BERLIN DECLARATION ON "TRANSFORMING TOURISM"

PREAMBLE

We, over 30 participants from civil society from 19 countries in Africa, Asia, Europe and Latin America, representatives of non-governmental organizations, people's movements and academia joined together from the 3rd to the 6th of March 2017 because we are committed to achieve the vision of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development of a just, inclusive and equal world. As tourism experts and practitioners, we are concerned that the current dominant tourism model is not able to support the necessary transformation of our world envisaged by the 2030 Agenda. On the contrary, in too many cases it is exploiting people, harming communities, violating human rights and degrading the environment.

Transforming our world is not possible without transforming tourism. With this declaration we want not only to encourage further reflection and debate, but demand concrete activities and imperative actions.

1. REFLECTION ON THE 2030 AGENDA

1.1   The specific inclusion of tourism in the 2030 Agenda is an acknowledgement of the global significance of the sector; but at the same time creates an obligation to transform the current consumptive business model, which is incompatible with sustainable development.

1.2   While the rhetoric of transformation in the 2030 Agenda is strong, we are concerned that implementation through the 17 Sustainable Development Goals may not be ambitious enough. Some goals and indicators for progress remain vague or inadequate; others, including the tourism-related indicators, are unduly focussed on a poorly regulated and contradictory growth paradigm.

1.3   The 2030 Agenda is more than the sum of its 17 goals. Cherry-picking goals and easy-to achieve indicators hampers the change needed. The complexity and interdependency of the 2030 Agenda reminds us to be ambitious, honest, clear, creative and transformative. As a cross-cutting industry, tourism has tremendous effects on the daily life of local people, communities and workers, as well as impacting their environment and culture, and thus has enormous responsibility.

1.4   Sustainable tourism is mentioned in the 2030 Agenda four times; however, the term is strongly contested by civil society organisations for its lack of a people-centred approach. Only tourism that contributes to the improvement of the well-being of local people, dignity of workers, environmental integrity as well as the elimination of exploitation, inequalities and poverty, is a meaningful option for sustainable development.

If it ignores this responsibility it is a threat to development, rather than a tool. Therefore, the development of tourism per se is not an end-goal in itself – all efforts should concentrate on the transformation of tourism.

1.5   We welcome the commitment by the international community to the vision of transforming our world. In tourism, the international community therefore remains accountable for the monitoring and implementation of all 17 goals.

2.   CURRENT DEVELOPMENTS IN TOURISM

2.1   Although tourism will continue to grow, only a minority of people are currently able to travel. However, its negative effects are felt, directly or indirectly, by the majority of the world's population. This raises questions about justice; unchecked growth is exacerbated by widespread poor management and inadequate regulation at international, national and local level. This widens existing inequalities, exploits workforces, displaces communities, commodifies cultures, depletes natural resources and threatens future generations. The rights of women, children, minority and indigenous peoples are particularly vulnerable to current tourism dynamics.

2.2   Climate change impacts are most heavily felt by the world's poorest people. Tourism is both a vector and a victim of climate change. It is high time to rethink the current tourism model that increasingly depends on air travel and short trips that do not fulfil the promise to contribute to sustainable development.

2.3   We are concerned that the benefits of technological solutions are overestimated, at the expense of focusing on the necessary transformation in behaviour and product development to achieve a net reduction in green house gas emissions.

2.4   Although technological developments have allowed small-scale tourism producers and community initiatives to connect directly with their customers, there is growing concern about the increased commodification of social networks and interaction.

2.5   Increasingly complicated corporate ownership structures, complex value chains and opaque financial models demand stronger regulation, transparency and accountability. We are therefore concerned that the trend towards deregulation contributes to a democratic deficit, leads to the exclusion of small and local businesses and worsens already precarious working conditions in tourism, including increased outsourcing. Additionally, disruptive sharing economy businesses can lead to a high rate of insecure employment arrangements.

2.6   Also in tourism, we are concerned at the worldwide trend of shrinking space for civil society, especially human rights defenders and critical journalists. Their struggles for land rights and against evictions, for social protection, workers rights, gender equality, child protection and indigenous rights are closely related to any challenge for sustainable develpoment in tourism.

3. WE THEREFORE DECLARE THAT THE FOLLOWING CORE PRINCIPLES SHOULD DULY BE TAKEN INTO ACCOUNT:

3.1   Human rights and self-determination of communities must be at the core of every tourism development. This includes the right to meaningful participation and consultation including free, prior and informed consent on whether, to what extent and in what form tourism takes place.

3.2   If tourism is developed, it needs to seek a widespread and fair distribution of economic and social benefits throughout the recipient communities, including improving local prosperity, quality of life and social equity.

3.3   Tourism should be a positive and beneficial experience for travellers and hosts alike in order to act as a force for mutual understanding, empathy and respect.

4.   RECOMMENDATIONS

4.1   While the international community has committed itself to the achievement of the 2030 Agenda, we are concerned that shifts in power from public institutions to private sector interests makes transformation an impossible task.

4.2   The achievement of a fair, just and equal world and the full implementation of the 2030 Agenda depends on political will and a critical review and further development of existing governance processes, business practices as well as the commitment of travellers, media, education and civil society.

4.3   So far as the achievement of the 2030 Agenda is concerned, there is still a lack of coherence and adequate governance structure in tourism. While other UN organisations already incorporate mechanisms for the meaningful participation of civil society including complaint and monitoring mechanisms, the UNWTO is yet to develop these mechanisms. This year 2017 being the International Year of Sustainable Tourism for Development creates an imperative for an urgent and time-bound review of those structures and the development of such mechanisms.

4.4   We demand that **local, national and international governments**:

» ensure participation by civil society and tourism-affected communities at all levels of planning, decision making, business, destination management, and in monitoring processes. Local communities must benefit from tourism income;
» develop comprehensive coherent monitoring mechanisms with regards to tourism's contribution towards the achievement of the vision of the 2030 Agenda in order to strengthen positive and reduce negative impacts;
» implement the mainstreaming of gender equality, community empowerment and human rights-based approaches in tourism policy and development;

- » introduce binding regulations on corporate accountability and reporting with robust enforcement mechanisms in line with the UN Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights;
- » abolish subsidies with detrimental effects on the climate leading to market distortions that encourage harmful tourism practices at the expense of more sustainable travel options;
- » ensure responsible resource management, which addresses the negative impacts of over-tourism and respects environmental and cultural carrying capacities;
- » eliminate structural disadvantages and create an enabling business environment for small and medium scale enterprises as well as community-based initiatives;
- » introduce and enforce legislation guaranteeing fair and decent working conditions including living wages;
- » ensure tax justice by implementing effective tax regimes with fair mechanisms for distribution;
- » facilitate education and life-long learning opportunities that enable career development, enhance personal and professional skills as well as cultural awareness and intercultural understanding.

4.5   We expect the **tourism industry** to:
- » align management processes with all 17 Sustainable Development Goals and the UN Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights. Develop due diligence processes and set key performance indicators, monitore them regularly and establish public reporting, that allows for independent evaluation;
- » commit to a transparent, fair and accountably managed supply chain including clear and visible pricing policy;
- » develop and put into practice plans to reduce the net consumption of resources, such as water and energy as well as net green house gas emissions and waste volumes;
- » procure and hire locally in order to help integrate and strengthen local markets;
- » enable regular dialogue and exchange with civil society and local communities guaranteeing their access to land and resources;
- » consult stakeholders along the supply chain, including workers and guarantee labour rights, including freedom of association;
- » invest in research and development to minimize and mitigate the negative impacts of their operation.

4.6   We call on tourists to take responsibility for their travel choices by: respecting host communities and their culture; mindfully using scarce local resources; supporting the local economy and ultimately respecting human rights.

4.7   We expect the media to independently investigate, critically assess and accurately report on tourism issues.

4.8   We call for academic research, teaching and learning programmes that provide an in-depth understanding of tourism issues as they relate to global justice, sustainability and international development.

5 2017 International Year of Sustainable Tourism for Development & beyond – A Call for Action

5.1 Empirical studies, academic research, case studies and our own experiences show, that tourism as we know it today seriously endangers the achievement of the 2030 Agenda.

5.2 Modest socio-economic or ecological adjustments in production, often presented as 'sustainable' or 'responsible' tourism, will not bring the necessary change. For tourism to contribute to sustainable development, a fundamental transformation of tourism itself is essential and urgent.

5.3 We strongly encourage you, whether a tourist, tourism operator, political decision maker or host community, to contribute to transforming tourism. Future generations will judge us by our actions. Now is the time for change.

Berlin, March 2017
This declaration was the agreed statement of the participants of the Berlin Conference on Transforming Tourism. It is in the process of endorsement or already endorsed by the participants. We are seeking further endorsement by concerned organisations and individuals.

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