

CTO-UNEP SUSTAINABLE TOURISM SYMPOSIUM

“Advancing Sustainable Tourism in the Caribbean: A Regional Progress Report”

30-31 October, 2012

The Crane Residential Resort, Crane Beach, Barbados

OPENING REMARKS

CARIBBEAN TOURISM ORGANIZATION

Good Morning:

Michelle Gyles Mc Donnough – United Nations Resident Coordinator and UNDP Resident Representative, UN Development Programme (UNDP) - Barbados and the Eastern Caribbean

Deirdre Shurland - Senior Consultant, UN Environment Programme- Division of Technology, Industry and Economics & Coordinator, Global Partnership for Sustainable Tourism

Francis Mc Barnette – OAS Representative to Barbados

Eddy Silva - Sustainable Tourism Specialist, Caribbean Program, The Nature Conservancy

Lana McPhail - Permanent Secretary, Ministry of Tourism, Civil Aviation and Culture, Grenada

Dhaneshwar Deonarine – Deputy Permanent Secretary, Ministry of Tourism, Industry and Commerce, Guyana

Ladies and Gentlemen,

On behalf of the newly elected Chairman of the Caribbean Tourism Organization – Beverly Nicholson-Doty – Commissioner of Tourism for the US Virgin Islands - and our Secretary General – Mr. Hugh Riley, it is my pleasure to welcome all of you to Barbados on the occasion of this sustainable tourism symposium for Caribbean tourism industry decision makers.

We acknowledge and appreciate the support of the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP), Global Partnership for Sustainable Tourism, German International Cooperation for Sustainable Development (GIZ), Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development (BMZ), the Government of Norway and The Nature Conservancy (TNC) for convening this important symposium on “Advancing Sustainable Tourism in the Caribbean: A Regional Progress Report”. Against the backdrop of today’s changing global environment, this forum seeks to:

1. inform the decision-makers of the Caribbean tourism public and private sectors on the status and progress of sustainability in the tourism industry, and
2. discuss the main sustainable tourism needs and priorities of CTO Member countries as a mandate for developing further technical assistance as an enabler for meeting national and regional sustainable tourism goals

The Caribbean Tourism Organization - the international agency responsible for the development of Caribbean tourism - has a new vision:

“To position the Caribbean as the most desirable, year round, warm weather destination by 2017”.

We believe that:

“This vision helps us focus on achieving our very important objectives within a realistic timeline while continuing to provide strategic leadership in tourism,” (Hugh Riley, CTO Secretary General)

In order to realize this vision, the CTO will continue to lead in the areas of sustainable tourism development, human resource development, research and information technology, membership services, communications and marketing. The organization also has a renewed purpose: **Leading Sustainable Tourism - One Sea, One Voice, One Caribbean.**

As is evident, sustainable tourism is the foundation of this new vision and purpose. This approach is not new to the Caribbean region. However, it is important to understand where our journey began, to guide and support our thirty-plus CTO member countries in crafting a more sustainable future for our critical tourism industry, and how we got to where we are in 2012.

During the period 2005 to 2008, the CTO, with the financial support of the European Union under its 8th European Development Fund (EDF), implemented a Caribbean Regional Sustainable Tourism Development Programme. The purpose of this Programme was to foster the sustainability and competitiveness of the Caribbean tourism sector through the establishment of a sustainable development policy framework, supplementing and strengthening of regional institutional

capacities, development of skills and human resources, support to small operators through business development services, and strengthening the links among CARIFORUM/CARICOM, the Caribbean Tourism Organization, the Caribbean Hotel (and Tourism) Association, national tourism/hotel associations and academic institutions.

Employing a participatory approach, our first step was to arrive at a definition of sustainable tourism development for the Caribbean context – “...the optimal use of social, natural, cultural and financial resources for national development on an equitable and self-sustaining basis to provide a unique visitor experience and an improved quality of life through partnerships among government, the private sector and communities.”

A series of studies were undertaken on key elements of tourism sustainability to provide a baseline as part of an environmental scan and to determine how to fill identified gaps towards ultimately realizing the overarching sustainable tourism development vision, namely,

“.... a sector that is viable and resilient, of high quality, promotes empowerment and ownership, and continues to embrace regional integration.”

Supporting sustainable tourism guiding principles, developmental goals and policy objectives were then crafted. A number of important tools were also developed to address industry standards, disaster management, climate change adaptation and other aspects of social, economic and environmental sustainability. These were intended as a guide to our Member countries.

Since 2008 additional tools were developed and training provided as part of capacity building initiatives targeting the tourism public and private sectors. The CTO has been involved in a range of key sustainability areas including energy efficiency and renewable energy, climate change, disaster risk management, product development, human resource development, tourism standards development, hospitality management, visitor satisfaction surveys, crisis communications, tourism satellite accounting and regional marketing. We have also built greater visibility and recognition of sustainable tourism through our annual Caribbean conference on sustainable tourism development and the Caribbean Excellence in Sustainable Tourism Awards.

We have seen the results of these interventions manifested in sustainable tourism-focused policies, strategic plans and programmes, models to tourism development that put communities at the centre and pay increased attention to natural and cultural/heritage asset protection, an increasingly diverse tourism product offering, as well as regional and national sector standards.

Even with these strides, admittedly, more needs to be done as we strive to attain the vision that was set out four years ago. A one-size fits all approach has not been either used or advocated. CTO member countries are at different stages along the development continuum and the tourism life cycle. They therefore have different priorities and needs and operate within different governance structures, which impact on local control and access to vital financial, technical and other resources required for tourism sustainability progress.

Tourism sustainability success is a process requiring a change in both mindset and political will. Moreover, added to the typical challenges and vulnerabilities of our Member developing states, we know that we are not operating in a business-as-usual environment, some aspects of which may become the pattern of the future and affect our global tourism competitiveness and the very survival of the industry.

Five months ago, the CTO Secretary-General - Hugh Riley - noted that *“the region remains in the grip of one of the harshest economic crises of the modern era.* Countries are concerned about the threatened decreases in airline and cruise line capacity into the Caribbean; the closure of hotels and other tourism businesses; declining capital investment; lagging tourism revenues; increasing national debt; increasing taxation; and erosion of the region’s competitive position. These stressed economic conditions are compounded by climate risks related to annual recurrences of seasonal droughts and floods, storms, hurricanes and other stressors to the natural resource base upon which tourism depends. These continue to have a profound impact on the competitiveness of the regional industry and the capacity to achieve national development objectives.”

We are also acutely aware that we are at the crossroads of determining the best path forward for regional tourism. A study conducted by UNECLAC in 2010 on the developmental implications of the global economic crisis for the Caribbean tourism sector suggested that there are two available options:

1. to develop strategies for enhancing the value of the current tourism product by strengthening the value chain through linkages with other sectors

2. to expand the tourism sector into a total service economy by the addition of new services, technologies and public and private sector investments

An article written on sustainable tourism by Rachael Dodds of Ryerson University, Canada emphasizes the need for long term planning and a change in government's role to a decreased emphasis on promotion and an increased focus on "long term economic benefit as well as social and environmental protection and awareness". She also advocated for serious effort, long-term commitment, consistent policies and practices in conjunction with the necessity of sustainable tourism to be set within the wider sustainable development context.

But from our perspective, another key and immediate decision is whether Caribbean destinations choose to operate in a business-as-usual fashion or rather, do we fashion a future for tourism in which we develop and execute a strategy that would not only address our current challenges but to mitigate against anticipated ones. What policies and priority programmes do we need to implement? What actions do we need to take now to ensure that our natural, cultural and built assets are protected well into the future? What type of investment do we need to attract? What kind of destination image do we want to project to the world? Why continue to pursue this challenging path of sustainable and responsible tourism development? This Symposium will attempt to stimulate debate around such considerations and collectively we will attempt to provide some answers.

The concept of sustainable tourism has evolved into various manifestations including geotourism, responsible tourism and now, conscious tourism. This evolution has, in many instances, created some

level of confusion globally as to which path should be followed, which models are best suited to the local environment, which tools are best to employ, which indicators and certification/benchmarking systems to subscribe to, which good/best practices to follow and so on.

The global approach of organizations such the UN World Tourism Organization (UNWTO), UNEP and the Global Sustainable Tourism Council has tried to remove some of this confusion. But there still remains a level of skepticism in developing states such as ours because of an inherent desire to develop and embrace a path forward that takes the best learnings of such entities and develop something that has been adapted to our own specific circumstances.

As we move forward along this sustainable tourism continuum, the Caribbean Tourism Organization will not only provide leadership based on the changing global context but also be guided by our Members' sustainable tourism needs and priorities and find the best way to meet them with the technical and financial support of the right partners. We sincerely believe that this approach will bolster our past efforts to assist our members to meet their own national sustainable tourism development goals. In so doing, we should make significant progress in advancing sustainable tourism in the Caribbean and regaining our status as a global leader and exemplar in sustainable tourism development.

We wish you every success in your deliberations over the next two days and an enjoyable stay in Barbados.

Thank you.