

## **PRESENTATION TO POST TSUNAMI EMERGENCY TASK FORCE MEETING**

**PHUKET, THAILAND – MON 31<sup>ST</sup> JANUARY 2005**

Good morning ladies and gentlemen,

The APEC International Centre for Sustainable Tourism, which we call "AICST", is pleased to be here today to play a role in developing strategies for the restoration of tourism in the region following the devastation and loss caused by the recent tsunami.

We express our deepest sympathies for all those who have been affected and who suffered loss of family, friends, property and in many cases, livelihoods.

We are appreciative of the invitation from the WTO to join with them and PATA in this endeavour.

We agree that there needs to be a coordinated and united effort to assist the people in the affected communities throughout the region to get back on their feet so they can again play a valuable role in providing services and facilities to visitors and share their cultures with other people from overseas countries.

Last year, AICST in partnership with the WTO and PATA, developed and published a report entitled "Tourism Risk Management in the Asia Pacific Region – An Authoritative Guide to Managing Crises and Disasters". This report has been widely accepted by governments and industry organisations around the region. It contains the latest and world-best thinking on systems and procedures for countries and destinations to enable them to be prepared for disasters and to recover from them as quickly as possible.

It was developed by an AICST academic research team from the Sustainable Tourism Cooperative Research Center in Australia, the University of Hawaii and the Hong Kong Polytechnic University and there are representatives from each of these institutions here at these meetings as part of the AICST team.

Providing information on how to deal with crises and disasters is one thing. Doing something with it is another.

This tsunami was of a magnitude never before imagined. The work that we previously undertook following SARS and the Bali bombing, was unable to anticipate and comprehend the size and scale of this disastrous event.

We believe that the WTO – PATA – AICST partnership now needs to study the outcomes and experiences from this disaster and if necessary to update the previous Risk Management Report. We should then take this consolidated information and deliver it to government and industry representatives throughout the region in the form of training workshops and information in local languages so that there is a greater take-up and application of the principles into properly developed strategies that will prepare us all for the next risk that we will face – whether it be an earthquake, or a terrorist attack, another outbreak of SARS, or whatever.

It is no longer acceptable to recognise the need for managing risks without applying risk management practices at all levels. This industry of tourism is far too important to the economies of all countries in this region, to leave these matters to chance.

But the application of risk management practices is only one aspect of sustainable tourism.

Between WTO, PATA, AICST and others, we have the representation, the coverage, and the access to information, skills, knowledge and experience to address this and other issues to make our industry more sustainable following the disastrous tsunami.

We have come here today to listen - to gain a first-hand understanding of the needs of the affected countries, destinations and people. Any strategies and plans that we jointly develop must surely be driven by the needs of the affected destinations and be responsive to these needs, rather than any predetermined solutions we bring to the table.

In many of the affected areas, tourism was the major industry and directly and indirectly, provided the employment for the majority of the local community. There is enormous concern around the world from our industry colleagues as to the state of tourism in this region following the tsunami. We are gathered here on behalf of the World tourism community to focus on local issues in each affected destination - to help restore tourism to its previous levels. What precisely can we do to assist small to medium tourism businesses to rebuild their lives and businesses and thus restore destinations to their full strength?

We recognise that there is an immediate and urgent need for rebuilding infrastructure and to address the humanitarian needs of shelter, food, health, etc. There are other agencies which are better equipped to deal with these issues.

We need to learn from the experiences of affected destinations – the challenges they face in rebuilding – what were the barriers that delayed this recovery – what worked well and what didn't – and to analyse and use this knowledge to assist us in improving risk management application.

And then there is the opportunity to focus more strategically on how to improve the sustainability of tourism in the region.

If there is a need, we can undertake further research to provide the information that is required to help governments – national, state and local - develop more effective policies for tourism.

If required, we can assist with the development of training programs on a range of issues in addition to crisis management, that will provide the tourism industry in a country or a destination with more knowledgeable people to strengthen the planning, development and management of our industry for the future. If we are better managers of tourism in destinations, economies will improve, communities will have more opportunities and benefits and the environment will be better protected.

If there is a desire and commitment to improve sustainable tourism practices overall in a country or a destination, we can assist with advice, information, systems, programs and support that will enable local teams of people to develop and grow their skills and experience to be fully capable of planning and managing tourism in a truly sustainable manner. There are experienced tourism professionals from throughout the region who are prepared to assist. We need to identify what is required and how best to apply it.

All of these initiatives are simply investing in the people in our region and improving their knowledge so that they can be more effective.

By building and improving the human capacities in each and every country, we will be more competitive as a region and more successful at attracting and satisfying our guests and visitors. This is strategic development that will enable any destination to be better prepared in the future to deal with whatever man or nature throws at them.

Within the AICST network, we can draw on people and knowledge and experience from governments, industry organisations and universities from throughout the region to provide the information and assistance that is required.

We stand here today, alongside WTO, PATA and others, ready to do whatever we can to improve tourism sustainability and management practices for the future. We recognise the similar aims and objectives of the United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific which is based in Bangkok and the Transport and Tourism Division of that agency

which is represented here today. We would welcome their involvement in our joint endeavors to address the challenges ahead.

There is a further reason why we all need to unite in this task ahead – we all face a lack of funding capacity to deal with the challenges and opportunities we face. This is a similar situation to that faced by the international aid agencies that required enormous funding contributions to deal with the immediate humanitarian needs. We need to focus collectively on how we can access the funding required to rebuild tourism, to restore the jobs and livelihoods of whole communities and become better destination managers.

The time to act is now. We need to identify what is required and make the commitments to act on those requirements promptly.

We need to capture the emotion, the passion and the determination that this disaster has created, and to harness and focus all of these to gain the support of governments and the international institutions for the work that needs to be undertaken.

This must occur while there is still a real appreciation of just how tourism underpins local economies, generates the jobs and provides much of the infrastructure and services for the communities and countries that have been affected.

The going is tough so let's get going.