UNWTO General Assembly Opens to Advance Big Plans for Sector

**Samarkand, Uzbekistan, 18 October 2023** - The General Assembly of the World Tourism Organization has met for the 25th time in Samarkand, Uzbekistan. As its own data indicates that global tourism is on track to reach up to 95% of pre-pandemic levels by the end of this year, the Assembly brought sector leaders together to advance a clear vision for the long-term transformation of the sector around clear priorities.

Reflecting the broad diversity of the sector, delegations from 117 countries, including 70 Ministerial level representatives, came together for the meeting of the supreme organ of the UN specialized agency for tourism for development. Ahead of the opening plenary, UNWTO Secretary-General Zurab Pololikashvili had been formally welcomed to Samarkand by President of Uzbekistan Shavkat Mirziyoyev and commended his leadership in boosting levels of investment in the country’s tourism sector and his focus on education and supporting jobs.

A “key moment for tourism”

Opening the General Assembly, Mr Pololikashvili said: “This General Assembly represents a key moment for us as an Organization and for tourism as a sector. We weathered the storm of the pandemic, and now have the opportunity to achieve the long-term transformation of the sector and leave a real legacy for global tourism.”

On the eve of the Assembly, the Secretary-General had published his wide-landmark goal for the sector. “The Journey to 2030: A Vision for a Sector Transformed” sets out clear priorities for the sector in the year ahead and action plans for achieving them.

Also opening the General Assembly, H.E. Aziz Abdukhakimov is Minister of Ecology, Environmental Protection and Climate Change of the Republic of Uzbekistan, underscored his Government’s commitment to bolstering tourism as a pillar of national development and for the preservation of cultural heritage.

**Members Applaud Progress**

A key part of the First Plenary Session was the Report of the Secretary-General to Members, setting out the Organization’s achievements since the previous General
Assembly, held in Madrid, Spain (December, 2021). The report focused on his five core priorities for the sector, both over the last two years and for the two years to come:

- Scale up innovation and digital transformation
- Invest in People with a focus on Human Capital, Education and Jobs
- Boost investments, financing and entrepreneurship
- Foster sustainable and green transition across tourism
- Enhance competitiveness and resilience, through statistics, market intelligence, and product development.

The report to Members also highlighted UNWTO’s heightened relevance and visibility, including as part of the wider United Nations system. During the opening day, Member States were greeted by video messages from key UN leaders, including UN Secretary-General António Guterres, Director-General of the World Health Organization Dr Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus, Rebeca Grynspan, Secretary-General of the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD), Juan Carlos Salazar, Secretary-General of the International Civil Aviation Organization (ICAO), as well as European Commission Vice-President Margaritis Schinas. They all commended UNWTO’s central role in guiding tourism through the pandemic and setting the sector on course for a sustainable and resilient recovery.

**Strong, Growing Membership**

For the third consecutive General Assembly, UNWTO celebrated its growing size. In Samarkand, Belize was welcomed as the Organization’s newest Member State, taking the total to 160. The Assembly was given an overview of advanced plans to further expand Membership, including to welcome several countries it has been in long-term talks with.

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- General Assembly - Twenty-fifth session
- “People, Planet, Prosperity”: UNWTO Global Investment Forum Looks to the Future
- UNWTO Gears Up to Host World’s Top Tourism Authorities at Crucial General Assembly