

UNWTO Regional Office and Tourism Recovery Summit

Pre-recorded video message

Wednesday 26 May 2021

1. I wish to congratulate the opening of the UNWTO Regional Office for the Middle East and I wish to thank the government of Saudi Arabia for hosting this office, and for the support given to ICAO Middle East Regional Office in Cairo Egypt.
2. I wish to extend my thanks for the invitation from Mr. Zurab Pololikashvili, Secretary General of UNWTO, and H.E. Mr. Ahmed bin Aqil Al-Khateeb, Minister of Tourism of Saudi Arabia.
3. Aviation and tourism have always be closely connected, and ICAO and UNWTO have been supporting each other in many ways for many years, and ultimately to the socio-economic benefit of many countries.
4. As we consider the priorities of governments with respect to sustainability and innovation in aviation and tourism, it's helpful to recognize the strong interdependence between these two sectors and holistically appreciate why regulators and authorities are so invested in enabling new technologies, fuels and operations today.
5. Aviation connectivity among nations provides a critical foundation for tourism markets and value chains. This is made clear by the fact that, prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, some 1.5 billion tourists were crossing international borders and over half of them travelled to their destinations by air, generating some 900 billion dollars in global GDP each year.
6. Aviation directly supports 15 of the 17 UN SDGs, but it also indirectly supports them through its important impacts on tourism development.
7. By accelerating aviation innovations via digitization, unmanned aerial vehicles, and AI and blockchain applications, we're able to drive critical efficiencies and improve our sector's capabilities to generate economic growth, create jobs, and facilitate trade and tourism.

8. As you well know, both the air transport and tourism sectors have been particularly hard hit by the pandemic, and the outlook still remains uncertain.
9. The impact of the pandemic on air travel will still be deeply felt in 2021. ICAO's latest projection indicates that for this year as a whole, international passengers will still remain at around 66 to 76% below pre-pandemic volumes.
10. For sustainable recovery from the COVID-19 crisis, maximizing and balancing the benefits of tourism and air transport requires enabling regulatory environments, coherent policies, quality infrastructure, and comprehensive strategies to fully leverage the benefits offered by technological advances.
11. Over the course of recent ICAO World Aviation Forums and innovation symposia, transport ministers and heads of international organizations have addressed numerous challenges and opportunities arising from aviation innovation and frontier technologies.
12. Several key considerations have resulted from these discussions, including the need for substantial and systemic R&D and infrastructure investments correlated with a reliable degree of investment certainty and sustainable long-term business case assessments.
13. Also highlighted was the importance of establishing an enabling environment for new innovations to be assessed and implemented, one focused on performance-based outcomes and not technology-specific requirements. This provides for dynamic growth and development among both established legacy aerospace players, and small and medium-sized start-up enterprises.
14. ICAO is very pleased to have joined forces with UNWTO at many instances in the past to promote cooperation and compatible decision-making among transport authorities, tourism authorities and other ministries in charge of related portfolios, including finance, economic planning, energy, and others.
15. Similarly, it will be essential to consolidate planning and development efforts for aviation, tourism and trade infrastructure, and to establish good governance for expedited decision-making and process optimization.

16. We look forward to continuing on this collaborative path to support our respective Members and our respective industries at large, in pursuing a recovery strategy from the on-going crisis, and an implementation strategy for innovative solutions for the realization of socio-economic benefits.

17. Thank you.