



East Africa Tourism Platform

Press Release

EATP CHAIRPERSON ADDRESSES UNITED NATIONS GENERAL ASSEMBLY HIGH-LEVEL THEMATIC DEBATE

Kigali, Rwanda, May 4, 2022: The East Africa Tourism Platform Chairperson, Mr. Fred Odek, has addressed the United Nations General Assembly High-Level Thematic Debate on the theme "Putting sustainable and resilient tourism at the heart of an inclusive recovery."

The High-Level Thematic Debate allows the Member States and other relevant stakeholders to discuss strategies and share best practices and experiences in the tourism industry to stimulate the sector post-COVID-19. It aims to renew political commitment to support tourism as a driver of more sustainable, inclusive and resilient recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic.

The High-Level Thematic Debate also aims to strengthen dialogue among governments, the private sector, local communities and other stakeholders on opportunities for transforming the sector while rebuilding from the effects of the pandemic.



On behalf of Tourism Practitioners in East Africa, Mr. Odek commended the work done by the United Nations on sustainable tourism and recovery through its agencies.

Mr. Odek said the East African region as a tourism destination is well renowned, mainly due to its unique attractions and has some of Africa's most evocative safari destinations and the world's last remaining Mountain Gorillas in Rwanda and Uganda.

"From Wildebeest over the savannah in the Serengeti-Masai Mara ecosystem, rhinos stand in the shade in Ngorongoro crater and Chimpanzees in Western Tanzania's Gombe Stream and Mahale Mountains parks, to mention a few," Mr. Odek said.

Mr. Odek underscored that the importance of tourism, one of the sectors hardest hit by the COVID-19 pandemic, to the East African Community (EAC) as a region can never be over-emphasised. He noted that the EAC recognises the significance of the tourism sector to the national economies of its Partner States.

He said: "Before the Covid-19 pandemic, the tourism sector had become one of the most lucrative, but the pandemic brought it to its knees. The sector contributed an average of about 10% to GDP, 20 % to foreign exchange earnings, creating employment opportunities of about 8.3% in the region."

EAC Partner States lost over USD 5 billion in international tourism receipts and 2 million jobs in 2020 alone. According to the 2021 UNCTAD report,



East African tourism was the 2nd most-affected region globally after central America based on estimated GDP losses by region from a reduction in tourism.

Nonetheless, Mr. Odek said, the sector is without a doubt one of the most important sectors that have the potential to get regional economies back on to a healthy growth path.

"Our recovery strategies aligned with UNWTO recommendations and call to action," Mr. Odek said.

"In 2021 and this year, we are seeing signs of recovery. Kenya registered a 53% growth in 2021 compared to 2020, and Tanzania's arrivals increased to 922,000, and Rwanda had a 25% growth in Revenue in 2021 compared to the same period in 2020."

"The hospitality sector has also suffered but is recovering. We estimate that occupancy levels are still below 40% in the region. COVID-19 vaccine uptake is still low in the region at less than 20% of the population; however, infections have reduced tremendously."

Regarding COVID-19 Health regulations, Kenya, Uganda, and Tanzania are now allowing vaccinated tourists to enter without the COVID-19 test. Other member states eased their travel regulations to remove quarantines and other cumbersome regulations.



"The Ukraine Crisis will impact tourist arrivals in East Africa, especially destinations like Zanzibar where Russia and Ukraine were key source markets," Mr. Odek said.

"Air traffic in our region has also suffered and is now being affected by increasing costs."

The tourism industry in East Africa relied on domestic and regional tourism to mitigate the consequences of the crisis, Mr. Odek said. The EATP, the EAC, with the support of Trade Mark East Africa and GIZ, launched the Tembea Nyumbani campaign, which has now reached 20 million people to encourage East Africa to visit their region.

As the voice of the private tourism sector in the region, he noted, the EATP continues to forge partnerships and create business opportunities for its members and stakeholders. The EATP also engages stakeholders to increase opportunities and develop strong relationships to benefit tourism through the African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA).

"EATP calls for more trade facilitation, easing cross-border tourism, and removing barriers to tourism. East African single tourists visa and the use of IDs among the EAC partner states is one of the best practices East Africa can share with the other regions," Mr. Odek said.



"Working together, we can ease more mobility to benefit travel. It is also critical to discuss airspace liberalisation and open skies policies. The Platform now joins all Governments and private sector leaders' call for a renewed commitment to support tourism recovery."

"East Africa is safe and open to welcome you. As we say in Swahili, KARIBU SANA!"

While the tourism sector is still under pressure, Mr. Odek said, there is a bounce-back and signs of a positive trend towards recovery by 2024.

"The ability to rebound will be enhanced through the continued collaboration and joint efforts," Mr. Odek said.

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For more information, please contact:

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About the East Africa Tourism Platform:

The East Africa Tourism Platform (EATP) is the apex private sector body for tourism in East Africa. The EATP promotes intra and inter-regional tourism through advocacy, marketing, skills development, research and information sharing. The Platform was established in 2011 and is supported by Trademark East Africa. Under the leadership of key tourism leaders in the region, the Platform motivates and defines private sector participation in the



emerging EAC policies and behaviour. It makes the private voice heard and relevant in the regional integration process, pursuing a common agenda as a sector.

The Platform currently represents five (5) Partner States; Burundi, Kenya, Rwanda, Tanzania, and Uganda and is looking forward to welcoming colleagues from DRC and South Sudan soon.

The EATP Secretariat is in Kigali, Rwanda, where the Rwanda Chamber of Tourism hosts it. The Rwanda Chamber of Tourism is the private sector pillar of the Rwanda Private Sector Federation, which is dedicated to promoting and representing the interests of the Rwandan business community.