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**HIGH-LEVEL AUTHORITIES OF TOURISM** 18 November 2021

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VIRTUAL

FINAL REPORT OF THE TWENTY-FIFTH INTER-AMERICAN CONGRESS
 OF MINISTERS AND HIGH-LEVEL AUTHORITIES OF TOURISM

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 INTRODUCTION

During the Twenty-Fourth Inter-American Congress of Ministers and High-level Authorities of Tourism held in Georgetown, Guyana, on March 21-22, 2018, the Ministers and High-level Authorities of the member states of the Organization of American States (OAS) accepted the offer of the Government of Paraguay to host the Twenty-Fifth Congress. Due to the COVID-19 pandemic the Twenty-Fifth Congress was held virtually and was hosted by the Government of Paraguay. The agenda of the Congress, theme and the sub-themes for discussion which reflected the priorities of the sectoral authorities was approved by Inter-American Council for Integral Development (CIDI).

In preparing for the Twenty-Fifth Congress, the preparatory meeting of the Inter-American Congress of Ministers and High-Level Authorities of Tourism was held virtually on September 3, 2021.

1. PARTICIPANTS

The List of Participants compiled by the Secretariat is available under “List of Participants” on the [web page of the Congress](http://www.oas.org/en/sedi/desd/itc/2021/documents.asp).

1. PROCEEDINGS

In accordance with Article 20 of the Rules of Procedure for Sectoral and Specialized Meetings of Ministers and/or High Authorities in the framework of the Inter-American Council for Integral Development,[[1]](#footnote-1) the Ministerial meeting had an inaugural session, eight plenary sessions and a closing session, which are summarized below.

A. Inaugural Session

The speakers at the Inaugural Session were Minister Sofía Montiel de Afara of the National Secretariat of Tourism of Paraguay, and Mr. Luis Almagro,Secretary General of the Organization of American States. The session was hosted by Mrs. Kim Osborne, Executive Secretary for Integral Development of the Organization of American States.

Minister Montiel noted that while COVID-19 had devastated all of OAS member states, vaccines had helped rebuild confidence in domestic and international tourism. Secretary General Almagro in his remarks noted that as we explore ways to rebuild and revive the tourism sector, and embrace solutions for its recovery, we should focus our efforts on making the recovery sustainable by generating more opportunities for progress, particularly for people in situations of vulnerability, that may otherwise fall back into poverty.

B. First Plenary Session

At the opening of the session, delegations approved the Draft Agenda without modification, as well as the Draft Annotated Agenda and Schedule of the Twenty-Fifth Inter-American Congress of Ministers and High-Level Authorities of Tourism.

At the proposal of the Head of the Delegation of Ecuador, Mrs, Sofía Montiel de Afara, Minister of Tourism of Paraguay was elected, by acclamation, as Chair of the Twenty-Fifth Inter-American Congress of Ministers and High-Level Authorities of Tourism.

C. Second Plenary Session

During the second plenary session, the meeting received the report of the Chair of the Inter-American Committee on Tourism (CITUR), the report of the OAS General Secretariat and those of the four (4) Working Groups of the CITUR established in August 2020.

Mr. Miguel Torruco, Secretary of Tourism of the Government of Mexico and Chair of the CITUR reported on the stewardship of the Committee over the last three (3) years. He pointed to the important work of the Committee, particularly in response to the COVID-19 crisis faced by the tourism sector in OAS member states and the establishment of the four Working Groups of the CITUR.

Ms. Maryse Robert, Director of the OAS Department of Economic Development focused her presentation on the actions taken by the Executive Secretariat for Integral Development to respond to the COVID-19 crisis, and the major results achieved in compliance with the Declaration of Georgetown and the 2018-2021 Work Plan of the CITUR. This included the establishment of the Indigenous Tourism Collaborative of the Americas and the execution of the project “Building the Resilience of Small Tourism Enterprises in the Caribbean to Disasters.”

Mr. Alberto Lopez Chaves and Ms. Cristina Arbelaez of Costa Rica and Colombia respectively, joint Coordinators of the CITUR Working Group to Develop an Agenda on Climate Change and Sustainable Development for Tourism in the Americas, reported on the lines of action taken *inter alia,* on information on regulation, certification, planning tools, awareness raising. They highlighted the intention of the Working Group to establish a repository of information from member states, to share this information and to create a forum for discussion on the theme of the Working Group and to share good practices.

Ms. Beatriz Roman presented on behalf of the Coordinator of the CITUR Working Group on Standardization of Biosafety Travel and Tourism Protocols in the Americas, Chile. She noted that the Working Group in 2020 produced a document on Biosafety protocols which reviewed the practices and regulations in member states, and which also contained a series of recommendations for the sector. She also highlighted the joint work between the Inter-American Development Bank (IDB), the United Nations World Tourism Organization (UNWTO), and the OAS, with the input of the Working Group, as well as the need for the protocols in the member states to be updated.

Ms. Laura Sanchez presented on behalf of the Coordinator of the CITUR Working Group to Develop a 2050 Tourism Agenda for the Americas, Mexico. She noted that the 2050 Agenda included issues related to economic development, regeneration, sustainable development, the well-being of communities and preservation of communities’ cultural heritage. She also noted that the Draft Agenda was just a first start and that member states should use the document but adapt it to suit their country’s circumstances.

In presenting the update on the activities of the Working Group to Develop aRecovery Action Plan for the Cruise and Airline Industries in the Post-Pandemic Stage the Honorable Edmund Bartlett, Minister of Tourism of Jamaica, Coordinator of the Working Group thanked the participants of the Working Group including from the Airports Council International, Latin America & Caribbean, the International Air Transport Association (IATA), and the Florida-Caribbean Cruise Association (F-CCA). He pointed to the nine (9) meetings of the Working Group held since December 2020, and the circulation to all member states of the Action Plan prepared by the Working Group.

The ministerial dialogue which ensued contained interventions from four member states: Brazil, Ecuador, St. Kitts and Nevis and Belize. These interventions can be heard in their original language via the link to the [web page](http://www.oas.org/en/sedi/desd/itc/2021/) of the Twenty-Fifth Congress.

D Third Plenary Session

The third plenary session addressed the “Strategies to mitigate the negative effects of COVID-19 on Tourism: Incentives and support for tourism-related companies.”

Presentations

Minister Edmund Bartlett reported on some of Jamaica’s support to tourism companies in Jamaica in light of the COVID-19 pandemic, including a $26 JAM stimulus for affected businesses. He also highlighted that this support had prioritized small tourism enterprises. The Minister’s presentation also contained an impassioned plea for vaccine equity among countries. He suggested that equitable global vaccination was a moral right and economic imperative, noting that there will not be any broad-based recovery without access to vaccines. He concluded by noting that the pandemic had exacerbated existing inequalities, and that we would never get vaccine policy right without cooperation.

Ms. Julia Simpson, CEO of the World Travel and Tourism Council (WTTC) in her presentation, pointed to some recent statistics regarding the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic. She noted that fifty (50) percent of the value of travel and tourism had been wiped off due to COVID-19, and that, the pandemic has hit the sector 18 percent more than any other crisis. She pointed to the importance of vaccine equity, the need to simplify and coordinate entry measures and systems for unvaccinated visitors, as well as global recognition of vaccines deemed safe by the World Health Organization (WHO).

Mr. Niels Olsen, Minister of Tourism of Ecuador highlighted Ecuador’s 9/100 vaccination plan (to vaccinate 9 million people in 100 days) and noted that the country’s tourism sector was almost entirely vaccinated. He pointed to the success of the ‘Breathe Again’ campaign in the Galapagos islands, and the message that Ecuador was open for business. He also pointed to ongoing work on a new organic law on tourism, noting that tourism was set to become the most important sector in the economy in the near future, as well as Ecuador’s development of a nomad visa.

Ms. Beatriz Román, Deputy Director for Development of the National Tourism Service (SERNATUR) of Chile, highlighted that Chile was proud of the success of its vaccination program, noting that 81 percent of the population had received one vaccine, while 75 percent has received two doses. She noted that Chile is estimated to have lost $6b as a result of the pandemic. She pointed to the some of Chile’s programs of assistance, including grants offered to women, suspension of contribution payments to Social Security, and loans to micro, small and medium-sized enterprises (MSMEs).

Ministerial dialogue

Mr. Mynor Cordón presented a video on the impact of COVID-19 on tourism in Guatemala. The presentation outlined the measures to assist businesses and families that had been enacted, the use of digital technologies in its advisory programs as well as security and biosafety seals for the tourism sector.

1. Fourth Plenary Session

During the fourth plenary the Indigenous Tourism Collaborative of the Americas was presented by Ms.Kathryn Isom-Clause, Deputy Assistant Secretary of Indian Affairs, Policy and Economic Development, of the Department of the Interior of the United States.

In her remarks Deputy Assistant Secretary Isom-Clause spoke of the impact that the pandemic has had on the United States and on Tribal Communities. She highlighted the birth of the Collaborative, coming out of the First Indigenous Tourism Forum of the Americas held in October 2020, and outlined its vision, structure as well as its priorities.

A video presenting some additional background details of the Collaborative was presented as well as one on Indigenous tourism in Paraguay.

1. Fifth Plenary Session

During the fifth plenary session presentation and deliberations referred to the “Strategies to mitigate the negative effects of COVID-19 on Tourism: Protocols and technological tools.”

Presentations

Mr. Alejandro Varela, Deputy Regional Director for the Americas of the United Nations World Tourism Organization (UNWTO), provided an update on the state of tourism as well as on tourism statistics for the Americas for 2020. He noted that there are expectations that there would be a rebound in tourism in 2022, particularly during the second and third quarters. He pointed to the need for standardized protocols and increased vaccinations to support the recovery. He also highlighted the UNWTO’S Inclusive Tourism initiative which would support the recovery effort in countries.

Mr. Oracio Marquez, Regional Director,Member and External Relations for Latin America and the Caribbeanof the International Air Transport Association (IATA), highlighted the detrimental impact that the pandemic has had on air connectivity. He noted his organization’s advocacy for reopening of borders, and the removal of restrictions in countries in an effort to jump start the recovery. He recognized countries’ efforts in weighing the balance between adopting policies which support the health of its citizens and the country’s economic health. He also highlighted the increasing use of IATA’s Travel Pass among countries.

Ms. Adela Moreda, Tourism Lead Specialist of the Inter-American Development Bank (IDB) noted the decline in tourism in the region but suggested that a nascent recovery may be in effect. She referenced the ongoing joint work on tourism biosafety protocols for the Latin America and the Caribbean region being undertaken by the IDB, the UNWTO and the OAS, which provided a summary of regional recommendations on biosafety protocols for the tourism sector. Her presentation also highlighted the need for countries to urgently review and update the protocols developed during the early days of the pandemic.

Mr. Iván Eskildsen Alfaro, Minister of Tourism of Panama pointed to stimulus programs in the country including the issuance of a Tourism Bond, as well as a program which allowed visitors to receive discounts. He referenced Panama’s focus on the Meetings, Incentives, Conferences and Exhibitions (MICE) sub-sector. He mentioned the Panama Convention Center which can accommodate 25 thousand persons as integral to the sub-sector. He also mentioned that Panama’s tourism model underscored the importance of protection, conservation, and biodiversity and with a focus on responsible visitors.

Ministerial Dialogue

During the ministerial dialogue, the Delegate from Peru noted the need to improve vaccination among its people. He also highlighted the importance of biosafety protocols, noting that visitors will be seeking out safe destinations. He also referenced the need to strengthen the CITUR and reaffirmed Peru’s commitment to the work of the Committee.

1. Sixth Plenary Session

The Chair noted that following months of negotiation, including one informal meeting and the preparatory meeting to the Twenty-Fifth Congress held in September 2021, she was pleased to present to member states the Declaration of Paraguay “Towards the Reconstruction and Rebuilding of Tourism Post COVID-19” for their consideration and adoption. She further noted that due to the postponement of the elections of the CITUR authorities to a later date, it was necessary to delete paragraph 11 of the Draft Declaration of Paraguay which refers to these elections.

The Delegate from Jamaica proposed that the Declaration of Paraguay: Towards the Reconstruction and Rebuilding of Tourism Post COVID-19 be adopted by acclamation, and it was duly adopted.

H. Seventh Plenary Session

The seventh plenary session focused on “Tourism Post COVID-19.”

Presentations

Mr. Alberto López Chaves, Executive Director of the Costa Rican Institute of Tourism (ICT), noted that his country’s model of tourism was not going to be changing anytime soon. He pointed to the fact that the model was more focused on the quality of the supply, rather than on its demand. He mentioned other important aspects of this model including, the responsible use of resources, innovation in the private sector, and avoiding artificial inputs that would damage the tourism product. He also alluded to the importance of sustainability; pointing out that tourism must be profitable in order for it to survive.

Mr. Rafael Echevarne, of ACI-LAC Airports Council International for Latin America and the Caribbean, noted in his presentation that it was important to provide opportunities on how aviation and air transport can be done better. He also noted that aviation was one of the most regulated and restrictive sectors in the world. He suggested that protection leads to inefficiencies, pointing out that the ease of restrictions in the European Union had facilitated improved air travel in Europe, with positive spillover effects for neighboring countries like Morocco, which had adopted similarly liberalized policies. He called for deregulation of the aviation sector in the Latin America and the Caribbean region to support better air connectivity in the post-COVID period.

Mr. Sergio Rodríguez, President of the Americas Section of the International Social Tourism Organization (ISTO), spoke on the issue of tourism for inclusive growth. He pointed to the need to lobby governments to make social changes in tourism, and to develop better links with the health and other sectors. He also highlighted the need to develop new tourism networks, to re-examine how tourism was being promoted, and to develop domestic tourism, suggesting that tourism should not be seen exclusively as an export service.

Ministerial Dialogue

The Delegate from Guatemala noted that air connectivity was essential for a revitalization of tourism in the region, including cruise tourism. He indicated that the tourism sector in Guatemala was highly vaccinated and called for the airlines to increase their flights to the Central America and Caribbean regions.

I. Eighth Plenary Session

 The Chair of the meeting, Sofía Montiel de Afara, in her capacity as Head of the Delegation of Paraguay, informed the meeting that two offers to host the Twenty-Sixth Congress in 2024 had been received - from Paraguay and Ecuador, respectively. She further noted that Paraguay had since withdrawn its offer as host and therefore proposed that the Congress accepts Ecuador’s offer to host the next Congress.

 Member states agreed with the Chair’s proposal and it was decided that the Twenty-Sixth Inter-American Congress of Ministers and High-Level Authorities of Tourism will take place in Ecuador, in 2024.

J. Closing Session

In her closing remarks Mrs. Kim Osborne, OAS Executive Secretary for Integral Development, thanked the Government of Paraguay, Minister Sofía Montiel de Afara, and her team in Asuncion as well as at the Permanent Mission of Paraguay in Washington, D.C. for leading the preparatory work for the Congress. She noted that the dialogue and discussions over the course of the day had served to confirm the critical importance that reconstructing and rebuilding the tourism sector meant for OAS member states; and further, that the participation of the members of the private sector, international organizations, together with the highest authorities of tourism of the region during the panel discussions recognized that solutions to the current crisis in the tourism sector requires a collaborative approach. In closing, she recognized the contributions of the CITUR authorities led by the Chair, Mr. Miguel Torruco, Secretary of Tourism of the Government of Mexico, as well as the Vice-Chairs, the Honorable Edmund Bartlett, Minister of Tourism of Jamaica and Mr. Iván Eskildsen Alfaro, Minister of Tourism of Panama, and thanked them for their stewardship during these turbulent times for the sector.

Minister Sofía Montiel de Afara thanked the participants, speakers, and member states for the attendance of the meeting and expressed Paraguay’s satisfaction with the outcomes of the meeting. She thanked the delegations for their cooperative and participatory spirit, the Secretariat’s officials for their support and guidance, the interpreters, and the local team.

The audio record of the Congress can be found at the following links.

[http://scm.oas.org/audios/2021/SEDI-DED-XXV Congreso.Interamericano.Ministros.Turismo.AM\_10-06-2021.mp3](http://scm.oas.org/audios/2021/SEDI-DED-XXV%20Congreso.Interamericano.Ministros.Turismo.AM_10-06-2021.mp3)

[http://scm.oas.org/audios/2021/SEDI-DED-XXV Congreso.Interamericano.Ministros.Turismo.PM\_10-06-2021.mp3](http://scm.oas.org/audios/2021/SEDI-DED-XXV%20Congreso.Interamericano.Ministros.Turismo.PM_10-06-2021.mp3)

The list of documents can be found at: [CIDI/TUR-XXV/doc.8/21](http://scm.oas.org/IDMS/Redirectpage.aspx?class=III.26.1%20CIDI/TUR-XXV/doc&classNum=8&lang=t)

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1. **Article 20.** Each sectoral or specialized meeting of CIDI shall hold an inaugural session, the necessary plenary sessions, and a closing session. In addition, the Chair may convene a preparatory session, which shall be a closed session, when there are pending matters to be settled. Agreements reached during a preparatory session shall be formally adopted at the first plenary session of the meeting. In the case of a special meeting, the inaugural session may be omitted. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)