Executive summary

The Kingdom of Saudi Arabia has informed the Secretary-General of its intention to establish a UNWTO Regional Office for the Middle East to strengthen the cooperation and support of the UNWTO for the Middle East Region, with a view to be operative from 2020-2021 for a period of fifteen years.

Such Regional Office would constitute an integral part of the Organization (Category I) in line with the conditions and criteria adopted by the General Assembly at its 21st session through resolution 656(XXI), and for which a corresponding draft Host Country Agreement has been prepared.

At the request of Saudi Arabia, the Secretary-General is hereby submitting the proposal for establishing a UNWTO Regional Office for the Middle East in Riyadh for the consideration of the Executive Council and subsequent ratification by the General Assembly.

Upon receiving a mandate by the Executive Council, the Secretariat will conclude a Host Country Agreement with the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia for the establishment and functioning of the UNWTO Regional Office with a view to start its operations in 2020-2021, fully financed by the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia through a voluntary contribution.

If approved and operative, the UNWTO Regional Office for the Middle East will be established in Riyadh as an integral part of the Organization to carry out the functions assigned to it by the General Assembly and the Secretary-General.
DRAFT DECISION

Agenda item 3(c)
Establishment of a UNWTO Regional Office for the Middle East in Saudi Arabia
(document CE/112/3(c))

The Executive Council,

Noting that the Minister of Tourism of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, H.E. Mr. Ahmed bin Aqil Alkhateeb, informed the Secretary-General of the intention of Saudi Arabia to establish a UNWTO Regional Office for the Middle East to strengthen the cooperation and support of the UNWTO for the Middle East Region,

Having examined the information submitted by the Secretary-General on the proposal to establish a UNWTO Regional Office for the Middle East in Riyadh,

Recalling the conditions and criteria for external entities adopted by the General Assembly at its 21st session through resolution 656(XXI),

1. Endorses the proposal of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia on the establishment of a UNWTO Regional Office in Riyadh; and

2. Requests the Secretary-General to conclude the necessary procedures and signature of the Host Country Agreement for the establishment of the Regional Office with a view to start its operations in 2020-2021 and to submit a progress report to the next session of the Executive Council.

1 This is a draft decision. For the final decision adopted by the Council, please refer to the Decisions document issued at the end of the session.
I. Proposal to establish a UNWTO Regional Office for the Middle East

1. Through a letter dated 16 June 2020, the Minister of Tourism of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, H.E. Mr. Ahmed bin Aqil Alkhateeb, informed the Secretary-General of the intention of Saudi Arabia to establish a UNWTO Regional Office for the Middle East. A copy of the letter is attached to the present document as Annex I.

2. During the recent visit of the Secretary-General to Saudi Arabia on 28 August 2020, the Minister of Tourism reaffirmed his government’s interest that Riyadh hosts the UNWTO Regional Office for the Middle East, with a view to be operative for a period of fifteen years from 2020-2021, and expressed his wish to inform all Members of the Council in its upcoming 112th session.

3. The Secretariat has shared with designated officials from the Ministry of Tourism a draft Host Country Agreement in line with the conditions and criteria for external entities that are an integral part of the Organization (Category I) adopted by the General Assembly at its 21st session through resolution 656(XXI). A full list of the conditions applying to Category I entities is attached to the present document as Annex II.

4. At the request of Saudi Arabia, the Secretary-General is hereby submitting the proposal for establishing a UNWTO Regional Office for the Middle East in Riyadh for the consideration of the Executive Council in accordance with Article 20 of the Statutes and further ratification by the General Assembly pursuant to Article 12 (j) of the Statutes.

5. Upon receiving a mandate by the Executive Council, the Secretariat will conclude a Host Country Agreement with the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia for the establishment and functioning of the UNWTO Regional Office with a view to start its operations in 2020-2021.

Mandate and functioning of a UNWTO Regional Office in Riyadh

6. If approved and operative, the UNWTO Regional Office for the Middle East (hereinafter “the Office”) will be established in Riyadh as an integral part of the Organization to carry out the functions assigned to it by the General Assembly and the Secretary-General. The Office will support and implement UNWTO’s activities in the region of the Middle East and in line with UNWTO’s Programme of Work. In particular, the Office will leverage the image and seize of UNWTO’s international presence and network of partners in the Middle East.

7. The Office will be responsible for the coordination, follow-up and reporting of the activities undertaken in the Middle East through continuous relations with each and every Middle East Member States, as well as with the Affiliate Members in the region; the office will ensures, a fair, yet strategic, geographically balanced repartition of UNWTO activities. It will also establish and maintain relations with non-Member States in order to integrate them within the Organization and keep the Management informed on all relevant regional issues (priorities, requests from Members, etc.), and other departments on activities of their respective competency.

8. The Office will work on meeting the specific needs of the National Tourism Authorities, local authorities and tourism enterprises in the region, and to conduct seminars and conferences on topics of interest to the tourism industry, including courses on tourism human resource development and tourism statistics. It will contribute actively to the dissemination and promotion of the operational departments’ products and gather any useful information regarding Member States, particularly, but not only, upon request from operational departments.

9. The Office will work on furthering production of internationally comparable tourism statistics in the region, in accordance with international methodological standards, and expand their scope and improve their quality. The office will promote the use and analysis of tourism statistics and data in the design and monitoring of regional and national policies, and the development of research initiatives in collaboration with regional members.

10. The Office will work have an integral role in the national tourism human capital development enablement and regulatory programs, and initiatives such as implementation of quality certification systems, monitoring current and future skills development of the sector, tour guide training and licensing programs, as well as provide on-going advice on priority strategic issues to regional members.
11. The Kingdom of Saudi Arabia will fully finance the Office and the implementation of its activities through a voluntary contribution, while other Member States and the private sector may provide additional voluntary contributions to complement the work of the regional office, as appropriate, and in accordance with the regulations and policies of the UNWTO.
Annex I:  Letter from the Minister of Tourism of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia

H.E. Mr. Zurab Pololikashvili  
Secretary-General  
United Nations World Tourism Organization

Your Excellency,

It was a pleasure to speak to Your Excellency on Monday, 15 June 2020 and to have the opportunity to discuss the ongoing cooperation between Saudi Arabia and the United Nations World Tourism Organization. We have seen the relationship grow stronger, especially in the last two years, through the meaningful opportunities we have had to work with one another. Taking this opportunity, I would like to highlight the discussion which took place on our call.

Once again, I congratulate Your Excellency on the UNWTO’s leadership of the Global Tourism Crisis Committee that has resulted in the release of the Global Guidelines to Restart Tourism. We reaffirm Saudi Arabia’s support of this outcome and the Ministry has taken the guidelines under advisement as we implement measures across the country’s tourism sector to ensure tourism restarts as swiftly and responsibly as possible. We look forward to building upon these outcomes by launching a joint campaign with the UNWTO with the objective of supporting jobs and restoring consumer confidence in the tourism sector that has been directly impacted the most by COVID-19.

With regards to the suggestion for a virtual meeting between Your Excellency and the Crown Prince of Saudi Arabia, HRH Prince Mohammed bin Salman bin Abdulaziz Al Saud, to discuss the rebuilding of the tourism sector, the ongoing projects between Saudi Arabia and the UNWTO, including those supporting the work of the G20 such as the Framework for Inclusive Development and the Women in Tourism in the Middle East Report. This request has been conveyed with enthusiasm to the Royal Court and we will coordinate with the Regional Department for the Middle East.

Saudi Arabia remains committed to hosting the Regional Commission for the Middle East and appreciate your proposal to hold the 46th Meeting virtually on 6 July 2020 given the current travel restrictions, and look forward to hosting the 47th Meeting in Riyadh in 2021. We look forward to actively participating during the meeting in July by sharing the Saudi experience in swiftly addressing and mitigating the health and economic concerns of the tourism sector in the face of the pandemic and sharing updates on the work of the Tourism Working Group and Tourism Ministers of the G20. We view this as an opportunity to continue to emphasize the need for high-level of international coordination.

With regards to 112th session of the Executive Council, I look forward to participating and hope it will be possible to personally meet in Tbilisi on this occasion. This will give us the opportunity to meet to discuss several elements of furthering our institutional relationship.
including the UNWTO Regional Center, the Human Capital Development Project with the UNWTO Academy, and our collaboration with the UNWTO ahead of the G20 Tourism Ministers Meeting in October 2020, which I hope to welcome you to in person this Fall. Given the unique nature of the circumstances that the world is faced with this year, I understand that coordination of the 113th Executive Council Session is still under consideration and look forward to a resolution on the modality of holding the session, especially given Saudi Arabia’s nomination to host this meeting.

As discussed, Saudi Arabia would like to reaffirm its intention to move forward the discussion on opening a UNWTO Regional Office for the Middle East in the Kingdom with one of the options for a prime location in Riyadh’s Diplomatic Quarter. I look forward to sharing our plans in further detail during our next meeting and to a proposal in this regard ahead of the meeting so that we may expeditiously move through the process.

Lastly, as it was mentioned on the call, with reference to the letter regarding the approval of the proposal request for the Women in Tourism in the Middle East Report, which is to be funded from the existing resources provided to the UNWTO, enclosed No. 11074 dated 2 June 2020, I emphasize the importance of our combined efforts to highlight the progress made in the Middle East for gender equality. Given the importance of this topic, especially alongside our G20 Presidency, which highlights Women’s Empowerment, we reaffirm the importance of the report to ensure equitable regional representation of all regions, and to highlight the work and role of the UNWTO in the G20 this year. We commend the UNWTO’ commitment to bringing gender issues to the forefront of the tourism sector and look forward to sharing the results of this report together with Your Excellency at the G20 Tourism Ministers Meeting in October.

Thank you again for your time and valuable support during this critical time for the tourism sector and I look forward to continuing our fruitful collaboration.

Kindly accept, Your Excellency, my personal regards.

Ahmed bin Aqil Alkhateeb

Minister of Tourism
Annex II: Conditions applying to Category I entities

1. Category I entities are institutionally part of UNWTO and they are established as an integral part of the Organization.

2. The establishment of Category I entities is subject to the signature of an agreement with the host Member State that ensures that the appropriate legal framework and juridical personality are provided to the entity and that, at the minimum, includes the conditions herein stated.

3. Category I entities are governed by UNWTO’s legal framework and by UNWTO Rules and Regulations and are not subject to any national legislation or jurisdiction.

4. Category I entities will follow UNWTO accounting policies. Their transactions will be part of UNWTO Financial Statements audited by UNWTO external auditors. They will neither issue their own Financial Statements nor will be audited by other external auditors than those of the UNWTO.

5. Category I entities form an integral part of UNWTO’s programme of work and budget.

6. Wherever located, the Host Country will apply the Convention on the Privileges and Immunities of the Specialized Agencies of 1947 and its Annex XVIII relating to UNWTO to Category I entities.

7. Category I entities are directed by a UNWTO employee who reports to and is under the authority of the Secretary-General.

8. The selection, recruitment and contracts of Category I entities personnel will follow UNWTO policies, rules and regulations.

9. Category I entities are allowed to use UNWTO’s name, acronym and logo to indicate that they are an office or centre of UNWTO.

10. The government of the host country will take the necessary measures to ensure the safety and security of Category I entities and their premises, considering the mandatory security standards required by the United Nations Department of Safety and Security (UNDSS).

11. UNWTO will conduct evaluations of the activities of Category I entities as to ascertain whether they constitute a significant contribution to the UNWTO’s objectives and are in conformity with those set out in the agreement with the host country in order to determine either the desirability of extending the agreements beyond the initial duration or their termination.