



Dignitaries and colleagues, ladies and gentlemen,

As we gather here at the UN SIDS4 conference, it is crucial to highlight the vital role that mangroves play in the sustainability of our island nations. These remarkable ecosystems are not just natural barriers protecting our coastlines from erosion and storms; they also serve as nurseries for marine life, support biodiversity, and can capture up to 10 times more carbon than forests, thus super ecosystems for mitigating climate change.

Tourism is the lifeblood of many island economies, representing up to 70% of GDP in some nations, providing jobs, generating income, and fostering cultural exchange. However, over the past decades, the expansion of tourism infrastructure along our coasts has often come at a significant cost. Mangroves have been systematically depleted to make way for resorts, marinas, and other facilities, leading to the loss of these crucial natural defenses and biodiversity hotspots. In fact, a recent IUCN report says that 50% of the world's mangroves are at risk of collapse, primarily due to climate change impact, but accelerated by destructive coastal development.

As stakeholders in the tourism industry, we have a unique opportunity and a profound responsibility. Our industry thrives on the natural beauty and ecological richness of these islands, yet our development practices have sometimes undermined the very resources we depend upon. It is imperative that we shift our approach from one of exploitation to one of stewardship, actively participating in the protection and restoration of mangroves.

Our collective action to protect and restore mangroves is not just an environmental imperative, but also a strategic move for the sustainability of our tourism sector. By adopting sustainable tourism practices, supporting conservation initiatives, and integrating mangrove restoration into our business models, we enhance the resilience of our coastal communities and ensure the long-term sustainability of the tourism sector. This is a win-win situation for both our environment and our economies.

Let us commit to forging partnerships with local communities, governments, and environmental organizations to protect and restore mangrove ecosystems. By investing in the health of our natural environment, we are securing the future of our economies and the well-being of our island nations.

Sustainable Travel International is committed to supporting SIDS tourism climate action plans, strongly focusing on developing low-carbon tourism products and regenerating blue carbon sinks such as mangroves. One of our partners, The Ministry of Tourism of St. Kitts, will publicly sign the UN Glasgow Declaration on May 29 at the "Regenerative Tourism for Resilience: Policy, Practice and Finance" UNTOURISM side event.

We seek private-sector tourism partners to support and scale this initiative across SIDS by creating a network of blue carbon - mangrove protection program. Together, we can turn the tide and create a tourism model that supports economic growth and environmental sustainability.

Thank you,
Paloma Zapata
CEO, Sustainable Travel International