



UNWTO FORUM - Women in Tourism

ITB Berlin, 7 March 2008

Report

1. In her opening remarks, **H.E. Ms. Khouloud Daibes**, Minister of Tourism of Palestine, thanked UNWTO for the holding of this Forum as a follow-up of the *Sri Lanka Think Tank* on the role of women in tourism held in September 2007. She mentioned that it was the first time that a woman had been appointed as Minister of Tourism in Palestine. This was also a form of recognition for women, showing that they could be appointed to all levels of responsibility, and not only to jobs related to social issues. Ms. Daibes admitted that it was not always easy for her to promote a country which was characterized by political problems and conflicts.

2. Ms Daibes had previously been appointed as Minister for Women Affairs, and was now trying to integrate the work of the two Ministries in order to introduce women to the tourism market and create more work opportunities for them in the tourism sector. Achieving an increased independence for women was her main objective, along with leaving behind gender's traditional stereotypes. Ms. Daibes believed that the participation of women in tourism could play a fundamental role in the resolution of the political and economical problems of Palestine, where two third of its population lived under the poverty line. Both tourism and women could support the political process towards peace, make a positive change and provide jobs and better conditions for the citizens.

3. **Mr. Taleb Rifai**, Deputy Secretary-General of UNWTO, pointed out that women were the most affected by conflicts and expressed sadness for the situation in Palestine, appealing to everybody's efforts in order to reach a peaceful solution. Mr. Rifai then introduced Ms. Nilofar Bakhtiar from Pakistan as an important "fighter" for women's rights, a person of great strength who deployed all her efforts in favour of gender equality and women empowerment. These were some of the reasons that led to her appointment as Special Adviser to the UNWTO Secretary-General on Women in Tourism.

4. Mr. Rifai explained that the UNWTO had become a specialized agency of the United Nations in 2003 and, as such, the Organization had an obligation to work towards the achievement of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) and the Development Agenda. UNWTO understood that the growth of the industry could never be complete if it was not in line with what was known as "Sustainable Development". For this reason, the General Assembly approved the Global Code of Ethics for Tourism, which considered the generation of income from tourism activities as not being ethical unless equitably distributed. Tourism could not be ethical if it was destructive to culture, ways of life and environment, or if it did not respect human rights and basic social issues.

5. The “triple commitment” objective of UNWTO related to the MDGs was therefore: a) tourism should benefit the poor, b) protection of the environment, and c) empowerment of women. Mr. Rifai indicated that even if the rate of employment of women in the tourism sector was relatively high (around 60-70% according to ILO) their conditions of work were often unacceptable. UNWTO would partner with other associations dealing with gender issues, such as UNIFEM, ILO and others, with whom the Organization would sign specific cooperation agreements. Finally, Mr. Rifai referred to the words of Ms. Daibes and the situation of women and children in conflict-ridden countries. He offered the collaboration of the Organization to favour dialogue among nations, and to advance women in tourism and other social issues.

6. **H.E. Mrs. Nilofar Bakhtiar**, Special Adviser to the UNWTO Secretary-General on Women in Tourism and Former Minister of Tourism of Pakistan, started wishing a happy “Women’s Day” to all women participating in the meeting and thanked UNWTO for choosing that significant date for the event. Mrs. Bakhtiar considered the meeting as being a starting point for a new era. Tourism had all the characteristics to be the key sector to reach the empowerment of women: the value of the industry, its speed of growth, the aspect of innovation and diversity, etc. The first step should be the collaboration and partnership with other organizations, such as UNIFEM, which worked in women-related issues, like health, education, political and social rights.

7. Mrs. Bakhtiar was of the opinion that it was high time to call upon governments, ministers and tourism boards, to provide training, market access and micro-credit opportunities for women. Equally important was the creation of basic conditions that enable women to stay and maintain their positions, such as family care, on-job training, incentives, facilities for babies, and everything that could motivate women to continue working. Economic empowerment was a key issue related to education and gender policies. Finally, Mrs Bakhtiar reminded that there were regions where women’s occupation in tourism was around 80%, while in others it did not reach 10% and discrimination was still overwhelmingly present. Gender stereotypes needed thus to be challenged without losing the feminist principles.

8. As starting point to the general debate that would follow, the UNWTO presented the core activities of the proposed plan of action for its women agenda, which included a multi-stakeholder taskforce and a broad network, a data-collection system and a biennial status report, a tourism gender portal and an international awareness campaign and a call for action.

9. **H.E. Ms. Maha Kathib**, Minister of Tourism of Jordan, and long-time collaborator of the UN, specifically of UNIFEM, believed that in gender-related issues it was essential to talk to everybody, including men. It was also important to raise awareness of decision makers, especially in rich countries which generate significant tourist flows to poor countries, about the sexual exploitation of women. In this context she mentioned marriages of young women of 13-14 years old occurring during the summer vacations. A clear definition of a “good” tourist was necessary, as well as a network and a campaign that would sensitize people about the potential damage that irresponsible behaviour of tourists can cause to local communities. Ms Kathib further pointed out that unless tourism earnings got into every household’s income, we would be unable to achieve “Sustainable Tourism”. Women should therefore be integrated into the labour force, from small and medium-sized enterprises to managerial positions. Training opportunities for women were also needed.

10. **Mr Geoffrey Lipman**, Assistant Secretary-General of UNWTO and moderator of the debate, mentioned that Jordan would host the “World Tourism Forum” in February 2009. Some of the key-issues that would be discussed in that forum would be related to the points raised above.

11. **Ms Margherita Bozzano**, Commissioner for Tourism of the Liguria Region (Italy), underlined the value and weight of women in the field of tourism. She reported that the percentage of women employed in the tourism sector was very high although there were not enough gender features about the phenomena. For this reason, the data collection system included in the draft plan of action would be really appreciated. She also announced that her organization was collecting gender disaggregated figures on women employed in tourism at regional level. The results would be presented at the National Conference of Woman in Tourism to be held in Genova in November 2008.

12. **Ms. Miriam Blanco**, UN International Fund for Agriculture & Development (IFAD), reminded that the mandate of her organization was to overcome poverty through rural development. IFAD had projects with several components of tourism and would like to foster a partnership to cooperate in this field and to avoid overlapping of activities.

13. **Ms. Rosa Martha Brown**, Chairperson of the International Federation of Executive Women in Travel (FIASEET), explained that her Association represented women in tourism and travel and had over a thousand members in Mexico, Colombia, Ecuador, Peru, Argentina, Uruguay, Brazil and Spain. The network was aimed at empowering women within the travel industry along with companies and enterprises. It was also involved in the protection of children from sexual exploitation in tourism. She offered to cooperate with the data collection system as the national associations had a special position in the travel industry in their respective countries.

14. **Mr. Rifai** observed that this forum was a very valuable opportunity to identify potentials like those mentioned above, and to address anyone who would like to join the Task Force. **Mr Lipman** explained that the concept of the Task Force was also linked with the WTF in Jordan next year, at which the movement and the network could be promoted. He added that the UNWTO Affiliate Members, which was a Network of networks, would be a valuable piece in that process.

15. **Ms. Maria Jose Chamorro**, International Labour Organization (ILO), believed that an additional effort should be made to collect data on this subject. ILO’s objective was to bring decent work to every worker in the world, as well as equal pay for equal work without discrimination. She pointed out that the celebration by ILO of the International Women Day would fall this year under the theme “investing in decent work for women; not just right but smart”. The ILO believed that tourism was the ideal sector to do so.

16. **Ms Anita Mendiratta**, tourism consultant from South Africa, considered it important to raise public awareness about empowerment and protection of women in tourism. The proposed actions were a chance to turn words into action and, therefore, it was necessary to make them actionable, because people needed to understand and be aware about what was happening with women in tourism.

17. **Ms Helen Santiago Fink**, Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE), reminded that her organization looked at tourism as a vehicle for economic growth and development, and that the UNWTO initiative should be a partnership of women working with men. She mentioned some specific projects dealing with empowerment of women, notably the training of women in the hotel industry through the Youth Career Initiative by the International Business Leaders Forum. She mentioned a project she was leading in Central Asia which was addressed to rural populations and aimed at engaging women in the provision of tourism services, i.e. handicrafts, restaurants and food services, home-stays.

18. **Ms Iaia Pedemonte**, Journalist, Association Responsible Tourism (Italy), informed of the holding of a round table on this subject within the Italian Association of Responsible Tourism and volunteered to help build the network.

19. **Ms Ljubica Milojevic** of the Ministry of Economic and Regional Development of Serbia explained that the role of women in her country had improved although the situation was different in the public and the private sectors. The knowledge factor was the main tool to improve the role of women in tourism. Education and regulation of family businesses in tourism were also very important to address gender equality and poverty alleviation in line with the Millennium Development Goals.

20. **Mr Patrick Dalban-Moreynas** of the International Tourism Workers Union (IUF) considered that the Task Force should include all relevant stakeholders from trade unions and NGOs. His organization had a role to improve the situation of women in tourism, this was a priority on the IUF agenda. He would support the UNWTO initiative and would report it at the annual meeting of IUF in April 2008. The work of UNWTO on women issues would be developed in close cooperation with other UN agencies, notably with the ILO, which was the right place for social dialogue.

21. **Mrs Emuobo Ibru**, Ikeja Hotels Nigeria, reminded that the information to people in Africa was very limited, and in fact, information to women in Africa was non-existent. For this reason, it was very important the knowledge and the establishment of a network in all countries and in all continents. It was necessary to put a human face to tourism and to visit places where people did not feel attracted to go or were considered to be inaccessible. She expressed that Nigeria and Africa were part of that situation at the moment. Under an agreement on poverty alleviation, she would like to convince people that they might have some contributions to make to her country.

22. In his closing remarks, **Mr. Dawid de Villiers**, Designated Chairman of the World Committee on Tourism Ethics and former Deputy Secretary-General of UNWTO, underlined the importance of tourism as a great industry which provided remarkable growth in the world and job opportunities for many people. Tourism was a powerful tool for development, especially in addressing the problem of poverty. However, along with its positive aspects, the negative impacts of this activity should also be considered. The issues of women in tourism, exploitation of children and the destruction of the environment had a common link. He reminded that the UNWTO Global Code of Ethics for Tourism was a charter which dealt with all these problems and which provided basic principles to serve as guidelines for tourism activities.