



WORLD TOURISM ORGANIZATION  
ORGANISATION MONDIALE DU TOURISME  
ORGANIZACION MUNDIAL DEL TURISMO  
ВСЕМИРНАЯ ТУРИСТСКАЯ ОРГАНИЗАЦИЯ  
منظمة السياحة العالمية

## **SPECIAL EVENT ON MAXIMIZING ECONOMIC BENEFITS AND STRENGTHENING RESILIENCE IN SIDS THROUGH SUSTAINABLE TOURISM-IMPLEMENTING THE MAURITIUS STRATEGY**

**Statement by Rafeuddin Ahmed, Special Representative of  
the World Tourism Organization to the United Nations  
(New York, 23 October 2006)**

Mr. High Representative,  
Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen,

Small Island Developing States (SIDS) and tourism are closely related at least through the following two main aspects. Firstly, because they often represent the quintessential tourism destinations where one can escape from the hassles and pressures of urban societies. Secondly, because tourism is one of the few economic sectors on which small island states can rely for their sustainable development and where continued growth is highly probable. Tourism is in fact witnessing a geographical diversification, with arrivals in developing countries growing much faster than those in developed societies; tourists of the developed world and newly emerging economies have the will and the financial capacity to reach every place in the world, even the most isolated.

In terms of international tourist arrivals, SIDS have performed particularly well over the last few years. This is especially true in SIDS members of UNWTO, where the adoption of sustainable tourism practices has been instrumental in achieving significant growth.

In economic terms, tourism receipts in many small islands represent a substantial proportion of service exports (up to 90% in countries like the Bahamas, the Dominican Republic and the Maldives). Besides, in some SIDS, given the trans-sectoral nature of tourism, it has been increasingly utilized as a catalyst for the development of agriculture, fisheries, handicrafts and other services.

There is no other economic activity that cuts across so many sectors, levels and interests as tourism and, for this reason and given the dynamism of the tourism industry, there is a vital need to integrate tourism planning with national development plans. There is also a need for evaluating in advance the costs and the economic benefits it can bring.

If well planned, developed and managed, sustainable tourism can be one of the least disruptive sectors to be developed in small territories like SIDS:

- **Economically**, as a major foreign exchange and employment generator, and especially suitable for small enterprise development, tourism is vital for island nations if measures are taken to increase local tourism revenues and reduce economic leakages. Its multiplier effects represent a powerful development option for island economies.

- **Socially**, tourism can provide jobs to a large proportion of the island populations, including women and unskilled labour, enhance the quality of life of the host communities, contribute to the respect of human rights and promote equal opportunities for all in society.
  
- **Environmentally**, tourism can contribute to the conservation and management of island resources, especially those which are non-renewable or are precious in terms of life support. For this, it is vital to minimize pollution of air, land and water and address its deleterious consequences and to conserve biological diversity and the natural heritage of the SIDS.

In an industry as competitive as tourism, and with beach tourism forming a considerable segment, it has to be acknowledged that islands have been extremely active in capitalizing on the economic benefits from the development of tourism, often disregarding the potential negative social and environmental impacts. In order to help SIDS to plan and manage their tourism industry in a sustainable manner, UNWTO has been actively supporting them through various activities.

UNWTO actively participated in the following international meetings:

- Barbados Conference on Small Island Development States in 1994 where UNWTO encouraged delegates to focus on tourism.
- The International Conference on Sustainable Tourism in Small Island Developing States and other Islands, convened jointly by UNWTO with UNEP in Lanzarote, Spain, 1998. Based on its resolutions, the following regional meetings were organized, again in collaboration with UNEP:

- Meeting on Sustainable Tourism and Competitiveness in the Islands of the Mediterranean held in the Island of Capri, Italy in May 2000
- International Conference on Sustainable Tourism in the Islands of the Asia-Pacific Region held in Sanya, Island of Hainan, China in December 2000
- Various regional workshops on sustainability indicators of tourism development were held at demonstration study sites in coastal and island destinations selected by host countries, providing valuable experiences for sustainable coastal and island tourism development.
- World Summit on Sustainable Development held in Johannesburg in 2002 where UNWTO contributed to the recognition of the importance of tourism in the article on SIDS included in the Plan of Implementation.
- UNWTO organized a tourism side event at the United Nations Global Meeting to Review the Implementation of the Programme of Action for the Sustainable Development of the Small Islands Developing States, held in Mauritius, 2005.

With the opportunity provided by this side event, the World Tourism Organization launched a special report under the title "**Making Tourism Work for Small Island Developing States**", examining the economic dimension of tourism in small island states, as well as its environmental and socio-cultural implications. This UNWTO report presents a summary of the status of tourism in SIDS, while providing evidence of the key importance it has for the sustainable development of many islands and for the achievement of the UN Millennium Development Goals. It also addresses the key issues that need to be considered by small island nations and provides policy orientations, guidelines and other tools to the national tourism authorities, the tourism industry and other tourism stakeholders in SIDS on how to develop and manage tourism in a sustainable manner for the benefit of their populations.

The Mauritius Strategy , adopted at the UN Conference for SIDS, elaborates on a wide variety of actions under 20 broad headings, among them those having direct implications for the tourism sector are: climate change and sea-level rise; natural and environmental disasters; management of wastes; coastal and marine resources; freshwater resources; land resources; energy resources; tourism resources; biodiversity resources; transport and communication; science and technology; sustainable capacity development and education for sustainable development; sustainable production and consumption; national and regional enabling environments; health; knowledge management and culture.

I would like to focus on the question linking tourism and climate change. Climate change can indeed have a significant impact on tourism activities by altering the natural environment that represents both a key attraction and a basic resource for tourism. Examples exist of negative impacts such as coastal erosion, damage to coral reefs and other sensitive and biodiversity-rich ecosystems that are key tourism resources in islands. Climatic conditions are dynamically changing, adding new risks to tourism operations, and the tourism sector needs to develop the capacity to adapt in order to maintain its viability, continue generating the socio-economic benefits for the host communities and provide quality experiences for tourists.

UNWTO has initiated a series of pilot projects to assist selected SIDS, in order to develop and demonstrate adaptation policies and techniques at beach destinations and coastal ecosystems. Initial proposals on climate change adaptation in tourism have been approved by the Global Environmental Facility (GEF) for Fiji and the Maldives. The aim of these projects is to further develop and demonstrate adaptation initiatives that will reduce the vulnerability of the tourism sector, and its natural and human resource base, to the impacts of

climate variability and change, and in doing so enhance the sustainability of the natural resources and the quality of life of the people of the SIDS.

One of the main constraints for developing tourism in islands is accessibility: Given the limited scale of an island community and its economic outputs, there is often an absence of economies of scale that would provide a rationale for frequent and reliable transportation services. However, some examples in the Caribbean show that the development of international tourism in islands can take place by adapting regular air transport, with charter traffic playing only an ancillary role.

Talking about transport, a tourism segment that is gaining importance in many island destinations is cruise tourism. It offers great advantages for small islands with a reduced hotel capacity, allowing them to benefit from bigger tourist flows without developing a too heavy accommodation infrastructure. However, in islands where a substantial hotel capacity already exists, cruise tourism can become a negative element generating more damage, in economic and environmental terms, than benefits to the local economy.

To conclude, I would like to say that the presence of the World Tourism Organization at the BPOA + 10 in Mauritius was a step forward in the recognition of tourism as an important sustainable development option for Small Island States. In line with the above, the World Tourism Organization proposed the establishment of a **Small Island Developing States Tourism Observatory**, working closely with SIDS governments and with all relevant UN Agencies, for ensuring a sustainable tourism industry that contributes to the sustainable development of Small Islands.

The richness and complexity of tourism call for coordinated efforts by all institutions that deal with tourism at the international level. With this in mind, UNWTO will keep doing its part to achieve the objectives of the Millennium Declaration in the Small Island Developing States.