Remarks

by

Ms. Fekitamoeloa Katoa 'Utoikamanu

Under-Secretary-General

High Representative

for the Least Developed Countries, Landlocked Developing Countries

and Small Island Developing States

at a

UNCTAD High-level Panel Session on "Exploiting the potential of tourism for transformative growth in Africa"

13 September 2017

11:30 -13:00

Room XVII, E-Building, Palais des Nations, Geneva

Excellences,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

The tourism sector holds great potential to act as a driver of economic growth and socio-economic development – from its value, growth rate, its ability to benefit vulnerable groups of society, and its huge as-yet untapped expansion in African countries.

Realizing this potential is of particular importance to the 39 African countries in special situations – namely the least developed countries, the land-locked developing countries and the small islands developing states.

The tourism sector comprises up to 50 percentage of GNI for some of these countries. It is responsible for up to 70 percent of total foreign exchange earnings, and is an important component of trade in goods and services.

Tourism is explicitly mentioned in the targets of SDG 8, SDG12 and SDG 14, and it contributes to achievement of all the others.

The labour-intensive nature of the sector as well as its significant multiplier effect on employment in related sectors contribute to its job creation potential.

Tourism can also foster decent employment opportunities for vulnerable groups such as the poor, women and youth, as discussed in the UNCTAD report *"Tourism for Transformative and Inclusive Growth"*.

Sustainable tourism contributes to inclusive and sustainable growth, which is a goal of the Istanbul Programme of Action.

The three Programmes of Action for LDCs, LLDCs and SIDS highlight the important role of tourism development in these countries, and the challenges faced by the lack of adequate physical infrastructure, including electricity, transport, information and communications technology, and water and institutional capacity.

LDCs and SIDS are typically heavily reliant on imported petroleum products and indigenous biomass fuels. Tourism depends on energy, mainly fossil fuels, both for travel and consumption at the destination.

Yet these countries often have sizeable untapped renewable energy endowments – solar, wind, wave and geothermal. Their potential to exploit renewable energy resources is limited by the lack of capacity, both human and financial, as well as technological constraints.

Efforts must be made to increase local investment, overcome institutional capacity constraints and poor credit ratings, and increase the viability of energy investments.

Donors should also consider increasing their support to the tourism sector, given its potential. Between 2003 and 2013, only 0.09% of total ODA was directed to tourism in LDCs.

The distinctiveness of cultures and the uniqueness of natural ecosystems often comprise the attraction for tourism, especially for international travellers. However, if not properly planned and managed, tourism could significantly degrade the environment on which it is relies.

Tourism development and environmental management can be made to be mutually supportive, by identifying niche markets in eco-tourism, nature and cultural tourism, and involving local populations in the identification and management of natural protected areas set aside for eco-tourism.

Water scarcity is major environmental issue for African SIDS and coastal LDCs. The tourism sector's demand for water is high and growing, and the impact is compounded by the fact that the dry season often coincides with peak tourist season in both groups of countries.

Higher water consumption implies large volumes of effluent, which can further contaminate freshwater resources. To properly manage water resources, a package of measures is needed, from improved treatment and reuse of grey water, to raising awareness among tourists on efficiency. With the right set of incentives and regulation, tourism can act as a catalyst for improved water management overall.

Peace, stability, greater security and enhanced tourism are mutually supportive. However, there are also inter-linkages with illegal wildlife trafficking.

Wildlife is one of the main tourist attractions for many African countries. Through several resolutions of the General Assembly, Member States have recognized the serious scale and scope of illicit trafficking in wildlife and the need for international cooperation in tackling illicit trafficking.

The Security Council has also noted that forms of illicit natural resource exploitation, including wildlife poaching and trafficking, constitute one of the major factors in fuelling and exacerbating conflicts in the Great Lakes region of Africa.

Several studies have argued that ivory poaching is fuelling insurgent and terrorist groups. There is evidence that elephant populations have been depleted in a number of current and former conflict areas, due to years of civil wars, insurgencies and rebellions.

Wild goods and natural resources are often gathered in areas where State control is weak, including areas dominated by insurgents or other groups that tax illicit trade and undermine security.

There are also reports and anecdotal evidence that illegal wildlife trafficking is linked to other form of trafficking and money laundering.

Globally, annual poaching is estimated at about 1,000 rhinos from a total population of 30,000, while an estimated 10,000 – 40,000 elephants are killed out of a population of about half a million.

The longer-term sustainability of these important niche tourist attractions must be preserved, by combatting the recent rise in poaching of these iconic species.

A range of national and international measures are needed, from the strengthening of penalties for poaching and trafficking to the development of anti-poaching strategies, and enhanced international cooperation between source, transit and destination countries.

It is also important to ensure local communities receive a share of the proceeds from tourism, provide cash for conservation efforts, reward informants, and support the development of sustainable and alternative livelihoods.

I would like to conclude by emphasizing the over-riding importance of combatting climate change and building resilience for environmental sustainability, hence to sustainable tourism.

A single extreme weather event can have a devastating on years of hard-earned gains in building tourism infrastructure, especially in African SIDS and coastal states.

As a tragic and stark example of this, we need only to think back a few days to the damage that Hurricane Irma has caused to those in its path.

Thank you.

****