



PRESS RELEASE

Maximizing Tourism's Contribution to Africa's COVID-19 Recovery

New York, 21 June 2021 – Turning the disruption in tourism into new opportunities for improved competitiveness is essential for Africa's recovery from the devastating impact of the COVID-19 pandemic. This was the key overarching message conveyed by Japan, the United Nations, the African Union and representatives of African states at today's "Boosting Africa's Transformative Power of Tourism" United Nations online high-level meeting.

UN member states, UN agencies, regional and international organisations, and representatives of the private sector, were gathered ahead of the eighth Tokyo International Conference on African Development (TICAD 8), which will be held in Tunisia next year. Participants also underscored today that active tourism policies will be critical to ensure we capture sustainability as a bedrock for recovery.

In these difficult times, policies to ensure tourism can benefit the communities relying on the sector need to be supported and implemented. These include addressing air transport policies to improve connectivity within the continent, reinforce SMES skills, digitalization and financing, step up marketing and promotion, promote inclusion policies and green investment. In the short term, it is also critical to implement and communicate clear and seamless safety and security protocols regarding entry requirements as well as on the ground to regain travelers' confidence.

"Tourism is a pillar of prosperity, poverty reduction, sustainable development and stability in Africa," explained H.E. Tarek Ladeb, Ambassador and Permanent Representative of Tunisia to the United Nations and host of TICAD 8. "It contributes to Africa's recovery and economic integration, boosts its transformative and inclusive growth."

"As the world reopens, now is the time to deploy innovation and green-led tourism models and policies that unlock competitiveness, identify niche sectors and maximize potential, including for the "One Africa market" in the African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA)," emphasized Ms. Ahunna Eziakonwa, UN Assistant Secretary-General and United Nations Development Programme's Assistant Administrator & Regional Director for Africa

In 2019, the African continent had the world's second fastest growing tourism sector. As many as 70 million international tourists visited Africa and travel and tourism brought about US\$170 billion to the continent's gross domestic product. However, the pandemic had a devastating effect on all social and economic sectors, particularly tourism. According to the United Nations World Tourism Organization (UNWTO), one billion less international tourists travelled globally in 2020 and Africa recorded a 74-percent fall in international tourist arrivals and a decline of 64 percent in tourism related exports. With a recovery that is expected to be slow and uneven among regions, supporting the sector in Africa in these challenging times is critical, while adjusting to a more sustainable and inclusive model.

Ms. Elcia Grandcourt, UNWTO Regional Director for Africa, clarified that "tourism offers communities across Africa the chance to build back better, providing jobs and opportunities for marginalized groups, women and youth. As we continue to respond to the COVID-19 crisis, we must join forces to accelerate the safe and sustainable restart of African tourism."

Discussions at the high-level panel also focused on the important changes needed within the tourism sector to ensure it benefits the economic recovery of destination communities, while promoting youth and women's employment and entrepreneurship – all with an eye on sustainability.

"Disruptions in the travel and tourism industry provide new opportunities to revisit the business model and improve competitiveness in Africa. It is crucial to use this momentum to reshape existing travel policies and

frameworks to make tourism an anchor of endogenous and sustainable socio-economic growth,” said Ms. Cristina Duarte, Under-Secretary-General and Special Adviser to the UN Secretary-General on Africa.

“Young Africans in the tourism sector have continuously shown great talent, creativity and resilience,” underlined Ms. Rica Rwigamba, Rwanda Country Head of the Mastercard Foundation. “Investing in them is both a validation of their tenacity and an act of hope, the hope that we will emerge on the other side of the pandemic stronger.”

Senior Tourism Specialist at the World Bank, Shaun Mann, confirmed that “A competitive tourism sector is too important for countries in Africa not to prioritize a greener, resilient and more inclusive recovery.”

Some countries have started reopening their borders, but the situation remains dire as waves of the pandemic continue to rage through the African continent. The implementation of the African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA) is expected to further boost domestic and intra-regional travel. The AfCFTA could potentially ease cross-border movement restrictions and infrastructural and transport challenges, including the high cost of air transport, poor connectivity, and inflexible visa regimes, while fostering regional value chains and the manufacture of value-added products. Hope is firm on tourism as it is one of the priority sectors for the AfCFTA Protocol on Trade in Services.

“One cannot mention tourism without mentioning Africa,” stated H.E. Ms. Fatima Kyari Mohammed, Ambassador and Permanent Observer of the African Union to the United Nations. “The cradle of ancient innovations and human history are interwoven in Africa’s natural and cultural heritage. I am fully convinced that the continent has an opportunity with the AfCFTA, to support future growth of tourism in the continent. We have what it takes to build back better.”

The event was a follow-up high-level panel discussion to this year’s Africa Dialogue Series, which focused on “Cultural Identity and Ownership: Reshaping mindsets” and the African Union Theme of the Year for 2021: “Year of the Arts, Culture and Heritage: Levers for Building an African We Want”. It was an opportunity to reimagine the potential of tourism to help societies recover from the pandemic and promote positive changes for all, including sustainable development and sustainable peace.

Recommendations will feed into the global discussions on the preparation of TICAD8, aiming at scaling up the international community’s collective support to Africa’s recovery and building back better.

“The future for tourism in Africa is bright. It is a time for the tourism sector to build forward better. The AfCFTA will open the continent like never before,” stated Mr. Achim Steiner, UN Under-Secretary-General and UNDP Administrator. “We must go beyond the mere economic reforms of the sector. We must measure its added value to our natural world, for instance. This is essential to mobilise new stimulus, financial support and investments, and should be underpinned by new efforts to expand access to affordable broadband, at a time when only 80 percent of households enjoy.”

“Let’s seize the opportunities for reshaping Africa’s narrative, unlocking the full potential of Africa’s rich natural and cultural assets and human capital” declared H.E. Mr. Ishikane Kimihiro, Ambassador and Permanent Representative of Japan to the United Nations. “TICAD8 in Tunisia 2022 will boost global collective efforts towards more resilient and vibrant societies and economies across Africa in the post-COVID-19 era.”

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About TICAD

The Tokyo International Conference of African Development (TICAD) was launched in 1993 by the Government of Japan, to promote Africa’s development, peace and security, through the strengthening of relations in multilateral cooperation and partnership

The launch of TICAD was catalytic for refocusing international attention on Africa’s development needs. In the course of the past 20 years, TICAD has evolved into a major global and open and multilateral forum for mobilizing and sustaining international support for Africa’s development under the principles of African “ownership” and international “partnership.”