

## **UNWTO Commission for the Middle East**

Forty-eighth meeting  
Cairo, Egypt, 28 March 2022

CME/48/CR  
Madrid, April 2022

**THE 48<sup>th</sup> MEETING OF THE UNWTO COMMISSION FOR THE MIDDLE EAST  
CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

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CME/CR/1(XLVIII)

### ADOPTION OF THE AGENDA

The Commission,

**Adopts** the agenda of its forty-eighth meeting as it figures in page 2 of this document;

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CME/CR/2 (XLVIII)

### COMMUNICATION OF THE CHAIR

Agenda item 2

The Commission,

**Having heard** the communication of the Chair of the UNWTO Commission for the Middle East, by H.E. Dr. Khaled El-Enany, Minister of Tourism and Antiquities of the Arab Republic of Egypt, on the important message of support that holding this in-person regional meeting transmits towards consumers' confidence in the re-opening of tourism;

1. **Shares his opinion** on the importance of developing joint work in the framework of the Commission, especially during these unprecedented challenging times worldwide due to the Covid-19 pandemic, in order to enhance countries' strategies to address the impacts of the pandemic on tourism, enhance the recovery of this vital sector and get its human capital ready for the restart;
  2. **Praises** the efforts of the Arab Republic of Egypt in mitigating the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic, supporting tourism sector workers and preparing for the restart;
  3. **Believes** this meeting is a platform for many initiatives, projects and proposals to support joint action for tourism recovery and restart; and
  4. **Invites** Member States to take advantage of UNWTO initiatives to address the impacts of the pandemic on the tourism sector and to develop the necessary tools and mechanisms for this, by strengthening cooperation between them.
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CME/CR/3 (XLVIII)

**REPORT OF THE SECRETARY-GENERAL**

Agenda item 3

The Commission,

**Having considered** the Report of the Secretary-General on the UNWTO's vision and initiatives to address the effects of the pandemic globally and regionally, the main challenges of the tourism sector in the region and the priorities for its joint work within the Organization's work towards the recovery of the sector;

**Having heard with great interest** the presentation made by UNWTO Secretary-General on the Response of UNWTO to the challenges created by the Covid-19 pandemic to support the Members worldwide and in the region, in monitoring and evaluating the impacts of COVID-19 on international tourism (UNWTO-IATA Destination Tracker and Dashboards), monitoring the travel restrictions, directing and coordinating policies through the Global Tourism Crisis Committee and technical assistance to revive tourism and tourism security, managing risks and crises affecting the sector, and using digital technology applications in modern ecosystems, stimulating and fostering investments and entrepreneurship, education and employment, safe, secure and accessible travel, and social, cultural and environmental sustainability, as well as his brief overview of tourism trends and scenarios;

**Having heard** the presentation made by UNWTO Director of Innovation, Education and Investments Department on UNWTO initiatives in education;

1. **Notes with satisfaction** that international tourism has continued to recover at the start of this year and that the Middle East is one of the strongest performing regions with 52% increase in arrivals over that period.
2. **Thanks** the Secretary-General for his comprehensive remarks on the Organization's priorities and vision, new trends in international tourism and its future prospects, worldwide and in the Middle East, as well as the Organization's Programme of Work and **welcomes** the initiatives of the UNWTO targeted to the recovery of the tourism sector.
3. **Commends** the work of the Global Tourism Crisis Committee and UNWTO recommendations in supporting governments in developing policies to mitigate the impact of Covid-19 on the tourism sector and accelerate the recovery, by providing incentives, preparing for tomorrow and building for the future;
4. **Congratulates** the Secretary-General for the major awareness efforts delivered at the global level to alert global leaders on the heavy repercussions of the COVID-19 pandemic on the tourism sector and the need to coordinate the measures taken to alleviate the consequences of the pandemic;
5. **Shares his opinion** on the importance of adapting the tourism sector - as it prepares for resumption and recovery in the region - to the challenges of safety and security, constant market changes, natural resources limits, innovation and digitization in order to maintain competitiveness and maximize the potential of the sector, creating labor opportunities and sustainable development;
6. **Also shares his opinion** on the importance of building the tourism recovery on trust and confidence and of protecting tourists in emergency situation;

7. **Notes with interest also** the importance of the Human Capital Development, especially youth and women, and UNWTO education and training initiatives through the International Tourism Academy and **thanks** the Organization for allocating 100 scholarships to each Member State for the online-Course "Introduction to Tourism - Industry Management" to empower youth and boost quality of education in tourism.

8. **Commends** the Organization efforts in making tourism smarter through innovation and digital transformation, **requests** the Secretary-General to continue his efforts, in light of the unprecedented global health, social and economic emergency caused by the COVID-19 pandemic, to encourage innovation and digitization for the development of the tourism sector, and **encourages** Member States to make best use of the available resources, knowledge and expertise to restore the sector's right track and to communicate with the Organization regarding the use of technology and digital applications in innovating management, development and marketing systems, and harnessing tourism to support economic and social development;

9. **Expresses** Members' support to the Secretary-General in the UNWTO's ongoing activities in addressing the effects of the pandemic and in achieving the priorities set to support to Members in the recovery of their tourism sector and creating decent living opportunities for local communities and reinforcing its coordination with various institutions of the United Nations system.

10. **Welcomes** the collaboration with regional organizations, especially the Gulf Cooperation Council and the Arab Tourism Organization and **encourages** more collaboration with other regional organizations; and

11. **Appreciates** the work of the UNWTO Regional Office for the Middle East in fostering the sustainable recovery of the sector in the region, mainly in Tourism and Rural Development; and Innovation, Education and Investments.

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CME/CR/4 (XLVIII)

## UNWTO IN THE MIDDLE EAST

### Agenda item 4

#### **The Commission,**

**Having considered** the report of the UNWTO Regional Director for the Middle East on Member States activities in the Region within the Organization's Programme of Work.

**Having Listened** to the presentation made by the Regional Director for the Middle East on regional activities to mitigate the effects of the pandemic in the Middle East and to support Member States initiatives in monitoring and evaluating the impact of COVID-19 and the resumption of tourism;

1. **Adopts** the report and **commends** the quantity and quality of regional activities that have been implemented or planned, in implementation of the Organization's General Programme of Work for the period 2021-2022;

2. **Notes with satisfaction** that many of the UNWTO Global initiatives during the tenure of the Secretary-General have launched in the Middle East region, mainly digital transformation activities, training and education, the AI Ula Framework for Inclusive Community Development through Tourism , Best Tourism Villages by UNWTO, 1<sup>st</sup> UNWTO Regional Office, amongst others.

2. **Commends** UNWTO's efforts in supporting countries' focus on tourism as an important source of income, creating job opportunities and diversifying their national economies, by supporting and implementing the organization's activities in the Middle East region;
4. **Appreciates** the continuous efforts of the team of the UNWTO Regional Department for the Middle East aimed at delivering value to UNWTO's members by attracting and sharing solid initiatives and projects likely to contribute to the overall efforts by the Organization to accelerate the recovery of the sector;
5. **Calls upon** the Member States to intensify their communication with the Secretariat and to benefit from its various activities in order to enhance confidence in the tourism sector, make tourism resumption initiatives successful, secure an appropriate environment for investment in tourism projects, and enhance the sector's contribution to creating decent job opportunities, especially for young people, and developing local communities, especially in light of the ongoing challenges facing the Middle East region and the negative effects of the pandemic; and
6. **Urges** Member States to participate in the international events to be held within the framework of the Organization's Programme of Work during the second half of this year and **looks forward** to further collaboration in the framework of the Commission to support and train countries of the region, coordinate initiatives to promote tourism products and sustainable development, enhance education and training, human capital development and capacity-building training and stimulate investments.

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CME/CR/5 (XLVIII)

**UNWTO AFFILIATE MEMBERS:  
LATEST DEVELOPMENTS AND REFORMS**  
Agenda item 5

The Commission,

**Having heard** the presentation of the Director of the UNWTO Affiliate Members Department reporting on the main Affiliate Members activities in the Region and the intervention of the Brand and Marketing Executive Director of The Red Sea Development Company, Representative of the Board of the UNWTO Affiliate Members,

1. **Thanks** the UNWTO Affiliate Members Department for its work towards a quality-oriented expansion of the Affiliate Membership and for and for prioritizing the promotion of the Membership in regions with great tourism potential but less Affiliate Members, as it the case of the Middle East, with only 28 affiliated entities, representing around 5% of the total;
2. **Appreciates** the continuous efforts of the Department aimed at delivering value to UNWTO's members by attracting and sharing solid initiatives and projects likely to contribute to the overall efforts by the Organization to accelerate the recovery of the sector;
3. **Also appreciates** the excellent outcome of the Reform of the Affiliate Membership Legal Framework, that was approved at the 24th UNWTO General Assembly;
4. **Commends** the continuous efforts of the Secretariat to modernize the management of the Affiliate Members' network and improve the available tools and procedures enabling to provide better services and meet the needs and expectations of the Affiliate Members;

5. **Looks** forward to receiving inputs from the recently created Committee on Matters Related to the Affiliate Membership to best create synergies for the quality-oriented expansion of the Affiliate Membership in the Member States of this Commission;
6. **Welcomes** the participation of the representative of the Board of Affiliate Members in this ministerial meeting on behalf of the Affiliate Members as an effective way to share with the Member States of the region their needs and points of view on priority topics for the Organization;
7. **Expresses** the full availability by the Member States from the Middle East region to work with the Affiliate Members towards reaching the objective of an increased integration and engagement of them in the overall activity of the Organization;
8. **Supports** Affiliate Members' commitment and readiness for a stronger engagement within the main UNWTO's initiatives and projects in priority topics such as sustainability, rural development, education, innovation and digitalization; and
9. **Shares** Member States proposals to work actively with the private sector, **notices** the low number of Affiliate Members from the Middle East and **calls upon** its members in attracting industry stakeholders from their respective countries to join the UNWTO Affiliate Membership.

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CME/CR/6 (XLVIII)

**PLACE AND DATE OF THE FORTY-Ninth MEETING  
OF THE UNWTO COMMISSION FOR THE MIDDLE EAST**  
Agenda item 6

The Commission,

**Having considered** the candidatures presented by **Jordan** and **Lebanon** to host its 49<sup>th</sup> meeting during the second quarter of 2023;

**Having heard** the intervention made by H.E. Mr. Aly El Halaby, Ambassador of Lebanon to Egypt to withdraw in favour of Jordan and to submit their candidature to host the 50<sup>th</sup> CME meeting;

**Having heard** the presentation made by H.E. Mr. Nayef Al Fayez, Minister of Tourism and Antiquities of Jordan to submit their candidature to host the 49<sup>th</sup> CME meeting;

1. **Thanks** Jordan for presenting its candidature to host its 49<sup>th</sup> meeting, **accepts** this invitation at a date and place to be determined later, in coordination with the Chair and the UNWTO Secretary-General, and **calls upon** Jordan to undertake in writing, in due course and to observe the legal framework for the holding of UNWTO meetings away from Headquarters and to provide the provisions established in the model agreement.

2. **Takes note** of the candidacy of Lebanon to host its 50<sup>th</sup> meeting, which should be submitted for decision to its forthcoming 49<sup>th</sup> meeting.

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CME/CR/7 (XLVIII)

**LAUNCH BY THE SECRETARY-GENERAL  
OF THE OF BEST TOURISM VILLAGES FOR 2022**  
Agenda item 7.1

The Commission,

**Having heard** the presentations made by UNWTO Secretary-General and the Director of Market Intelligence and Competitiveness on the Best Tourism Villages initiative and;

**Having watched** the videos of the 2021 and the launch of the 2022 editions,

1. **Appreciates** the UNWTO Best Tourist Villages Initiative and **commends** the organization's efforts in promoting innovative and transformative approaches to the development of tourism in rural destinations that contribute to the three pillars of sustainability – economic, social and environmental – in line with the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) ;
2. **Encourages** Member States to make best use of this initiative, which aims to identify, protect and promote the development of villages along with their landscapes, biodiversity and ecosystems, knowledge, cultural diversity, traditional social structure and way of life through tourism and to also encourage the massive participation of Tourist Villages; and
3. **Recalls** that an online session for the Members States in the Middle East will be conducted to ensure the full briefing of the details for the presentation of candidacies by the Members States and that the deadline for presentation is 28 June 2028.

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CME/CR/8 (XLVIII)

**SIGNATURE OF THE AGREEMENT BETWEEN UNWTO AND THE KINGDOM OF SAUDI ARABIA  
FOR HOSTING THE 116TH SESSION OF THE UNWTO EXECUTIVE COUNCIL**  
Agenda item 7.2

The Commission,

**Having witnessed** the Signing ceremony of the Agreement between UNWTO and the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia for hosting the 116th session of the UNWTO Executive Council represented, respectively by Mr. Zurab Pololikashvili, Secretary-General of the World Tourism Organization and HE Mr. Ahmed bin Aqil Al Khateeb, Minister of Tourism of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia;

**Congratulates** the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia for the organization of this statutory meeting for the first time.

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**POLICY DISCUSSION ON THE RECOVERY  
OF THE TOURISM SECTOR IN THE MIDDLE EAST**

Agenda item 8

The Commission,

**Having heard** the introduction made by the Director of Market Intelligence and Competitiveness on the Policy Discussion on the recovery of the tourism sector in the Middle East and the focus of the debate on the three issues below:

- What are your short-term prospects for tourism in your country / the region?
- What are your priorities for recovery and resilience?
- What are the main obstacles to accelerate recovery and build resilience?

**Having heard also** the interventions of the Ministers and other high-level officials from the Member States on the recovery steps and initiatives in their respective countries, as follows (in alphabetical order):

#### **Bahrain**

The Bahraini government has adopted the tourism strategy 2022-2026, which is based on the development of the country's destinations, activities and business tourism. The biggest meeting and conference centre in the Middle East will be established in Bahrain in October 2022. It also aims at developing sports tourism, especially The Formula One, and recreational, cultural, film and medical tourism. Indicators for the end of this year are very optimistic compared to 2019 before the Covid pandemic. These are all indicators towards recovery.

#### **Egypt**

Egypt is optimistic as restrictions are lifted yet the Ministry recognizes there is still a way to go and thus it is critical to continue with the support to the sector, specially MSMEs and workers. One of the important issues was also reducing travel restrictions, whether in the PCR procedures and tourist visas issuance upon arrival at airports or ports of arrival for 76 countries.

Once travel to Egypt was stopped on March 19, 2020, the Ministry reviewed the requirements and controls in all tourist facilities in order to preserve and support workers. In April of the same year, it provided a hotline service for tourism workers to ask for support which allowed both formal and informal workers to address the Ministry, carried out an inventory of direct and indirect employment and identified skill gaps to support workers in the sector.

It was also important to link beach tourism to cultural tourism in order to familiarize tourists with the country's heritage and thus this became one of the strategies to attract other types of tourists.

It was also important to at this stage step up communication with outbound markets in order to spread messages of confidence, whether at the political level or with tour operators, as well as through the development of a tourism system on how to communicate with tourists, especially through social media and influencers who convey their personal experience from arrival to departure. In the resumption of tourism activity, we recorded positive figures.

Among the important areas to act, Egypt identified also domestic travel and the digitalization to build skills.

## **Iraq**

The gross domestic product increased by 10% compared to previous years due to the increase in the number of religious tourists after the lifting of restrictions and the health protocol upon arrival from abroad.

Now tourism in Iraq depends mainly on religious tourism throughout the year, while archaeological tourism comes in a second place. Iraq's challenges include fighting seasonality and grow beyond the Arab market.

## **Jordan**

Regarding the recovery for the year 2021, the percentage in Jordan was good compared to the world in general, but the real recovery began in the second half of last year. During the first half, the challenges were great, and the biggest concern was to preserve the workers in the tourism sector, because Jordan always strived to preserve the workforce in the sector. The Jordanian government highly invested in supporting the tourism sector in order to maintain the biggest number of workers in the sector. In this respect, the biggest challenge was to maintain informal workers as there are no available data, in addition to the difficulty to reach them. This may have been one of the lessons learned – how to address and support the most vulnerable in times of crises, namely the informal workers in tourism, women and youth in local communities.

Jordan set goals for the year 2021 and the gradual restart and recovery of the tourism sector has already begun, and although results were about 26% above the target number, it suffered another setback, as happened in all countries of the world. Through the National Tourism Strategy, Jordan intends to return to pre pandemic numbers in terms of tourists and income.

Added challenges to support the tourism sector at this stage include the payment of the financial obligations contracted during the crisis to the banks and so the Ministry is working on the possible rescheduling of loans granted.

There have been important achievements but recovery is yet to be consolidated and thus it is important to focus the work of the Organization and our governments to bring positive results to support the sector.

## **Kuwait**

During the past two years, Kuwait went through partial, then complete, then partial closures until it began to recover recently and gradually, returning to operate in the beginning of February 2022. The return coincided with the annual Kuwait Hala February Festival, and there were positive signs in the tourism activities.

Coinciding with the festival, Kuwait began issuing direct tourist visas to more than 50 countries, in addition to other countries that will be added, according to some regulations, with views to advance tourism development in Kuwait. Demand has been mainly driven by the GCC.

There are also infrastructure projects, services and logistical support for tourism development projects; by the end of this year, the new Kuwait airport will be opened, and will attract more than 25 million visitors per year. This will have a positive impact on the development of tourism, especially that Kuwait supports intra-regional tourism.

## **Lebanon**

There was an increase in the number of arrivals to Lebanon in 2021 by 114% compared to 2020. During January and February of this year, an increase of 170% and 200% was recorded respectively.

With regards the measures to mitigate the effects of the pandemic, a balance has been achieved between the economic and the health situations, taking into account the full health measures. Facilitation was provided to arrivals by exempting them from PCR in the event of full vaccination, and only some restrictions on some countries that have special cases.

With the decline in the number of arrivals, and since the tourism sector is a mainstay in the national economy in terms of foreign currency, and a main driver of economic activities, the Ministry of Tourism launched a plan to revitalize the tourism sector at the local and international levels by supporting the national economy, applying administrative reforms and modernizing the structure and the legislation in line with the recent development of the tourism industries.

In addition it has activated the work of the National Council for Tourism Development, which stimulates public and private partnerships, as well as partnerships with local tourism associations, especially in the field of environment, most of which are headed by women. In this area, there is a partnership with UNWTO to establish a management system for tourist destinations (Destination Management Organizations – DMOs).

To stimulate demand, competitive tourism packages were launched with Middle East Airlines. Rural tourism and winter tourism were also activated, as citizens interacted more with nature, which led to an improvement in the economy and recovery in these areas. The village of Bkassin has been selected as one of the Best Tourism Villages by UNWTO and a celebration will take place in April in the village: This helps to promote the village and repositioning Lebanon in the world tourism map. On the other hand, a Lebanese school student team also won the UNWTO Student League.

Lebanon has joined the Enlarged Partial Agreement on Cultural Routes with the European Union and has become a member. Currently the country is working on developing various routes: the Phoenician, the Umayyad, the Olive Route, the Wine Route and the Silk Road.

All these activities are helping to recover Lebanon, in this important phase of gradual opening.

## **Oman**

The government of the Sultanate of Oman approved a recovery plan that included six axes to help overcome the repercussions of the pandemic for a period of three years.

It included the safety of the tourism sector and the need to maintain precautionary measures to protect tourists and workers, as well as human capital sustainability, support to local communities to prevent the impact of the pandemic, the development of tourism programmes and their importance in keeping pace with the aspirations of tourists and the changes that occurred after the pandemic, tourism communication and marketing and the importance of focusing efforts in marketing the Sultanate of Oman as a tourist destination in the target markets, supporting investment in the tourism sector through approving a set of investment incentives for Omani SMEs, or even foreign investors wishing to invest in the Sultanate in the tourism sector. The plan also included exempting the nationals of 103 countries from visa requirements before visiting the Sultanate, which is expected to have a positive role in the return of tourism momentum and movement to Oman.

In 2019, the tourism sector accounted for about 2.5% of the gross domestic product in the Sultanate of Oman, and the target is to reach 6% to 10% by 2040.

## **Saudi Arabia**

The Kingdom of Saudi Arabia has very positive prospects that indicate recovery. Despite the repercussions of the pandemic, the strength of local tourism in the Kingdom and the efficiency of local tourism promotion campaigns have maintained the recovery and prosperity of the sector and even provided material support to increase employment and protect the livelihoods of workers in the sector by increasing wages support for citizens working in the sector by 30-50% and the availability of different work patterns.

During the next year, the sector is expected to witness a strong recovery with the improvement of public health and travel conditions, as the Kingdom aims this year to reach more than 78 million visits and to reach 100 million visitors by 2030. Tourism currently contributes 4% to the GDP, and the target is for it reach 10% by 2030.

As of March 5, the Kingdom lifted most of the restrictions on travel: This will contribute to doubling the number of incoming visits, in addition to activating the initiatives of the Ministry of Tourism in partnership with the tourism sector system in the Kingdom from the public and private sectors.

The Kingdom has taken a measure to lift travel restrictions in coordination with the World Health Organization based on two basic criteria, namely the high rate of vaccination and the strength of the health care system in the Kingdom and hopes that this step will encourage other countries to lift all travel restrictions.

The Kingdom also expects a positive long-term future development as a result of the launch of the National Tourism Strategy, which aims to make tourism the second largest economic sector after oil. This ambition is driven by the Kingdom's major investments in all components of the travel and tourism sector, including giga projects aimed at developing leading Saudi tourist destinations that combine keeping pace with the future, luxury, sustainability, and raising the readiness of existing tourist sites.

As part of efforts to support global recovery from the pandemic, the Kingdom is proud of its major aid package worth half a billion dollars directed at the medical aid pledged by the Kingdom to support the World Health Organization and the Global Alliance for Vaccines and Immunization, in addition to its contributions to investments and loans for recovery estimated at a billion dollars only in Africa during 2021.

The recovery priorities in the tourism sector included several axes in line with the best practices of the sector and its needs. The Ministry has adopted programmes and initiatives based on the use of modern technologies that support these facilities and accelerate recovery through business camps and accelerators.

The Kingdom will also work within the recovery group to increase the countries eligible for obtaining a tourist visa, in addition to bridging the gap related to accommodation facilities and the workforce by addressing many challenges related to the quality of facilities and its reclassification, as well as providing training programmes to raise the efficiency of workers in the tourism sector and attract young people through supportive policies for job stability and professional development in support of sustainability and continuity in the sector.

The Kingdom also confirms its firm commitment to sustainable tourism and green investment. During the past year, the Green Saudi Forum and the United Nations Climate Change Conference COP 26 witnessed the launching of the Global Center for Sustainable Tourism, and the Kingdom is looking forward to hosting the World Tourism Day in 2023, which will be held under the theme of tourism and green investments.

Digital transformation is also a top priority for the Kingdom, and the Leap International Technical Conference, which was held recently in Riyadh, witnessed the launch of the digital tourism strategy. By implementing the strategy, KSA aims at providing a smooth experience for tourists and stakeholders to support the prosperity of the tourism sector by providing digital solutions to simplify travel procedures, ease of business, in addition to technical innovation and encouraging entrepreneurs in the tourism sector.

Despite the ambitions of our region and the progress it has achieved, the Ministry sees that the near future is not without obstacles that need to be overcome. One of the major obstacles in the tourism sector is the lack of coordination regarding travel and health protocols, as well as the need to build and refine the skills of the workforce, and this is not limited to the specialized services sector and the skills of what is needed in the tourism sector only, but also includes digital technology skills, as digitization is one of the challenges facing SMEs, which requires training and tools of supportive systems that help adopt leading technologies and digital business models.

There are many opportunities as well especially in terms of cooperation and knowledge exchange between countries. This type of opportunities has become more important than before, especially in light of these difficult times that our world is witnessing today, and through the World Tourism Organization, the Ministry is confident that the countries of the Middle East can reap many fruits from this cooperation. Hence, it is necessary to combine efforts to empower the tourism sector and present regional treasures to the whole world.

## **Syria**

Syria suffered twice more than other countries due to unjust, unilateral sanctions that affect all sectors of life. The recovery of the tourism sector is one of the priorities that poses major challenges to the Syrian state, which is making all possible efforts to recover this sector within a different framework, at least internally, because these sanctions have a significant impact on the various elements, tools and means of recovery, the first of which is aviation, and not the last, transportation and accommodation in hotels, resorts, etc.

These unilateral sanctions affect the basics of life for all people, and various terrorist attacks have affected the most important Syrian antiquities, which were and still constitute the backbone of tourism in Syria. Therefore, the Ministry attaches great importance to the issue of recovery, and the state supports it greatly, and it appeals to the World Tourism Organization to have a real role in lifting part of this injustice as much as it can with regard to lifting sanctions that affect all aspects of life, including tourism.

The Ministry has great hope in finding a solution for all the areas that have been subject to aggressions in order to rise and recover within the framework of sustainable development of tourism in the world. It also commends the proposals put forward in this session regarding the development of intraregional tourism. Syria is the only country that does not impose visas on any Arab citizen since many decades, and therefore Syria is open and hopes that of intraregional and international tourism will return soon.

## **The United Arab Emirates**

Two years after the start of the Covid-19 crisis, the tourism sector around the world, especially in the Middle East, is witnessing remarkable recovery indicators, but the issue still exists, and this requires continuous work to accelerate the pace of recovery and to restore the tourism traffic to the levels of 2019.

The UAE is constantly coordinating with partners in the public and private sectors, for a full recovery, as its aims to reach 40 million hotel visitors by 2031. Therefore, the UAE Ministry of Economy has launched, jointly with the local tourism departments, some important initiatives, including the UAE's tourism identity and special focus on domestic tourism, which was in fact crucial for the rapid recovery of the tourism sector in the country. The UAE was keen to facilitate the traffic of tourism to countries through its various airports with the application of the highest levels of precautionary measures and strengthening the agenda of the state's activities to attract more visitors from around the world.

With Expo 2020 Dubai since last October, the UAE witnessed a remarkable tourism boom, with visitors to the Expo exceeding 20 million – this is an example of the role that events play in tourism development. By the end of 2021, the country welcomed 19 million guests in the hotel sector and achieved nearly 28 billion dirhams in revenues. It expects the sector to recover further within 2022. Therefore, it renews its call to the World Tourism Organization to continue its support for the countries of the Middle East and to increase the volume of projects, initiatives and activities that enhance the tourism sector in this region.

## Yemen

Yemen is going through special circumstances. With the Houthi coup against legitimacy the great tourism potential of Yemen was unfortunately destroyed. Most of the employees in the tourism sector lost their jobs. The Ministry hopes that the war will end and that the tourism sector will return to how it was before 2014. It asks the World Tourism Organization and the Arab Tourism Organization and all delegations to help Yemen in the rehabilitation of its human capital.

## The Arab Tourism Organization

Emergency Response Planning differs from one country to another, as there are countries that have had sufficiently flexible governance to deal with crises, while there are other countries that have had very great challenges in finding the necessary governance and the way to deal with crises, and this is one of the points where lessons have not been learnt.

The second point, which is very important and was raised by HE the Saudi Minister of Tourism, is SMEs. In many countries they are the mainstay of the tourism industry and must be preserved in any way. Some countries have the ability to support them, while others do not, therefore cooperation must be made in this matter among the countries of the region.

1. **Pays tribute to** the valuable and necessary information provided by all Members States and regional Organizations and **commends** the efforts of the Organization, to establish mechanisms and initiatives for the recovery of the tourism sector and mitigation of the impacts of the pandemic;
2. **Emphasizes** on the need to work together and move in a quick and balanced way with unified efforts to pave the way for recovery through coordinated policies that restore the confidence of travelers and businesses; and
3. **Affirms and urges** Member States to effectively use digital technology and innovation to provide a safe travel without difficulties in accordance with health, security and regulatory controls and standards.

Closing the debate the Secretary-General, thanked the important information shared and highlighted that it will be factored into the UNWTO Programme of Work. Furthermore, he recalled the importance of education and the inclusion of tourism as a theme in schools since the primary level, the need to create a stronger knowledge of tourism employment and the development of a Toolbox for Crises focusing on the protection of jobs including those in the informal economy.

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CME/REC/10 (XLVIII)

**VOTE OF THANKS TO THE HOST COUNTRY AND TO THE ORGANIZATION**

The Commission,

**Having considered** the various items on the agenda of its forty-eighth meeting in the best possible conditions of efficiency and comfort;

1. **Expresses** its utmost appreciation and thanks to people of the **Arab Republic of Egypt**, the government, particularly the Ministry of Tourism and Antiquities and for the warm hospitality and for the arrangements made for the holding of this meeting, and
2. **Thanks** the Secretary-General of the World Tourism Organization, the team of the Regional Department for the Middle East and other officials of the Organization for the success of the meeting and for their continuous support to Member States.

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### 3. LIST OF PARTICIPANTS

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