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

**MINISTERS AND HIGH AUTHORITIES OF TOURISM** CIDI/TUR-XXV/INF.15/21

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VIRTUAL

WELCOME REMARKS BY THE SECRETARY GENERAL OF THE ORGANIZATION OF AMERICAN STATES, LUIS ALMAGRO

**OAS TALKING POINTS**

**XXV INTER-AMERICAN CONGRESS OF MINISTERS**

**AND HIGH-LEVEL AUTHORITIES OF TOURISM**

**Luis Almagro, Secretary General**

**6 OCTOBER 2021**

Ministers/Heads of Delegation/Delegates;

* The COVID-19 pandemic has had a staggering impact on the travel and tourism sector. Globally, travel and tourism lost an estimated 4.5 trillion dollars and 62 million jobs in 2020.
* Equally important are the disproportionate effects on key groups including small tourism enterprises, women, rural communities, and indigenous peoples.
* The decline in tourism in 2020 also reversed a near decade of strong growth performance in the sector with the lack of mobility for visitors and the closure of discretionary travel in many of our countries.
* This downturn has however afforded us an opportunity to reflect on the type of tourism that we would like to see for the region, once the sector recovers; one that embraces all the opportunities for inclusive growth and ensures that the benefits of tourism are felt by a broader range of beneficiaries.
* The OAS, through its Inter-American Committee on Tourism (CITUR), as well as this Twenty-Fifth Congress, provides us with important platforms to do this through dialogue with key stakeholders, including the private sector, representatives from international organizations and the region’s highest tourism authorities.
* Prior to the pandemic, tourism destinations were dealing with situations such as over-tourism, the effects of climate change such as rising sea levels and the impact on coastal communities, increased frequency of adverse weather events, access to new technologies, and air and maritime connectivity.
* Many of these issues will remain critical for policymakers post COVID-19 as we explore ways to rebuild and revive the tourism sector, and embrace solutions for its recovery.
* We should focus our efforts on making this recovery sustainable by generating more opportunities for progress, particularly for people in situations of vulnerability, that may otherwise fall back into poverty.
* Rebuilding and reviving tourism, particularly in countries where the sector is dominant, will help to improve economic outcomes in many areas.
* Unquestionably, the region faces a significant degree of uncertainty regarding the recovery of tourism. Will all countries recover at the same time? If not, what policies will propel some to advance faster than others? These are issues that I am hopeful the Congress will be able to address.
* This Congress also provides us with the opportunity to explore strategies to mitigate the adverse effects of COVID-19 on tourism, since the pandemic will remain with us for some time, and there is now considerable experience from countries on the most effective policies.
* Moreover, in looking at how to survive the current crisis, we must also be forward thinking, and give real meaning to the oft used slogan of “building back better.”
* Successful and safe rebuilding and recovery of the tourism sector requires collective contemplation on several issues. Among these are rebuilding confidence among travelers, and supporting micro, small and medium-sized tourism enterprises decimated by the pandemic.
* Others, such as ensuring equity in vaccine roll-out and distribution across countries, and recognition of vaccine certificates have broader implications but direct impact on the tourism sector. These, along with challenges related to vaccine hesitancy, threaten the success of countries’ immunization programs, and could potentially slow the recovery and any return to normalcy.
* Job recovery, as well as incentives and relief measures, particularly for small and medium-sized tourism enterprises, remain important considerations for policymakers. Many of these entities have been disproportionately affected by the fallout from the pandemic and may require specific interventions to ensure their survival.
* Distinguished Ministers, delegates, Ladies and Gentlemen, this global pandemic has inflicted arguably the worst crisis for the tourism sector since World War II. As a region we must be resilient, and as a sector we must act collectively.
* The Draft Declaration of Paraguay which you will be considering later today is an important first step. The Draft Declaration reflects the potential areas for cooperation among OAS member states to find ways for the tourism sector to prosper in this challenging environment. I invite you to join this call for a collective and cooperative approach to spearhead tourism recovery in our region.
* In closing I would like to thank Minister Sofía Montiel her leadership of Congress. Minister, you have my best wishes for a day of substantive dialogue.
* Thank You!

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