



Remarks by Minister of Tourism Sofia Montiel de Afara

Your Excellency, Secretary-General of UNWTO

Mr. Zurab Pololikashvili

Your Excellencies, fellow Ministers, Authorities of the Ministries of Tourism of the Americas, and Authorities in attendance,

It is a great honour for me to address this select group of Ministers who make up the Tourism Commission for the Americas (CAM), who have honoured me with their vote of confidence to serve as Chair of the Regional Commission for the Americas during the 66th Meeting of the Commission held on 24 June 2021 in Kingston, Jamaica.

After the unprecedented decline of the sector due to the COVID-19 pandemic in the years 2020 and 2021, international tourism is expected to continue its gradual recovery during 2022.

All regions experienced a significant rebound in January this year, although it should be noted that this is from the low base recorded at the beginning of 2021. The Americas region (+97%) continues to show the best results, albeit with international arrivals still at half of pre-pandemic levels. International arrivals in the first month of 2022 remained 67% below pre-pandemic levels.

A growing number of destinations are easing or removing travel restrictions. Although there are figures that confirm the positive trend that began last year, the path of recovery in January was affected by the emergence of the Omicron variant and, consequently, the reintroduction of travel restrictions in various destinations.

Tourism activity started strongly this year, giving signs that better days are coming for the sector, with receipts in the travel and tourism market expected to increase by more than 60% in Latin America and the Caribbean in 2022.

In the words of UNWTO Secretary-General Zurab Pololikashvili, “Trust is the new currency of the new normal, and tourism is in the best possible position to be the vehicle that channels that trust.”

Dear colleagues, this is our time to work together to make our region an example of unity in the world.

For this reason, and with the firm intention of addressing the issues of common interest that are mobilizing us in the field of tourism, I propose to carry out activities of regional interest, such as the holding of an International Tourism Seminar. It would be held within the framework of the next meeting of Mercosur Ministers of Tourism, whose pro tempore presidency is held by

Paraguay, on 21 June of this year, to talk about the importance of rural tourism in the development of tourism in our region, in addition to innovation and technology as contributing elements in the promotion of tourism in our countries.

In the recent UNWTO survey on Members' priorities for 2022-2023, one of the important needs that emerged was the formation of subregional committees to hold discussions on specific topics. To this end, I propose to create 4 subregional committees in working groups to address issues such as:

1. The sustainability of tourism: establishing a balance between the environmental, economic and socio-cultural aspects of tourism development, the conservation of biodiversity, minimizing its impact on the environment and local culture so that they remain available to future generations, and contributing to income generation, job creation and the conservation of local ecosystems.
2. Joint tourism promotion: sharing integrated marketing strategies in order to attract consumers in relation to tourism offerings.
3. Innovation and technology: satisfying the needs of travellers as well as exceeding their expectations and generating of new experiences. Technology as an advantageous tool in business; and
4. Air and cruise transport: aviation as an economic facilitator in generating jobs in the region, facilitating trade as well as economic competitiveness, increasing productivity, improving efficiency; cruises as a tourism activity with the highest growth worldwide due to the variety of services it offers and the possibility of making a trip to any part of the world through a unique and different means of transport.

Also identified was the importance of exchanging experiences, good practices and expert knowledge, benefiting from each other's knowledge on how to restart tourism after the crisis. Promoting common technical cooperation projects with the formation of focal points, training programmes, development projects in cross-border destinations, promotion and marketing of multiple destinations. Involving subregional organizations and private partners, creating an exchange platform or social networks among others. All in collaboration with UNWTO.

Likewise, I propose the holding of training sessions, with the collaboration of the UNWTO, aimed at members of the Americas to be held in 2 face-to-face seminars: one in Mexico or Central America and another in South America, in addition to 2 webinars aimed at members of the CAM. Their specific topics would be defined according to their importance and by agreement among the member countries of the Americas.

During my recent visit to Madrid on the occasion of the first Extraordinary UNWTO General Assembly, I had a private meeting with the Secretary General to propose the creation of a website centralizing the information on the health and medical protocols of entry to the member states of the CAM, thus

providing a regional platform for information on the protocols of entry to the countries of the Americas. This request was swiftly handled by the Secretary General who informed me in timely manner that the website was already available and that the grouping of protocols by continent would proceed.

Finally, dear Colleagues, I would like to highlight the immense spirit of resilience that characterizes our sector, that attitude of strength and cooperation that allowed us to go through these hard times. It is this same way of thinking that will lead us to emerge victorious from the next challenges. The way is to stay united, thinking about our countries, our citizenry, integrated into the world. With all the lessons learned, we will continue to make tourism a key part in the growth of our countries.

Thank you very much.