

**MESSAGE FROM THE WTO SECRETARY-GENERAL
FOR WORLD TOURISM DAY 2003**

***TOURISM: A DRIVING FORCE FOR POVERTY ALLEVIATION,
JOB CREATION AND SOCIAL HARMONY***

In our apparently wealthy world, poverty still affects four billion people throughout the world, of which two billion are living with less than one dollar a day.

It is with this dramatic figure in mind that the Millennium Declaration of the United Nations identifies Poverty Alleviation as one of the most crucial challenges that the international community is facing in the twenty-first century.

By selecting "*Poverty Alleviation*", "*Job Creation*" and "*Social Harmony*" as the World Tourism Day theme for 2003, our 14th General Assembly firmly expressed its will to fully support one of the key issues stated in the UN Millennium Development Goals and, at the same time, recalled the fundamental role of tourism as a positive instrument towards the reduction of poverty, the creation of job opportunities as well as contributing to social harmony. There is an evident ethical need for tourism to support such goals.

A major sector of the services economy, tourism is increasingly recognized as contributing to social and economic development as well as a beneficial activity for host countries and local communities to combat unemployment by creating direct and indirect jobs.

Tourism can also contribute significantly to rural development, especially in depressed rural areas threatened by the decline of traditional agricultural activities. And it is precisely in rural areas of developing countries where most poor people live.

It is in this framework that the World Tourism Organization has been called by the World Summit on Sustainable Development (WSSD), held last year in Johannesburg, South Africa, to play an increasingly active role in “promoting sustainable tourism development.....in order to increase the benefits from tourism resources for the population in host communities”. This central role of WTO will soon be strengthened, as the Organization will become a full-fledged agency of the United Nations.

Thus, WTO has joined forces with the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD), and with other multilateral and bilateral donor agencies to implement tourism policies and projects that can assist developing countries, and particularly least developed countries (LDCs) in reducing poverty levels through sustainable tourism.

In a year shaken by political turmoil, environmental and natural disasters, international conflicts and new diseases that have affected tourist movements, we are more confident than ever that tourism has the capacity to contribute to the alleviation of some of the main factors which are at the root of such problems, especially extreme poverty and social harmony.

We invite all tourism stakeholders, particularly national tourism administrations and the private tourism sector, to strengthen their activities with this new, poverty-reduction focus. We are convinced that they will find numerous ways to combine solidarity with profitability, national tourism growth with employment opportunities for the poor, and long-term business success with socioeconomic sustainability. The World Tourism Organization is available to help them in their efforts.

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