**TWENTY-FIFTH INTER-AMERICAN CONGRESS OF** OEA/Ser.K/III.26.1

**MINISTERS AND HIGH-LEVEL AUTHORITIES OF TOURISM** CIDI/TUR-XXV/doc. 2/21 rev.2

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VIRTUAL

ANNOTATED AGENDA

“Toward the Reconstruction and Rebuilding of Tourism Post COVID-19”

(Approved at the first plenary session)

(Prepared by the Section of Culture and Tourism, Department of Economic Development)

A. BACKGROUND:

On March 11, 2020, the World Health Organization (WHO) officially declared the pandemic caused by the coronavirus known as COVID-19. Because of this, by April 20, 2020, one hundred percent of the world’s destinations had introduced restrictions on movement; and by November 1, 27% of global destinations had completely closed their borders to international tourism. In 2020, the pandemic triggered the worst crisis in the travel and tourism sector since World War II, causing a 74% drop in tourist arrivals worldwide and an estimated loss of US$1.3 trillion in global revenue. The World Tourism Organization (UNWTO) estimates that this situation has brought about a US$2 trillion drop in global GDP and jeopardized between 100 and 120 million jobs tied directly to tourism.[[1]](#footnote-2)/ In our region—the Americas—tourist arrivals fell by 69%, so less than in the world as a whole or in the other four UNWTO subregions. Predictably, the Caribbean—the world’s most tourism-reliant region—was disproportionately affected. The International Monetary Fund (IMF) estimates that the tourism-dependent nations of Caribbean lost about 12% of GDP in 2020, compared to the global contraction of 4.4% observed during the same period (World Economic Outlook, IMF, October 2020).

Faced with this crisis in the sector, the Inter-American Committee on Tourism (CITUR) organized two meetings in 2020—a special meeting in August and a regular meeting in November—to offer member states a forum for, among other things, examining the nature and cost of the pandemic’s impact on the tourism sector, policies implemented to support small businesses, tourism companies, and sector workers, and protocols and strategies used to ensure the sector could continue to operate during the pandemic. At those meetings, CITUR recommended the creation of four working groups to support the sustainability of the tourism sector in the Americas. One of these groups is devoted to developing a plan of action for recovery of the airline and cruise industries and another, to the importance of having standardized biosafety protocols in place for travel and tourism in the region in order to combat COVID-19. The remaining two groups are looking at climate change and sustainable development and developing a 2050 strategy.

 Thus far in 2021, CITUR has held two more special meetings—one in March and one in June—to review the progress made by the four working groups, assess the status of the situation, and seek out common measures to address the impact of the pandemic and revive the travel and tourism sector and prepare it for the post-pandemic.

 In view of the crisis facing the sector, the Government of Paraguay, host of the XXV Inter-American Congress of Ministers and High-Level Authorities of Tourism, is proposing **“Toward the Reconstruction and Rebuilding of Tourism Post COVID-19"** as the theme for the meeting, reflecting the need to rebuild the sector that has been most hard hit, with thousands of companies and businesses shut down and millions of jobs lost, with a domino effect on the economy. According to the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD), the decline in tourism has led to a 5.5% average increase in unemployment among unskilled workers, varying widely from 0% to 15%, depending on how important tourism is to the economy.[[2]](#footnote-3)/

 UNCTAD also highlights the need to reactivate the sector when restrictions on movement begin to be lifted and tourists start traveling in the region again, noting that the decline in international tourism triggered by the coronavirus pandemic could cause more than US$4 trillion in losses in global GDP in 2020 and 2021.[[3]](#footnote-4)/ The UNWTO predicts the tourism sector will not return to pre-pandemic levels before 2023.

B. PROPOSED TOPICS FOR DISCUSSION

 The Congress was originally going to be held in person but given the persistence of the health crisis and mobility difficulties in the region, the Government of Paraguay, in April 2021, felt the need to propose the meeting be held virtually on October 6, 2021. To that end, it presented a draft resolution, which was subsequently approved by the Inter-American Council for Integral Development [CIDI/RES. 347 (CXII-O/21)]. This special situation shifts the regular format from a two-day, in-person meeting to a one-day virtual meeting.

 Given the new reality, the Government of Paraguay proposes to condense the discussion into two sub-themes:

* Strategies to mitigate the adverse effects of COVID-19 on tourism
* Tourism post-COVID-19

 The first sub-theme, **“Strategies to mitigate the adverse effects of COVID-19 on tourism,”**seeks to examine public policies adopted by member states to tackle the crisis and propose joint measures to reactivate the travel and tourism sector in the Americas in a safe and sustainable manner.

It bears emphasizing that individual member states have selected and adopted various parameters to enable the safe operation of the tourism industry in today’s environment, especially for air and cruise travel. The parameters have consisted of requirements pertaining to vaccination, COVID-19 testing prior to departure or upon arrival, quarantines, temperature checks prior to departure or upon arrival, and the use of face masks.

In this regard, it should be noted that the European Union has adopted the so-called Green Passport or Digital COVID Certificate,[[4]](#footnote-5)/ something that will undoubtedly set a trend, creating expectations for other regions and making it necessary to examine the possibility of reaching an agreement among the countries of the Americas on a similar certificate, which each member state could join in on voluntarily. Accordingly, it is worth noting that several governments in the region are studying the possibility of adopting similar measures unilaterally. Inter-agency collaboration, particularly between health and tourism authorities, is essential to the process.

Faced with stoppages and decreases in air and cruise travel, border closures, airline bankruptcies and less frequent flights, the region is facing a lack of connectivity, which was already a challenge and will now impact, given the lack of travel options, the rebuilding of travel at least to pre-pandemic levels. Against this backdrop, it has become necessary to consider mechanisms for recovering and improving connectivity. Policies like “open skies,” incentives to businesses (consistent with their international obligations), and the elimination of taxes and fees on fares have gained traction these days. By way of example, Honduras has just passed legislation in this regard[[5]](#footnote-6)/ and other countries are currently considering similar measures.

Within CITUR, the Working Group to Reactivate the Airline and Cruise Industries, in conjunction with important private sector associations and organizations, has analyzed the scenario for the sector and is prepared to make recommendations to the member states. These inputs will be very valuable for the ministerial dialogues during the Congress.

Likewise, governments have drawn up biosafety protocols that have to be implemented by, among others, tourism service providers such as wholesale tour operators, travel agencies, tourist carriers, and restaurants and hotels in order to offer a certain degree of security to tourists and host communities. The sharing of good practices, regional cooperation, and training are important for ensuring the effective implementation of the protocols, which will in turn help to reactivate tourism.

The Congress will seek to address matters like job recovery, incentives, and relief measures, as it is essential to consider support for tourism businesses and host communities, including community-based and indigenous tourism at the destinations, which have seen their revenues seriously diminished. Without the private sector and host communities there can be no tourism and the region faces the possibility that, at any given time, there may be excess demand and supply shortages, which would undoubtedly impact, in the short term, rebuilding to pre-pandemic levels. Currently, in some countries that have begun to reactivate, the closure of establishments and the lack of workers is already creating disparities between supply and demand.

The second sub-theme, **“Tourism Post-COVID-19,”**is also becoming increasingly important inasmuch as we must consider how we want to rebuild tourism post-COVID. Prior to the current crisis, tourism destinations were dealing with situations such as overload, environmental degradation, precarious work, seasonality, access to new technologies, air and maritime connectivity, travel and tourism facilitation, service and product quality, multi-destination promotion, tourism safety, etc.

Within the framework of CITUR’s Work Plan, efforts have been made to address and tackle these issues, including support for micro, small, and medium-sized tourism enterprises, especially small hotel networks. The member states have understood the need for tourism to also benefit host communities, especially rural ones, and have sought to work together and share good practices to promote rural community-based tourism and indigenous tourism. In collaboration with the Secretariat for Multidimensional Security, support has been given to enhance national and destination capabilities with respect to tourism security. The need for regional cooperation to facilitate travel and tourism and for cooperation to improve regional connectivity has also been addressed.

The CITUR Chair, bearing in mind these actions and the need to consider how to rebuild tourism in a more sustainable and inclusive way, proposed at the special meeting in August 2020, the creation of two working groups to: “Develop an Agenda on Climate Change and Sustainable Tourism” and “Develop a 2050 Agenda for the Americas.”

The Congress will review the actions undertaken and will discuss joint policies to be implemented. Important private sector and civil society associations and organizations will be invited to this dialogue to emphasize the importance of public-private partnerships, as will representatives of academia and host communities, with an emphasis on Afro-descendant and indigenous communities and persons with disabilities.

Consistent with this sub-theme, it is important to highlight the theme of World Tourism Day 2021—**“Tourism for Inclusive Growth”—**which should be taken into consideration during the discussions at this ministerial meeting.

Other topics to be covered at the meeting include:

**Determination of the venue for the XXVI Inter-American Congress of Ministers and High-Level Authorities of Tourism.** The venue for the next Congress will be selected from among the member states that offer to host it.

**Consideration and adoption of the Draft Declaration**.The delegations will discuss the Draft Declaration and proceed to adopt it.

**Other business**

C. PURPOSE OF THE MEETING

1. Discuss the impact of COVID-19 on tourism in the Americas.
2. Discuss policies and actions aimed at reconstructing and reactivating tourism.

D. EXPECTED OUTCOMES OF THE MEETING

1. Improve regional dialogue and cooperation on tourism.
2. Reach agreements to jointly rebuild and revive tourism in the Americas.
3. Adopt the Declaration of the XXV Inter-American Congress of Ministers and High-Level Authorities of Tourism.

E. STRUCTURE OF THE MEETING

The meeting will offer a forum for member states to share experiences and will serve to promote dialogue among ministers, and between ministers and other social actors. Each of the plenary sessions will be devoted to one of the meeting’s specific sub-themes and will include written, oral, and visual presentations by ministers of tourism, subject-matter experts, private sector representatives, community leaders, and other social actors. After the presentations for each sub-theme, the ministers will have sufficient time—at least forty-five (45) minutes—to engage in in-depth discussions and present other considerations, share country experiences, or even suggest possible options for policies related to the area being addressed.

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1. . See UNWTO, https://www.unwto.org/covid-19-and-tourism-2020. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
2. . See UN, https://news.un.org/es/story/2021/06/1493872 [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
3. . Idem. [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
4. . See <https://ec.europa.eu/info/live-work-travel-eu/coronavirus-response/safe-covid-19-vaccines-europeans/eu->digital-covid-certificate\_es [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
5. . See https://aerolatinnews.com/destacado/iata-felicita-al-gobierno-de-honduras-por-incentivos-para-las-lineas-aereas/ [↑](#footnote-ref-6)