



# ORGANIZATION OF AMERICAN STATES

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## **ACTIVITIES OF THE INTER-SECTORAL UNIT FOR TOURISM IN SUPPORT OF THE IMPLEMENTATION OF THE SUMMIT OF THE AMERICAS**

### **Background**

The Plan of Action of the Summit of the Americas, held in Miami, December 9-14, 1994, identified tourism as important to the economies and valuable in promoting understanding among the peoples of the Americas. Tourism is the world's largest industry, a major source of revenue, foreign exchange and employment, and a catalyst for economic development and growth in the Americas. At the Miami Summit, heads of state and government of the Hemisphere therefore agreed to undertake initiatives to stimulate tourism in the Hemisphere, including the approval of a resolution to support the establishment of an Inter-Sectoral Unit for Tourism.

In response to this resolution, the Secretary General of the Organization of American States (OAS) on June 28, 1996 created the Inter-Sectoral Unit for Tourism with responsibility for matters directly related to Tourism and its development in the Hemisphere.

The functions of the Tourism Unit are to carry out the following:

- (a) Provide support to the Inter-American Travel Congress forum for formulating hemispheric tourism policy;
- (b) Provide support in the area of sustainable tourism development;
- (c) Provide support to other sectors of the General Secretariat engaged in activities related to sustainable and integral tourism development;
- (d) Provide support to hemispheric and sub-regional conferences, workshops and seminars;
- (e) Formulate, evaluate, and undertake execution of selective technical cooperation projects and promote public/private sector cooperation;
- (f) Facilitate the exchange of information related to sustainable and integral tourism development in the region;
- (g) Conduct research and analysis of tourism issues; and
- (h) Promote cooperation with international, regional and sub-regional tourism organizations.

## **2002-2003 Tourism Industry Overview**

The travel and tourism industry in 2003 is struggling to recover from a decline which began in 2001 and is being prolonged as a result of a number of adverse factors including lingering traveler concerns about safety and security; reduction in airline capacity as airlines implement measures to reduce financial losses and return to profitability; economic slowdown in Europe and the USA and health concerns resulting from the spread of Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome (SARS).

The current state of world tourism was perhaps best summed up by the Secretary-General of the World Tourism Organization (WTO) Mr. Francesco Frangialli who early in 2003 observed that, "since 11 September, 2001, we have been experiencing the most serious crisis in the history of world tourism". In spite of the challenges to the sector, WTO estimates that international tourist arrivals declined by just 0.5 percent in 2001, and increased by an estimated 3 percent in 2002 to reach 715 million attesting to the resilience of the industry.

Further, the World Travel and Tourism Council (WTTC) has projected that in 2003, international travel & tourism will increase by 2.9 per cent in real terms generating 3.7 per cent of GDP and 67,441,100 jobs, while the broader travel & tourism economy is expected to generate 10.2 per cent of GDP and 194,562,000 jobs. WTTC also forecast travel & tourism demand will show real growth of 2.9 percent in 2003 and 4.6 percent real growth per annum between 2004 and 2013.

### **Activities of the Tourism Unit That Assisted in the Implementation of Summit Mandates**

Tourism is an important activity in the Americas and for several member states of the OAS it is the most important productive sector. Several of its activities also offer opportunities for fulfillment of the mandates of the various summits. Accordingly, a summary of the activities of the Inter-Sectoral Unit for Tourism, which relate to or assist in the implementation of the Summit mandates, is given below with the actions taken by the Unit in italics:

#### **Human Rights:**

Request the OAS to "facilitate the integration of Agenda perspective in the work of all its bodies, agencies and entities through the development of training programs and the dissemination of information on the human rights of women"

*The Inter-Sectoral Unit for Tourism has incorporated gender equity as part of its mission statement. Also, several staff members of the Unit have participated in gender equity training.*

#### **Human Rights of Children and Adolescents**

Integrate fully the human rights of children and adolescents into the work of hemispheric institutions.

*The issue of the trafficking of minors for purposes of sex tourism is a topic on the agenda for discussion at the XVIII Inter-American Travel Congress, organized by the Tourism Unit in Guatemala City in June 18-20, 2003.*

**Fight Against Terrorism:**

Support the work initiated by the Inter-American Committee on Terrorism (CICTE) , and encourage hemispheric cooperation to prevent, combat and eliminate all forms of terrorism.

*The issue of terrorism is a major theme to be discussed at the XVIII Inter-American Travel Congress, organized by the Tourism Unit in Guatemala City in June 18-20, 2003.*

**Trade and Investment:**

Ensure full participation of all countries in the FTAA, taking into consideration the differences in the levels of development and size of the economies of the Hemisphere, in order to create opportunities for the full participation of the smaller economies and to increase the level of development.

*At the request of the Caribbean Regional Negotiating Machinery, the Tourism Unit has provided input in relation to the tourism issues that should be considered and negotiated as part of the FTAA process.*

**Economic and Financial Stability:**

Support the efforts of Finance Ministers to address the challenges associated with globalization, to protect the most vulnerable and prevent crisis, and affirm the importance of having the benefits of globalization widely distributed to all regions and social sectors of our countries recognizing, at the same time, the unique challenges faced by most states.

*The Inter-Sectoral Unit for Tourism is implementing a series of initiatives to assist the performance, profitability and sustainability of the small hotels sub-sector, in order to increase its role in generating employment especially of women, foreign exchange and economic development. These include the Small Tourism Enterprise Project of the Caribbean, and the Small Hotels Project and the Ruta del Café Pilot Project of Central America.*

**Disaster Management:**

Develop the capacity to forecast, prepare for and mitigate the potential impacts of natural and man-made hazards; promote vulnerability reduction; adopt and enforce better building codes and standards; ensure proper land-use practices; inventory and evaluate the vulnerability of critical facilities and infrastructure; estimate climate change variability and sea-level rise and assess the possible impacts.

*The Unit has assisted in financing the implementation of tourism master plans for St. Kitts-Nevis, Grenada, Panama, which have included considerations of physical and land use planning, vulnerability issues and standards.*

### **Environment and Natural Resources Management:**

Resolve as parties to the United Nations framework convention on climate change, to pursue its objectives in accordance with its provisions to address the issue of climate change as a priority for action.

Consult and coordinate domestically and regionally, as appropriate, with the aim of insuring that economic, social and environmental policies are mutually supportive and contribute to sustainable development, building on existing initiatives undertaken by relevant regional and international organizations.

*The Unit has collaborated and provided input for the study on the management of climate change, which has been implemented by another Unit of the OAS. The Tourism Unit has also been collaborating with the Caribbean Hotel Association and the Caribbean Epidemiology Center/PAHO in the development of standards for environment and health in the hospitality industry*

Reaffirm our commitment to advance in environmental stewardship in the area of energy by advancing policies, practices, transference of and access to technologies, that are economically efficient and take the environmental impacts of energy development and use into account' and endorse and support the work of the Hemispheric Energy Initiative in this area.

*As an activity related to the Small Tourism Enterprise Project, the Tourism Unit is working with hotels and governments to encourage adoption and use of solar energy.*

### **Enabling Economic Environment:**

Provide and improve where necessary, both in rural and urban areas, access to quality information systems for micro, small and medium-sized enterprises through the creation of non-discriminatory mechanisms with the cooperation of the IDB, the World Bank, and other donors as appropriate, as well as ECLAC, and establish programs aimed at promoting the use of computers and the Internet, based on public and private sector partnership, to gain greater access to information technology, to credit and markets, and to instruments designed to assist them in all these areas.

*Under the Small Tourism Enterprise Project, the Unit has been assisting small to medium size enterprises in the hospitality sector to adopt and use technology, especially computers and the Internet, to improve the marketing and management of their businesses.*

### **Education**

Strive to ensure that secondary education is more responsive to evolving labor market requirements by promoting the diversification of programs and experimentation with new, more flexible teaching methods with emphasis on science and technology, including the use of new

information and communications technologies, and by supporting the establishment of mechanisms for the recognition and certification of acquired skills; and to this end, promote the exchange of information and best practices and support cooperation projects.

*The Inter-Sectoral Unit for Tourism has assisted in conducting training aimed at institutional strengthening in the public sector and capacity building in the private sector. This training has included the use of training and certification materials for which the Unit has obtained a license from the American Hotel and Lodging Association.*

### **Gender Equity:**

Integrate a gender perspective into the programs, actions and agendas of national and international events, to ensure that women's experiences and gender equality are an integral dimension of the design, implementation and evaluation of government and inter-American policies and programs in all spheres.

*The Inter-Sectoral Unit for Tourism is incorporating issues of gender equity in the development and implementation of its programs and projects.*

### **Indigenous Peoples:**

Make the best efforts, in accordance with national legislation, to encourage donor agencies, the private sector, other governments, regional and international organizations as well as MDBs to support hemispheric and national conferences in order to exchange experiences among indigenous peoples and their organizations in implementing activities to promote their sustainable cultural, economic and social development, and in such other areas as may be identified by indigenous peoples.

*The Inter-Sectoral Unit for Tourism has completed research that will be used in preparing a project to increase the involvement of indigenous peoples in tourism.*

### **Cultural Diversity**

Create an environment to foster awareness and understanding of cultural and linguistic diversity of countries in the Americas, through a variety of means, including the use of new communications technologies as well as the Internet.

*One of the major objectives and strategies of the Inter-Sectoral Unit for Tourism has been to create an awareness of the potential for use of cultural differences, lifestyles and assets in the development of tourism products.*

## **Connectivity**

Collective hemispheric efforts will be more effective through innovative uses of information and communications technologies to connect governments and people in the hemisphere and to share knowledge and ideas. This initiative, with participation from sub-regional, regional and multilateral organizations, civil society, and the private sector, aims to bridge the digital divide by harnessing the potential of information technologies for the economic, social and political development of the Americas.

*In the area of Information Technology, the Inter-Sectoral Unit for Tourism has undertaken the following activities:*

- (a) Provided technology assistance to almost 600 small businesses in the hospitality sub-sector;*
- (b) Established physical resource centers with training materials, a video library, a TV/Video viewing facility, Internet access and toolkits as informational and technology centers in thirteen member states;*
- (c) Established “**Caribbeaninnkeeper.com**” as a virtual resource center for persons in the hospitality industry including hotel operators, researchers and students;*
- (d) Commenced development of a web portal and reservation service for small hotels of the Caribbean under the Small Tourism Enterprises Project. The portal will be used for marketing and the distribution of products and is part of the framework being established to give sustainability to the project after GS/OAS involvement in the project has ended;*
- (e) Created and launched an Attractions Manager Web Site which is intended as a virtual information resource and database for attraction owners and managers in a role similar to that provided by Caribbeaninnkeeper.com to hoteliers.*
- (f) Provided technical support for Transfer of Technology and Training for the Destinations Management System of Central America;*
- (g) Established a website for the Unit;*

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