

UNWTO Executive Council backs strong, united plan for global tourism

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Dhaka: The Executive Council of the World Tourism Organisation (UNWTO) has met in-person and virtually for its 112th session. This was the first major in-person event involving tourism and the United Nations held since the COVID-19 was declared a pandemic. The Executive Council was able to gather 170 delegates from 24 countries, who all agreed to support the Tbilisi Declaration with its commitment to making international travel safe again. The Council also decided to open a first UNWTO regional office.

The Executive Council of the United Nations specialised agency ensures that the organisation fulfils its programme of work and adheres to its budget. After the session was opened by the Giorgi Gacharia, Prime Minister of Georgia and Zurab Pololikashvili, Secretary-General, UNWTO outlined the accomplishments of the past 12 months. This included the provision of technical support to Members, tourism advocacy at the very highest political level, and furthering the sector's contributions to the Sustainable Development Goals from within the wider United

Nations system.

Tourism during and beyond COVID-19

Opening the meeting, Giorgi Gacharia, Prime Minister of Georgia, said, “The post-crisis era presents an opportunity for our tourism sector to showcase the uniqueness of Georgia and make the country into a leading destination, with the many social and economic benefits this will bring.”

In his welcoming remarks, Zurab Pololikashvili, Secretary-General, underscored “that the restart of tourism must be properly managed and that our sector lives up to its unique potential”. He added that “this crisis has made clear the important role tourism plays in every part of our lives”, laying the ground to “work together to build a tourism sector that works for everyone, where sustainability and innovation are part of everything we do”.

Further proving tourism’s global recognition, for the first time ever the Secretary-General of UN sent a message of support to the Executive Council, remembering tourism’s key role for people and planet. Antônio Guterres said, “Tourism can be a force for good in our world, playing a part in protecting our planet in its biodiversity, and celebrating what makes us human”. He further stressed that “this Executive Council is an important platform for collaboration, to explore the way forward and to support the future of tourism.”

Saudi Arabia chosen for first UNWTO Regional Office

The members of the Council confirmed plans to open UNWTO’s first Regional Office, to be located in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, which recently announced its ambitious plans to open up its tourism sector to the world, including through the relaxation of visa rules for visitors.

Ahmed Al Khateeb, Minister of Tourism for the Kingdom, commended UNWTO for “its leadership during this challenging period. We are honoured that Saudi Arabia has been approved as the location for the first ever UNWTO Regional Office. This collaborative approach will help drive growth and build resilience across the tourism sector at national and regional levels.” He announced that the Regional Office for the Middle East will opened between this and next year.

At the event, members also unanimously accepted Spain’s proposal to host the 113th session of the Executive Council on January 19, 2021, during which the elections for the Secretary-General for 2022-2025 period will be held.