

Statement by the Secretary-General of the OACPS on World Tourism Day

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Brussels, 27

September 2021/OACPS: On the occasion of World Tourism Day, observed annually on 27 September, H.E. Mr Georges Rebelo Pinto Chikoti, Secretary-General of the Organisation of African, Caribbean and Pacific States (OACPS), is pleased to support the theme for this year's celebration, "Tourism for Inclusive Growth", which underscores the importance of this economic sector to the sustainable growth and development of the Members of the OACPS and their integration into the world economy.

The contribution of tourism to achieving the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and its importance to national economies is often overlooked. World Tourism Day fosters awareness of tourism's social, cultural, political and economic value and the sector's impact towards reaching the SDGs. Within the 79 Members of the OACPS, throughout Africa, the Caribbean and the Pacific, tourism is a major player, contributing to employment, infrastructural development and to national Gross Domestic Product (GDP). In many of the Members of the OACPS, which include a wide range of touristic activities, from primarily beach tourism in the Caribbean and the Pacific, to safari and cultural tourism across Africa; tourism is one of, if not the most significant, foreign exchange earner.

As a result of the COVID-19 pandemic, many governments were forced to take the difficult, but unavoidable decision to close their borders, with a consequential drastic fall in tourism revenues. As these States seek to relaunch their tourism product, the OACPS echoes the call of the United Nations World Tourism Organization (UNWTO) for unity and partnership for inclusive recovery and growth, to ensure that no one is left behind.

While we are still navigating our way out of the COVID-19 pandemic, one of the key issues to facilitate the reopening of borders and safe travel, is the availability of vaccines for all nations. Secretary-General Chikoti thanks the OACPS' international partners for their support, to date, and urges continued and where necessary, increased availability of vaccines to hasten the reopening of the industry. The Secretary-General also strongly advocates that each and every person should avail themselves of the opportunity to be vaccinated, so the countries of the South can indeed seek to 'build back better'.

The UNWTO notes that, 'an additional 32 million people were pushed into extreme poverty in 2020', and further that, 'In least-developed countries especially, women have been hit hardest by the global crisis caused by the pandemic.' Secretary-General Chikoti reiterates the OACPS' commitment to creating a more conducive environment for tourism at all levels, by accelerating the political, economic and social advancement of all its Members through poverty eradication, promotion of trade, and equitable integration into the global economy. It is for this reason, that the Secretariat coordinates a wide range of projects to promote and develop greater and closer trade, economic, social and cultural relations among the Member States and regions of the OACPS and with the relevant international stakeholders.

As the Members of the OACPS emerge from the devastation caused by COVID-19, the OACPS Secretary-General calls on the gamut of tourism stakeholders, its international partners and all citizens throughout the OACPS to work together to build a sustainable tourism industry that ensures inclusive growth while taking into consideration the unique needs of the Members of the OACPS including Small Island Developing States and Land-locked Countries.

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