

Opening Statement

for

Mr. Maged Abdelaziz

Under-Secretary-General

Special Adviser on Africa

at the High-Level panel discussion

**“Promoting Tourism as an Engine of Inclusive Growth and
Sustainable Development in Africa”**

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Nairobi, Kenya

Excellencies, Distinguished guests, ladies and gentlemen;

I am pleased to welcome you in this high level panel on **“Promoting Tourism as an Engine of inclusive growth and Sustainable Development in Africa”**, within this Ministerial Roundtable on Global Services Forum.

First of all, I wish to express our sincere appreciation to our distinguished high level panellists who graciously accepted to come and share their experience and perspective on this topic.

I wish to also express appreciation to UNCTAD for co-organizing this high level session with the Office of the Special Adviser on Africa, and for bringing Africa’s perspective in the Global Services Forum.

Our discussion will commence by my opening remarks, then introductory statements from our distinguished panellists and then an interactive discussion through questions and answers.

Excellencies, distinguished guests, ladies and gentlemen:

Tourism is a powerful vehicle for harmony among nations, inclusive growth and sustainable development. This is clearly captured in the United Nations General Assembly resolution

70/193 that declared 2017 as the International Year of Sustainable Tourism for Development.

Recent statistics by the World Tourism and Travel Council state that tourism contributed to about 8.1% of Africa's GDP and the assertion by the UN-World Tourism Organization that the continent was one of the fastest growing tourism destinations globally, behind South-East Asia.

Tourism therefore has been improving the livelihoods of millions of African people by generating decent jobs in both rural and urban areas. In 2015, tourism generated more than 20 million jobs across Africa, according to the World Tourism and Travel Council.

Tourism also supported the preservation of the environment and biodiversity. A clear example here is in Kenya through the safaris and national parks, as well as the multi-million dollar mountain gorilla tracking in Mugahiga national park in Rwanda and Bwindi in Uganda; to mention but a few.

However, tourism remains an untapped goldmine since it only represents 5% share in worldwide earnings and only 3% in

tourism receipts. In 2015, the comparison shows that Africa received 53 million international tourists while the city of Paris alone received more than 63 million tourists in the same year.

African tourism faces key limitations including poor infrastructure development – roads, rails, medical facilities, hotels, transports and airports. Additional challenges include the lack of skilled workers, weak price competitiveness, difficulties in obtaining visas, limited legislative support from governments and difficulties in land acquisition and ownership.

Further, African tourism suffers the impact of climate change and health risks as was illustrated by the Ebola outbreak in 2015 and its stigma challenges due to political instability, terrorism, violent extremism as witnessed in Egypt and more recently in Tunisia, Mali, Burkina Faso, Côte d'Ivoire, and Kenya, to mention but a few.

Ladies and gentlemen,

What should be done to unlock the potential of tourism in Africa?

Since it is more difficult and expensive to travel across Africa than to get there from Europe, America or the Middle East, it is imperative to invest in transport infrastructure. This will permit connectivity and accessibility. Also, African countries must adapt policies to facilitate travel within the continent and beyond necessitating increased investments in accommodation facilities.

Agenda 2063 has incorporated some flagship projects to accelerate implementation of key regional infrastructure and support such as the African High Speed Train Network to connect all African capitals and the establishment of a single African air transport market to facilitate air transport, create 155,000 new jobs and contribute US\$1.3 billion to the continent's GDP, and to facilitate the movement of people and goods, something that no doubt will have an impact on tourism.

Furthermore, to facilitate the movement of people, African leaders just launched the African passport during the 27th AU Summit in Kigali last week. This will promote local and intra-Africa tourism, learning from the South-East Asian tourism models.

Regional integration is also essential for access to tourism destinations and for the management of Africa's shared resources such as major rivers, lakes, forests and deserts; apart from the rich historical cultural sites. All this could serve as catalyst for regional and sub-regional tourism.

Excellencies, distinguished guests, ladies and gentlemen:

As the international community embarks on the implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, and African Union's Agenda 2063 and its First Ten-Year Implementation Plan, this session will explore the catalytic role of Tourism in poverty eradication, achieving the well-being of people, protecting the environment, and fostering inclusive and sustainable development in Africa.

Our discussion will also cover emerging tourism sub-sector opportunities that developing countries, particularly African countries, could better exploit, such as green and blue tourism, eco-tourism or sustainable tourism, and how public policies can maximize the benefits and minimize negative social, economic and environmental impacts.