

STATEMENT BY THE REPRESENTATIVE OF THE WORLD TOURISM ORGANIZATION (WTO), MR PETER SHACKLEFORD, TO THE ECOSOC BRAINSTORMING SESSION "PROMOTING AN INTEGRATED APPROACH TO RURAL DEVELOPMENT IN DEVELOPING COUNTRIES", NEW YORK, 24 MARCH 2003

On behalf of my Secretary-General, Mr Francesco Frangialli, I should like to thank the President of ECOSOC, Mr Gert Rosenthal, for the opportunity to contribute to this dialogue session this afternoon.

May I begin by recalling the words of a speaker who addressed us earlier today and who stated that: "rural development is more than agriculture"? The fact is that we have heard a great deal today about farming, yet, as was just mentioned by the Representative of UNCTAD, little has been said about other components of an integrated approach to rural development.

Yet, strengthening the rural economy cannot be accomplished by agriculture alone. This would disregard, inter alia, the growing service sector which in, industrialized countries, is already accounting for the lion's share of employment creation in rural areas.

I should, in particular, like to emphasize the role of sustainable tourism development as a complementary activity to farming. Tourism's role in sustaining rural populations and combating the flight from the countryside to cities is already widely recognized. In Europe, the European Commission has devoted considerable resources through its LEADER Programmes to promoting rural tourism in areas which would otherwise have lost the means to sustain their populations. Many highland and mountain areas, whose agriculture has always been marginal, only survive today thanks to income generated by tourism. WTO has studied the linkages that exist between tourism and the rural economy at seminars organized in Israel in 1996 and in Serbia and Montenegro in 2002. Further meetings on this theme are planned this year for Poland and the Ukraine.

Surely there are lessons here for developing countries? Rural tourism is not new for LDCs. The experience of village tourism in the

region of Casamance, Senegal, was documented by UNESCO and the World Bank as long ago as 1975. What has become clear in the intervening period is the mechanism by which tourism contributes to the rural economy of LDCs. Tourism offers the possibility to promote female employment and entrepreneurship, to revive the handicrafts sector and of course to use local agricultural products to feed tourists. WTO has increasingly been asked to advise on this subject and, in this context, has organized seminars in Indonesia and Malaysia. A sustainable rural tourism development project in Sikkim (India) focuses on capacity-building of local communities to cater for tourists' needs and services.

Recently, WTO's ST-EP programme (Sustainable Tourism - Elimination of Poverty), launched at the Johannesburg Summit in August 2002, has brought our organization into partnership with UNCTAD to develop good practice in this area.

WTO can only agree with the ECOSOC "Issues Paper" when it states that the objective of poverty eradication in rural areas will not be attained without attention also being paid to social development. In this context, I should recall that tourism investment in LDCs is demonstrably labour intensive and can have a strong positive effect on the lives of the poor, both in terms of income generation and social advancement. Naturally, WTO is ready to put its knowledge of this area at the disposal of ECOSOC and to contribute in this way to the success of the forthcoming High Level Segment. Thank you.