



New York/Madrid, 6 March 2014

## Summary of the UNWTO side event at the 8<sup>th</sup> Open Working Group on SDGs (OWG) New York, USA

Title: "How Tourism can contribute to the sustainable development agenda?" held on 4 February, 2014, at United Nations Headquarters, New York

UNWTO organized a side event on 4 February 2014 on "How tourism can contribute to the sustainable development agenda?". The event was designed to contribute to the work of the UNGA Open working Group on Sustainable Development Goals. The event was well attended by representatives of governments from all regions, UN agencies, civil society, business and academia.

**Mr. Nikhil Seth, Director, Division for Sustainable Development, UNDESA**, in his opening remarks, welcomed the initiative of UNWTO to organize the side event and noted that it would help focus the attention of OWG on the importance of tourism for the sustainable development agenda as its potential remains somewhat under-appreciated. Recent and prospective tourism trends showing consistent growth were very encouraging as these would have a substantial positive impact on economic growth and poverty reduction in developing countries. The challenge is to promote well managed and responsible tourism, as agreed upon at Rio+20, so that it contributes to the sustainable development agenda in a positive manner. He stressed that UNWTO can play a leading role in this regard.

**Mr. Márcio Favilla, Executive Director for Operational Programmes and Institutional Relations, UNWTO**, chaired the meeting and made a presentation on the main theme of the event. He noted that UNWTO is a specialized agency of the UN with a mandate to promote responsible, sustainable and universally accessible tourism. World tourism trends show the growing importance of the sector in the world economy, accounting for 9 percent of world GDP, 6 percent of world exports and 1 out of every 11 jobs worldwide. International tourism arrivals have increased manifold from 25 million in 1950 to over 1 billion in 2013 and are expected to almost double to 1.8 billion in 2030. By 2020, a majority of international tourist arrivals will be in developing countries, with all regions experiencing continuing rapid growth in tourism. A billion tourists can be turned into a billion opportunities to create jobs, reduce poverty, empower women and youth and promote sustainability. In recent years, the G-20 Leaders Summit in Mexico (2012), the Outcome Document – *The Future We Want* – of the UN Conference on Sustainable Development (Rio+20), the UN Conference on Least Developed Countries (LDCs) in Istanbul and the 10-Year Review Conference on Landlocked Developing Countries (LLDCs) as well as the UN General Assembly, in several recent resolutions, have increasingly recognized the significant contribution that well-managed, responsible and sustainable tourism can make to the MDGs and the sustainable development agenda (SDGs). In conclusion, he stressed that tourism is important for all countries, whether developed or developing, and thus has universal relevance. He recommended that well-managed and responsible tourism should be an essential component of the Framework of the Sustainable Development Goals.

**H.E. Ambassador Mr. Jean-Francis Regis Zinsou of Benin** underscored the importance of tourism for economic growth in the least developed countries as it makes a significant contribution to their

export earnings, facilitates the integration of their economies into the global supply chain, helps create jobs, especially for women and youth, and reduces poverty. The LDCs have seen rapid growth in tourism in recent years, with over 9 percent growth in international arrivals in the last 5 years. These encouraging trends are expected to continue. The high growth of the tourism sector has been a significant factor in the encouraging economic performance of LDCs in recent years, enabling some of them to graduate out of the LDC status. The type, nature and management of tourism have also evolved in recent years from mega-self-standing tourism projects designed to cater exclusively to international tourists of the past, to more creative, manageable tourism facilities that are well-integrated into the local economy, community and culture so that the benefits are widely shared. He emphasized that the LDCs need increased support for infra-structure development and capacity-building to manage the growth of sustainable tourism.

**H.E. Ambassador Mr. Marco Suazo of Honduras** gave a comprehensive overview of the Honduras experience in the context of the regional strategy developed under SITCA, for the promotion of tourism in the seven Central American countries. He expressed his appreciation for the support provided by UNWTO to Honduras and other member countries of SITCA. Ambassador Suazo outlined Honduras's sustainable tourism initiatives, including a Workshop on Sustainable Tourism in Central America, in June 2011 in Roatan, Honduras, organized with the support of UNWTO and also the sponsorship by Honduras of the resolution A/RES/66/196 at the 66<sup>th</sup> session of UNGA entitled "Sustainable Tourism and Sustainable development in Central America". He pointed to the dramatic Meso-American Coral Reef extending along Mexico, Belize, Guatemala and Honduras and stressed the need for combatting climate change as part of a regional sustainable tourism development approach. Such an approach is also essential for the achievement of the MDGs in the region and eventually the SDGs, given the high rates of poverty and unemployment in these countries.

In the ensuing discussion, representatives of Samoa, Morocco and others contributed their valuable perspectives to the rich debate.