look forward to the warm hospitality and experiences of participating in the 33rd CAP-CSA in 2021 in Sri Lanka.

I would also like to applaud my sincere appreciation and admiration to H.E Secretary General and UNWTO Team, on conveying this important meeting and being one of the first organizations in responding and taking pre-emptive measures to assist all member states to address this global pandemic. The UNWTO Global Tourism Crisis Committee intensely advocating for international cooperation and universal standards have scored a united response globally. In addition, the introduction of Tourism Recovery and Technical Assistance Packages, Impact Assessments and Analyses, Tourism Recovery Strategies & Recommendations are initiatives that has been ingenious at this time alongside the courses, webinars and resources extended to us all. The initiatives have helped us path our way to re-strategize our policies and adapt new measures to overcome the severe economic downturn and recession all of us are facing.

For many South Asia and Pacific countries, tourism has been the spearhead and driving force of the economy, contributing significantly to the GDPs of small countries. However, with the unforeseen Covid-19 pandemic, we are being forced to grapple with a “new normal” way of accepting tourism, travellers and open our borders for global tourism. Hence, emerging from this economic downturn will be challenging with necessary interventions from governments and international organizations to keep tourism and other sectors afloat.

As a small island developing state, we are facing challenges multi-fold with the inherent vulnerabilities we have. The tourism industry has been the most significant source of...
revenue generation for Maldives, which accounts for one third of the total government revenue. However, the unique vulnerabilities we have to external shocks, such as this pandemic has resulted in a severe economic slump. In March this year, for the first time in 47 years since inception of tourism in Maldives, the country had 0 tourist arrivals. Global pandemic Covid19 have had a more of socio-economic impact on the Maldives than the 2004 Asian Tsunami and the 2008 Global Financial Crisis.

However, with the guidance of WHO, WTO and many other organizations, Maldives has had instantaneous response to containing this pandemic. With the first positive case in March, the health and tourism industry acted cursorily to enforce preliminary necessary restrictions; starting with tourist resorts. Movement of guests and employees to and from, resorts and islands were completely constrained. In April, after the first positive case in Male’, our capital, further stringent interventions to control and contain Covid-19 were taken. A strict lockdown and timely restrictive measures have proved effective in containing positive new cases well below that expected by projection models.

As Maldives is now easing out of lockdown and preparing to open borders and adjust to the new normal, we do so by enforcing strong precautionary measures for the tourism industry, from ports of entry, to transfers, and to places of accommodation. Safe Travel and “Guideline for Restarting Maldives Tourism” are measures of consultations between the country’s health authorities and tourism industry. It facilitates the reopening of the Maldives’ world class tourism industry while ensuring the safety of our residents and visitors. They are also guidelines that will evolve as the world continues to learn more about Covid-19.

The Maldives believes the key to successful post pandemic tourism is a balance between confidence and convenience. The united response, universal standards and international cooperation from the international society, public and private organizations has positively impacted our ways of thinking and facilitated in adapting to the “new normal”. It is time we use this crisis as an opportunity to strengthen international coordination and create a platform for unity and harmony. That is what we offer when we reopen this July.