



**REPUBLIC OF KENYA
MINISTRY OF TOURISM AND WILDLIFE
OFFICE OF THE CABINET SECRETARY**

STATEMENT ON THE 24TH WORLD TOURISM ORGANISATION GENERAL ASSEMBLY IN MADRID, SPAIN, FROM 30TH NOVEMBER TO 3RD DECEMBER 2021

First and foremost is to congratulate, the government and the people of the Kingdom of Spain for hosting the 24th World Tourism Organization General Assembly and warmly welcoming the World Tourism Organization (UNWTO) fraternity at this unprecedented times, and the UNWTO Secretariat for their commendable efforts and commitment to make the 24th UNWTO General Assembly a reality.

We take cognizant that, we were almost time barred, with the Kingdom of Morocco unable to host the event due to unavoidable circumstances, which was highly regrettable since as per the adopted framework for hosting the UNWTO General Assembly on rotational basis, it was time for Africa. Kenya wanted to host the event, and was readily available after the inability by Morocco, and we hope in the future this opportunity shall be highly considered.

Secondly, it's a fact that the Covid-19 pandemic has demonstrated to be the worst predicament for the tourism and travel industry globally, as well as a nightmare to the world economy. We need to be proactive to address the issue of the pandemic, from equity in terms of vaccine access and distribution, to making sure that everyone is vaccinated, as no one is safe until we all are

vaccinated. We need to have an aggressive campaign to have ourselves, our friends, our neighbors and the world at large to get vaccinated. This is how we are going to counter the pandemic.

It is evident that we need to restart tourism now, in a safe and secure environment. We have all experienced the devastating impact of imposing travel bans and closing borders. We need to aggressively discourage countries from issuing travel advisories and closing borders. Travel advisories are going to shut down economies worldwide, resulting to further suffering of our people. Its not only about travel and tourism, but also livelihoods of our people. Travel advisories destabilize the tourism economy further devastating people's livelihood. We need to adopt to unified global health and safety protocols, that are more collective, than individualistic. It's evident that the virus shall mutate unprecedented times, and since it's a global pandemic, we don't know when or where the other virus mutation shall occur.

We meet, at this 24th General Assembly, under the '**New Normal**'. We applaud and commend the presentation by the Secretary General, Mr. Zurab Polokashvili; it was visual and futuristic. In line with this, it's important for the organization to reinvent itself in terms of governance and performance of its member states. It is time to be innovative and creative and find ways that the organization can generate funds to support itself and serve its members. **World Tourism Organization is a global body that should serve its members states fully, effectively and sustainably.**

Tourism is a global industry and it's time to enlarge our membership, attract and sustain those states that are key tourism destinations. We need to lobby those states that are not members, such as the USA, UK, Australia, among others. These are crucial partners for the growth of tourism and we need an aggressive team to work hard and bring these member states on board.

It is therefore very important, and crucial that the **Organization reinvents itself**. We have seen the proposal from the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, which is a great idea, that we all need to support to realize our destined new focus.

The issue on the establishment of regional offices is very important but we need to be very conscious, clear and pragmatic about it. It's a fact that, we have not ratified the criteria/ framework of how to establish these regional offices even if we have jumped into establishing the offices. According to the criteria already under circulation, the organization at the regional level shall be accorded immunity, tax exemptions, and the host country shall fully finance the annual budget of the regional office.

I suggest that, as minimum requisite, proof to be tabled to the general assembly, by the expected hosting government of its commitment to accord the immunity, tax exemptions and provide annual budget, prior to the member states approving the establishment of the regional office. This is very important because, if we do not reinforce these provisions, we shall approve establishment of these regional offices to member state that may not deliver. It's a fact that, in most countries, tourism is underfunded, and a commitment from our Ministries of Finances should be a requisite for establishment of these offices.

We are not against establishment of regional offices, but take cognizant that we are rushing into it without ratifying the minimum requisite conditions for each country interested in establishing the regional offices.

Lastly, let me reiterate that, it's time that the organization's voice is heard out there, loud and clear as a global tourism body, fighting and supporting destinations, that are impacted by travel bans and advisories, and calling for

equity in the access and distribution of vaccine, if at all we need to restart tourism. We commend the Scientist from South Africa for their extensive work and discovering the Covid-19 Omicron mutant. Their discovery does not mean the mutant was developed from South Africa, many countries have discovered various Covid-19 mutant, but it doesn't mean they developed them. The great work of the scientist has resulted into the country and its neighbors being punished with travel ban. This is not only unfair, but also discriminatory. We need a strong statement from the 24th UNWTO General Assembly on travel advisory and travel ban, because, without travel, there is no need of member states converging for the general assembly sessions. It's time to positively manage and control the impact of the pandemic.

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1st December 2021