

**Talking Points for the address by Dr. Talal Abu-Ghazaleh at the 22nd General Assembly
of UNWTO, 11-15 September, 2017, Chengdu, China**

Mr. President, Mr. Secretary General, Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen,

I am deeply honored by your invitation to me to address this august Assembly in my capacity as Special Ambassador for the United Nations International Year for Sustainable Tourism for Development.

As a business leader with a life-long commitment to support the goals and objectives of the United Nations and having served the world organization in many capacities over the last few decades, I cannot agree more with what Secretary General Taleb Rifai has said about the importance of this occasion in the history of the UNWTO, as “a unique opportunity to get the sector united towards the common goal of making tourism a true driver of sustainable development.”

I wish to pay my personal tribute to and salute Dr. Rifai for his visionary and truly exemplary leadership of the UNWTO, as its Secretary General for the past eight years, for which he has earned universal respect and admiration. He has turned the UNWTO into a world class organization of which not only the United Nations but the whole international community is proud. He will no doubt continue to guide us with his wisdom and sagacity in the years to come.

I would also like to pay tribute and express my profound thanks to our host country, China, which has in a short span of time, become world’s largest outbound tourism market and the fourth most visited country in the world. This is because the Chinese Government has defined tourism as a strategic pillar of the national economy and placed high priority on it as a driver of development. This is a success story worthy of emulation by many other countries.

Mr. President,

We know that the impact of tourism cuts across all sectors of the economy and society. Apart from its immediate entertainment value it is an educational and learning experience. It opens new windows to other cultures, languages and religions and makes it easier to understand other peoples' history and way of life. It thus breaks down barriers to communication and understanding, leading to tolerance for the other. No wonder some of the greatest writings in world literature have been produced by world travelers such as Marco Polo and Ibn-Battuta.

The holistic impact of tourism makes it a natural instrument that can contribute vitally to the achievement of the 17 Sustainable Development Goals. If pursued responsibly and in a sustainable manner, tourism stimulates inclusive and equitable economic growth, creates jobs, especially for youth and women, attracts investment in infrastructure and technology, creates small businesses, generates livelihoods in local communities and thus reduces poverty while protecting the environment.

However, all this cannot and does not happen by itself. Governments must accord high priority to the sector in their national development strategies, create a favorable policy framework and work towards building public-private partnerships that can engage all stakeholders and produce results.

As a business leader who has to work every day for concrete results, I am pleased to note the emphasis placed in the Draft Declaration on Tourism and Sustainable Development on these crucial elements, including, in particular, on public-private partnerships and the need for technology and innovation to make tourism smart and therefore sustainable.

I am convinced that breakthrough solutions are possible if we make smart choices and work together towards smart tourism as a key instrument for sustainability, growth and poverty reduction.

It is in this spirit and in the quest for concrete results that TAG-Org has entered into a partnership with the UNWTO to establish an International Smart Tourism Center. The Center, which will be designed to function as a core of a multi-stakeholder network of country, sub-regional and regional nodes, will promote and foster technological solutions to enhance the role of tourism in the achievement of the SDGs by using innovations and technology to make destinations smarter and thus contribute to better results.

I invite all countries and stakeholders to join this global initiative and make it a success.

I thank you