Agenda item 12  
Proposal of the Republic of Uzbekistan on the renewal of the mandate of the Secretary-General  

Note by the Secretariat: This agenda item was proposed by the Full Member the Republic of Uzbekistan by virtue of Rule 5(1)(i) and has been included in the provisional agenda in accordance with Rule 5(3) of the Rules of Procedure of the General Assembly. The present document consists of the requisite report submitted by the Republic of Uzbekistan in its proposal.
NOTA VERBAL

La Embajada de la República de Uzbekistán en el Reino de España saluda atentamente a la Organización Mundial de Turismo y tiene el honor de remitir copia de la carta del Ministro de Ecología, Medio Ambiente y Cambio Climático de la República de Uzbekistán, Excmo. Sr. Aziz Abdukhakimov, dirigida al Secretario General de la Organización Mundial del Turismo, Excmo. Sr. Zurab Pololikashvili, así como el Anexo a la misma dirigida a los Estados Miembros de la OMT.

La Embajada agradecería transmitir la carta a Su Excelencia y prestar su asistencia en la distribución del Anexo de la carta entre los Estados Miembros de la OMT.

La Embajada de la República de Uzbekistán en el Reino de España aprovecha la ocasión para reiterar a la Organización Mundial de Turismo el testimonio de su más alta consideración.

Madrid, 11 de septiembre de 2023

A la Organización Mundial de Turismo

Madrid
Zurab Pololikashvili  
Secretary -General  
World Tourism Organization  
Madrid, Spain

Your Excellency,

Allow me to extend my sincere appreciation to the Secretariat and yourself for the excellent cooperation in the preparations for the upcoming 25th session of the General Assembly that will take place in Samarkand, Uzbekistan. This meeting will provide a platform to present the progress made by the World Tourism Organization - ranging from the implementation of the 2022-2023 programme of work, to the necessary future steps to ensure its consolidation and to reassert the ample support by Member States to the positive direction undertaken by the Organization during your mandate, which you managed to maintain during the greatest crisis in the history of tourism.

We especially welcome the achievements around innovation, education, investment, tourism law and sustainability, driven by you since you were appointed Secretary-General. The current global tourism and economic situation presents an unprecedented opportunity to continue advancing, strengthening and structuring a more modern, resilient, and sustainable tourism sector, which is able to communicate in a relevant manner from the spaces of political influence where it rightly belongs throughout the world.

In this regard, I address you in your capacity as Secretary of the Executive Council and the General Assembly, to request the kind support of the Secretariat in the following: Pursuant to Rule 5.3 of the Rules of Procedure of the General Assembly, Uzbekistan requests to include in the provisional agenda of the 25th session of the General Assembly an item to consider the renewal of the mandate of the Secretary-General, in accordance with Article 22 of the Statutes.
I also have the honor to request that this same item be included in the provisional agenda of the 119th session of the Executive Council, pursuant to rule 4.2. (c) of the Rules of Procedure of the Executive Council, so that it may consider recommending the renewal of the mandate of the Secretary-General to the General Assembly.

These proposals aim to ensure the uninterrupted progress of the agenda initiated in 2018, when the 108th session of the Executive Council (May, San Sebastian, Spain) approved the Management Vision and Priorities, which were endorsed in all the statutory meetings that followed. As Host Country of the 25th session of the General Assembly, the ultimate objective of our requests is to support UNWTO’s work and to strengthen the activities and projects currently underway, as explained in detail in the attached document for consideration by UNWTO governing bodies.

Before concluding, I would like to extend my sincere thanks to the Secretariat for conveying this request in a timely manner to all Member States.

I avail myself of this opportunity to renew to you, dear Secretary-General, the assurances of my highest consideration and our reiterated commitment to ensure a successful 25th session of the General Assembly.

Sincerely,

Minister
Aziz Abdukhakimov
To All Member States of UNWTO

Executive Summary

Since taking office in 2018, the Secretary-General has initiated significant changes to improve how UNWTO serves its Member States and supports the global tourism sector.

Under his leadership - reflected in the Management Vision & Priorities approved at the beginning of his mandate and repeatedly ratified since – the Organization has also embraced innovation as a new area of work; scaled education and skills development reaching tens of thousands of people worldwide; tapped into tourism for rural development to broaden the sectors positive impact; developed the first approach to tourism investment to untap opportunities for Members; and made significant steps to be closer to Members through the establishment of Regional and Thematic with the first Regional Office for the Middle East established in Saudi Arabia, an example that may be followed by other regions.

While the COVID-19 pandemic put the Secretary-General's initial agenda for change on standby, UNWTO did not stand still but guided the sector's response to its biggest ever crisis. The Secretary-General led through these challenging times with new services to support recovery.

All these initiatives - described in detail in this document, based on publicly available information through the website and social media channels of UNWTO - must be further advanced and consolidated now that tourism has resumed after the worst of the pandemic is behind us. This requires the continuation of the current leadership as its main driving force, ensuring the necessary stability to keep advancing UNWTO's transformation, deepening its response capacity, and further diversifying how it supports its Members.

Uzbekistan requests that the Executive Council and the General Assembly consider renewing the mandate of Secretary-General Zurab Pololikashvili, in accordance with Article 22 of the Statutes.

I. Introduction

1. The current Secretary-General took office on 1 January 2018. The transition in leadership and management of the Organization took place in the first half of 2018, reaching its decisive moment during the 108th Executive Council, the first of his mandate (May 2018, San Sebastian, Spain).
The Council also approved the Management Vision and the new programme of work presented by the Secretary-General, around the new priorities of the Organization - innovation, education and employment, and investments - as fundamental axes and new areas of work of the Secretariat. The Council also took note of the results of the first internal audit of UNWTO, carried out by KPMG between February and April 2018 at the request of the Secretary-General, with the aim of starting his mandate with detailed knowledge of the internal situation of the Secretariat at the beginning of his tenure.

The Secretary-General proposed a restructuring of the Organization, in order to strengthen it and catalyze its transformation towards a more dynamic, agile, efficient United Nations agency where the development of new services would be available to Member States in a more tangible way.

2. It was not until the 23rd session of the UNWTO General Assembly (September 2019, St. Petersburg, Russian Federation) that the new programme of work and budget developed under the leadership of the Secretary-General, incorporating the Management Vision and Priorities approved by the 108th Executive Council, was adopted.

3. It should be noted that against the legacy of a deficit of EUR 750,000, - at the beginning of his mandate, in just 18 months a positive balance of EUR 2.4 million was presented to the General Assembly.

4. Only a few months later, the World Health Organization (WHO) declared a "public health emergency of international concern" (20 January 2020), followed by the declaration of the COVID-19 pandemic on 11 March.

5. The pandemic interrupted the implementation of the approved programme of work and the budget. The years 2020-21 were the worst in the history of tourism, worldwide the sector practically came to a standstill. As a result, foreign direct investment in the sector plummeted, leading to an estimated loss of US$2.6 trillion in international tourism receipts in the global economy. More than 100 million jobs were put at risk, impacting especially small and medium-sized enterprises who represent more than 80% of the tourism supply, especially the low-skilled workforce, who today more than ever need to strengthen their training and skills to professionalize and be able to aspire to quality wages.

6. Against this backdrop, the new agenda came to a halt in the second half of the Secretary-General's first term, and the process of transformation of the organization was delayed. Facing up to the crisis, the Secretariat was forced to take a new turn to address the greatest challenge in the history of tourism: guiding the recovery of the sector and helping the reopening of international borders.

7. A few days after the pandemic was declared, the Secretary-General convened the Global Tourism Crisis Committee, bringing together member countries, affiliates, UN agencies and international organizations, as well as destinations and major private sector groups, to join efforts and coordinate actions in response to the pandemic.
Among the results of the Committee's work, specific products to measure and manage the impact of the pandemic stand out, such as a new report on travel restrictions, the World Tourism Barometer was published monthly and a data dashboard measuring impact and relevant policy actions was launched. A number of guidelines and initiatives were also launched, ranging from technical assistance to recommendations to restart tourism. UNWTO's response also included vulnerable tourism-dependent populations through targeted initiatives. In this difficult context, the innovations introduced since 2018 proved their effectiveness, such as through the "UNWTO Healing Solutions Challenge", with the support of WHO, to identify startups with technological solutions to restart tourism safely. In parallel, UNWTO offered hundreds of webinars and digital meetings to accompany the sector in a responsible manner, generate trust, all with the goal of advancing in the harmonization and coordination of protocols at the international level.

UNWTO's response to the crisis also mobilized unprecedented political and public support and recognition. UN Secretary-General António Guterres' report "COVID-19 and Transforming Tourism", based on UNWTO research, reaffirmed that the Organization is the voice of the sector at the UN. In addition, timely UNWTO actions enabled an unprecedented tourism media presence, which has continued ever since. All of the above helped to prepare the sector to be able to restart its activity as soon as conditions allowed. A cornerstone of this is the new International Code for the Protection of Tourists, the initial work of which was carried out in this period.

8. At the start of the Secretary-General's second term in early 2022, and overcoming the worst moment of the pandemic, the previously suspended UNWTO agenda began to be reactivated. Results of great international impact were achieved in a short time, proving their added value for tourism and benefits for Member States. These achievements need to be consolidated to ensure their sustainability.

9. Any process of transformation and change contained in the new agenda and the roadmap promoted by the Secretary-General - paused because of the pandemic - must be consolidated. The objective is to strengthen the full recovery of the sector through the proven effectiveness of UNWTO's new activities and projects during and after the pandemic, aimed at rethinking tourism and building a more modern, resilient and sustainable sector.

10. Accordingly, and pursuant to Article 22 of the UNWTO Statutes, Uzbekistan proposes that, on the basis of a recommendation of the 119th session of the Executive Council, the 25th session of the General Assembly exceptionally renews the mandate of the Secretary-General.

II. Areas of work to be developed in the medium term

Since 2018 UNWTO has undergone a transformation, introducing new areas of work critical to the future of tourism. These new areas must be strengthened in the medium term to continue supporting countries' efforts to redesign tourism to become more resilient, innovative and sustainable. This implies considerations of tourism governance and its consideration as State policy, consistent with its transversal relevance as highlighted by the pandemic. Tourism should be included in the design of general economic, development, investment, energy, infrastructure and education policies. In particular:
1. Innovation and digital transformation.

a. The Secretary-General’s vision of being at the forefront of new developments and innovation - helping incorporate tourism into the global digital agenda and in the quest to create the first UNWTO-led tourism innovation ecosystem - has achieved unprecedented success and a milestone for public-private collaboration, moving from global actions to creating projects on the ground.

The innovation and digital transformation strategy initiated in 2018 has proven to be a key instrument for the recovery of tourism after the pandemic, both for Member States and for the United Nations system. Thus, in 2020 and 2022 UNWTO was recognized as a lead agency in the "United Nations Mapping of Innovation, Data and Digital Capacities", the UN's biannual innovation map.

b. Creation and launch of 14 startup competitions globally with more than 18,000 participants from 150 countries. Development of eight tourism innovation challenges mobilizing the participation of about 2,500 startups from 130 countries. The excellent quality of the 250 winning startups helped them gain US$ billion venture capital investment in recent years.

c. The 250 winning startups have achieved unprecedented visibility thanks to the more than 100 mentorships they received from the large technology companies which served as UNWTO partners, as well as in the 20 acceleration programs developed in recent years. Internationally renowned companies such as Telefónica, Google, Amazon Web Services, or Amadeus, have collaborated in these projects.

Within the innovation forums created under Mr. Pololikashvili’s leadership, the "UNWTO Tourism Tech Adventures" have been developed on thirty occasions around the world, becoming a reference platform to gather the tourism innovation ecosystem. More than 5,000 participants - governments, startups, investors, corporations, accelerators, incubators and academia - have attended to disseminate the technological solutions developed by startups for the common good, and to turn tourism into a more agile, dynamic and efficient sector.

d. The "UNWTO Digital Futures" programme, to train and generate digital tools for small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) in tourism, which make up more than 80% of the business fabric of the sector, has helped more than 1,000 SMEs make a diagnosis about of their digitization process and access relevant courses.

The "Marrakech call to action", presented at the 117th session of the Executive Council (November 2022, Marrakech, Morocco), called on the importance of creating pilot projects in every country to accelerate digitalization. It is an example of how to catalyze the fulfillment of the United Nations mandate to invest in people, planet and prosperity.
e. Uzbekistan recognizes that the cutting-edge initiatives around tourism innovation launched under the leadership of the Secretary-General are a cornerstone of the transformative agenda of the entire sector. They allow tourism to adapt its way of operating to incorporate technological advances, new business models and social interaction, as one of the most agile sectors of the global economy, and prepare it to anticipate challenges, seize opportunities and adapt to changing realities. Startups and companies have been able to connect and mobilize funds for the digital transformation of the sector in Member States in all regions. To secure these benefits and to generate new opportunities, the continuity of the Secretary-General as the main driver of this agenda at the top of UNWTO must be ensured.

2. Education and employment.

a. As part of the prioritization of education on the Secretary-General’s agenda, the Technical Committee on Online Education was created as a subsidiary body of the Executive Council. It brings the public and private sectors together to make recommendations and work with UNWTO in the development of its work plan.

b. The creation of the "UNWTO Tourism Online Academy" has been a case of pure innovation in education. This first platform specialized in online education for tourism has already exceeded 20,000 students from 150 countries.

UNWTO partnered with leading tourism universities to create 24 online courses in three languages, in addition to 15 partnerships to provide the knowledge, content and information that the sector requires. Access to high-quality education has also been facilitated through the UNWTO global scholarship programme, which now has more than 9,000 beneficiaries.

UNWTO has reached agreements with IE University of Spain, Les Roches, Glion, Ecole Ducasse, Swiss Education Group, Hong Kong Polytechnic University, Universidad Externado de Colombia, Universidad de Palermo, Universidad Católica de Chile, Bilkent University of Turkey, or the University of Sharjah of the United Arab Emirates, among others.

c. In addition, under the leadership of the Secretary-General, in 2023 the Organization created the first degree in sustainable international tourism with the Lucerne University of Applied Sciences and Arts-HSLU, Switzerland’s leading university. This milestone expands the range of opportunities to transmit the wealth of knowledge that UNWTO can offer to new generations.

d. In terms of quality in education, more than 221 programmes from over 79 institutions are now "TedQual" certified.

e. In the area of employment, the "Jobs Factory" was created to connect UNWTO-trained professionals with job opportunities.
f. The creation of international academies in tourism is a new service for Member States being currently developed in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, the Dominican Republic, and Uzbekistan among others, in collaboration with UNWTO. Uzbekistan is fully committed to this initiative as demonstrated by the signature of a Memorandum of Understanding with UNWTO in May 2023 to enhance Human Capital development and work together for the creation of training opportunities in Uzbekistan through the establishment of an international academy in collaboration with the Organization. These medium-term projects, which may be replicated in other countries, are key to ensure that tourism can build a powerful workforce and provide high quality employment for youth.

g. Finally, the "UNWTO Tool Kit" (presented at the 117th and 118th Executive Councils) will make a tool available to Member States to include tourism as a subject in education. From the beginning of their educational trajectory, young students will be able to connect with the sector.

3. Promotion of investment in tourism.

a. Since 2018, the Secretary-General’s vision has enabled a new relevance to working with the private sector. In collaboration with the intelligence unit of the Financial Times, FDI Intelligence, the first investment reports in tourism have been produced. Also, the first investor network with more than 500 members has been created, offering hand in hand with Member States investment opportunities in the sector. In 2022, the service offered to Members was expanded to help create national investment guides to incentivize the private sector to promote economic development in the sector.

b. The UNWTO Tourism Doing Business Guidelines are a central element of the new investment services promoted by UNWTO. To date, they have been developed in more than five countries, starting with the Dominican Republic. To expand the spectrum, a collaboration agreement was signed in January 2023 with the Development Bank of Latin America and the Caribbean (CAF) to sponsor guides for the region. In addition to the Americas, investment guides are being developed in Africa and Europe.

These three priorities - innovation, education and investments - have managed to generate more than EUR 4 million in additional funds for the Organization, which have allowed the execution of high-impact projects, in addition to at least 74 agreements and collaborations to continue promoting these pillars of the transformative agenda led by the Secretary-General.

4. Sustainability:

a. As reported by the Secretary-General at the 68th meeting of the Regional Commission for Europe held in June in Sofia, Bulgaria, UNWTO continues to provide responses and practical measures to enable the sector to face up to the challenge of climate change.
b. UNWTO has renewed its leadership of the One Planet Sustainable Tourism Programme for 2023 and 2024 and is advancing action plans for its more than 700 members. Through One Planet, the Global Tourism and Plastics Initiative aims to stop plastic pollution at the source and continues to grow in size and influence.

c. At the same time, the Glasgow Declaration on Climate Action in Tourism has welcomed some 800 signatories since 2021 (companies, institutions and destinations committed to a Net Zero tourism sector by 2050), and 11 signatories at national level (governments and national tourism organizations).

d. Specific products are also in the spotlight. At the end of 2022, UNWTO published its Global Roadmap for Food Waste Reduction, and the Baseline Report on Climate Action in Tourism, a joint effort with the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change. In March 2023, a key report on Climate Action in the Tourism Sector was published, focusing on the measurement of greenhouse gas emissions.

e. UNWTO is also strengthening its presence in the field. The International Network of Sustainable Tourism Observatories (INSTO) has continued adding new institutions, confirming the relevant work of the Organization.

f. Under the leadership of the Secretary-General, UNWTO has resumed the decisive momentum to create the first comprehensive and universal system to measure the environmental impacts of tourism. In collaboration with the United Nations in New York and the International Labour Organization (ILO), the Organization is leading the creation of the Global Standard for Measuring the Sustainability of Tourism (MST), which will be presented to the United Nations Statistical Commission in March 2024. The ability to set global standards requires continuity at the helm of the Organization to consolidate these achievements for the benefit of the entire sector.

5. International Code for the Protection of Tourists:

a. Under the leadership of the Secretary-General, the International Code for the Protection of Tourists was developed during the pandemic as part of the package of measures generated to restore confidence in travel and accelerate the recovery of the sector.

b. This tool for the public and private sector was produced by articulating the inputs of more than 100 countries and the private sector. The Code represents the first set of international standards concerning assistance to tourists in emergency situations and the protection of tourists as consumers, improving contractual relations with service providers. Uzbekistan takes good note of the interest of non-member States that joined this unprecedented initiative, demonstrating its global relevance.
c. As of August 2023, 15 countries have adhered to the Code, and this number is expected to continue rising, including at a signing ceremony to take place in the framework of the 25th session of the General Assembly in Samarkand, Uzbekistan. The Code was approved by the UNWTO General Assembly in 2021. A subsidiary technical committee of the Executive Council is expected to be formed to support the Secretary-General in promoting and monitoring the implementation of the Code, compiling actions taken by countries, adopting good practices and recommendations, and examining challenges in its implementation with a view to continuous improvement of the Code.

6. Tourism and Rural Development and the "UNWTO Best Tourism Villages" programme.

a. Positioning tourism as a vector of rural development represents another pioneering initiative during the current mandate. Focused on social, economic, environmental development and the well-being of communities, "Best Tourism Villages" by UNWTO recognizes rural destinations with the will to turn tourism into a source of opportunities and well-being.

b. Rural tourism provides opportunities for individuals and families to preserve their heritage and intangible assets, create quality jobs in vulnerable areas and empower women and youth to seize opportunities, mitigating rural exodus. It is an instrument of integral development of the territory, economic diversification and contributes to distribute more equitably the undeniable benefits of tourism as a cross-cutting sector.

c. For the first time in the history of the Organization, rural destinations which incorporate tourism as a development engine have been recognized. This is generating new employment and income opportunities and promoting social impact through innovation and sustainability.

To date, UNWTO has recognized more than 100 villages worldwide as examples of destinations with cultural and natural assets that preserve and promote community-based values, products and lifestyles and are committed to sustainability at all levels. In addition, UNWTO provides support to those villages which have not met all the criteria, to achieve such recognition. This pioneering initiative has only begun and is already yielding important concrete results. Consequently, its sustained growth and maturation requires continuity of the mandate of the current Secretary-General.

7. Decentralization/Regional and Thematic Offices

a. The Organization’s regionalization process is essential to be able to provide services in an efficient and agile manner to all Member States. For the first time in UNWTO’s half-century history, the Secretary-General managed to initiate the long overdue process to truly work closer to Members.
b. The first UNWTO Regional Office for the Middle East was inaugurated in May 2021 in Riyadh, Saudi Arabia. It was built in record time and during the pandemic after the approval by the 112th Executive Council (September 2020, Tbilisi, Georgia).

c. This historic process of decentralization to generate greater proximity to Member States quickly resonated in other regions and now includes the creation of regional offices in Africa and the Americas.

d. Uzbekistan applauds the vision and quick success of this landmark. It reflects the Secretary-General's commitment to strengthen tourism institutions in a concrete way for both Member States and the sector. Uzbekistan is fully committed to support this process and has submitted a proposal to UNWTO Governing Bodies to establish a UNWTO thematic office for “Tourism on the Silk Road” in Uzbekistan to contribute to tourism development in the region.

For the coherent consolidation of this decentralization process and its sustainability, the continuity of the leadership of the Secretary-General at the head of the Secretariat beyond 2025 is deemed to be essential.

8. Task Force:

a. UNWTO’s main message under the leadership of the Secretary-General has been to "Rethink Tourism", only catalyzed by the COVID-19 pandemic. This is critical to address the future and the increasingly rapid and unexpected changes, which can lead to challenges, crises, and risks, but also represent opportunities to seize.

b. Following the initiative of Saudi Arabia and Spain, a subsidiary body of the Executive Council will be responsible for assisting the Secretariat in strengthening the Organization in the new global context, and for making recommendations for strategy and reform.

c. This task force is in the process of being constituted and will work hand in hand with the Secretary-General in the coming years to present the roadmap for the future. It requires sufficient time and continuous interaction with the Secretariat to enable it to fulfill its mandate, as approved by the Executive Council.

II. Renewal of the mandate of the Secretary-General

1. Article 22 of the UNWTO Statutes states: "The Secretary-General shall be appointed on the recommendation of the Council and by a two-thirds majority of the Full Members present and voting at the Assembly, for a term of four years. Such appointment shall be renewable."
2. The current Statutes allow the renewal of the mandate of the Secretary-General for a third term, subject to the recommendation of the Executive Council for this appointment.

3. In the United Nations Secretariat, the possibility exists for the UN Security Council and General Assembly to review the Secretary-General's maximum term in office of two five-year mandates. This practice varies in other UN agencies, either with longer mandates or the possibility of renewal for more than two terms.

4. All the initiatives described in sections I. and II. are part of UNWTO's current programme of work. Because of both their complexity and positive impact on Member States and the Organization, they require to be further consolidated and developed under the current leadership as their main driving force. In conclusion, the mandate of the current Secretary-General needs to be renewed.

5. Uzbekistan requests that the Executive Council and the General Assembly to consider exceptionally renewing the mandate of Secretary-General Zurab Pololikashvili.

6. This exceptional renewal responds to the extraordinary circumstances that the Secretary-General had to face during most of his mandate and that delayed the implementation of the renewal agenda he has promoted since the beginning of his mandate. The renewal of the mandate will be a guarantor for the stability required by UNWTO to keep advancing its transformation process, to ensure its agility and responsiveness to current challenges and changing global circumstances, and continue to provide valuable services to its Member States and to the tourism sector.