



ORGANIZATION OF AMERICAN STATES
Inter-American Council for Integral Development
(CIDI)



**TWENTY-FIRST INTER-AMERICAN
CONGRESS OF MINISTERS AND
HIGH-LEVEL AUTHORITIES OF TOURISM**
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**DECLARATION OF
SAN PEDRO SULA ON GEOTOURISM IN THE AMERICAS**

(Agreed during the plenary session held on September 6, 2013)

WE, THE MINISTERS AND HIGH-LEVEL AUTHORITIES OF TOURISM OF THE MEMBER STATES OF THE ORGANIZATION OF AMERICAN STATES (OAS), gathered in San Pedro Sula, Honduras, on September 5 and 6, 2013, at the XXI Inter-American Congress of Ministers and High-level Authorities of Tourism,

CONSIDERING that the XXI Inter-American Congress of Ministers and High-level Authorities of Tourism, by focusing on the benefits of geotourism to local communities, represents an opportunity to build on the outcomes of the XIX and XX Congresses – which addressed the topics of “Tourism: a Challenge to Poverty” and “Conscientious Tourism,” respectively – through efforts to promote sustainable tourism in the Americas as a common denominator;

UNDERSCORING the significant contribution of the tourism sector to national efforts to reduce poverty and social inequality, to the improvement in the quality of life for tourist host communities, and the ongoing efforts to incorporate the developing concept of conscientious tourism into tourism activities;

RECOGNIZING that the XXI Inter-American Congress of Ministers and High-level Authorities of Tourism, “Geotourism for the Benefit of Local Communities,” considered the scope of geotourism and its impact on local communities, security within the framework of sustainable tourism, and sustainable destination management as key elements in the evolution of sustainable tourism development in the Americas;

CONSIDERING that “geotourism” can be described as tourism that sustains or enhances the geographical character of a place —its environment, culture, aesthetics, and heritage, and the well-being of its residents and visitors— and recognizing that “geotourism” promotes the sustainable development of communities with the active participation of the population and authorities, including the local landscape and culture, with the rational use of natural and cultural resources;

RECOGNIZING that geotourism, through the production and sale of handcrafts and other local tourism-related services, offers an opportunity for ethnic and vulnerable groups, indigenous peoples, afro-descendant communities and other vulnerable groups as well as local communities to participate in the distribution of tourism’s benefits;

UNDERSCORING the significant contribution of micro, small, and medium-sized enterprises, cooperatives, and other production units to national efforts to reduce poverty and combat social inequality, particularly in relation to job creation, leisure, recreation, and business opportunities;

RECOGNIZING ALSO that in the Quito Consensus on Conscientious Tourism, member states committed to encourage the development of community tourism operations through, *inter alia*, the sharing of successful experiences and the promotion of joint activities;

TAKING INTO ACCOUNT that tourism security is a fundamental component of tourism development and that, as defined by the World Tourism Organization (WTO), it encompasses “the protection of life, health and the physical, psychological and economic integrity of travelers, tourism staff and people constituting host communities”;

RECOGNIZING the efforts of the OAS General Secretariat in the implementation of the Tourism Security Program in the Americas, as well as the different initiatives and mechanisms of work of the Inter-American Committee on Tourism (CITUR);

RECALLING that the Declaration of San Salvador for Sustainable Tourism Development in the Americas recognizes “that tourism should be promoted with ethical and social responsibility, taking into account measures needed to prevent, combat, and eradicate human trafficking in all its forms, especially commercial sexual exploitation of children” and that the Quito Consensus on Conscientious Tourism instructed CITUR “to promote, in coordination with the pertinent areas of the OAS, the creation of mechanisms for sharing experiences involving public policies and best practices for strengthening, articulating, and monitoring actions undertaken by member states to prevent, combat, and eradicate human trafficking in all its forms, especially the sexual exploitation of children during travel and tourism;”

RECOGNIZING that sustainable destination management involves balancing the needs and demands of visitors, industry, community, and the natural environment through participatory planning and ongoing monitoring of key environmental and socio-economic indicators in order to enhance sustainability and manage risks;

RECOGNIZING ALSO that implementation of sustainable practices should contribute to the protection of the local environment and cultural heritage and enhance the positive impact of tourism activities on a destination;

CONSIDERING innovative programs as an important element for sustainable tourism development and the competitiveness of the tourism sector. Moreover, programs should include human resources training and capacity-building; and,

THANKING the Governments of the Dominican Republic and Panama for hosting the First and Second Conference on Tourism Security in the Americas, and the Government of Ecuador for its offer to host the third of these conferences.

THEREFORE, WE, THE MINISTERS AND HIGH-LEVEL AUTHORITIES OF TOURISM OF THE MEMBER STATES AT THE XXI INTER-AMERICAN CONGRESS:

1. COMMIT to work jointly to advance as a region with regard to the guiding elements of geotourism, consisting of sustaining, preserving, and enhancing the integrity and geographical character of our tourism destinations' environment, culture, aesthetics, and heritage, and the well-being of its residents through the adoption of standards which ensure conservation of natural resources and biodiversity, respecting the authenticity of local heritage; preserve geographical diversity, particularly, the distinctiveness of a destination; complemented with the execution of effective public policies, the promotion of public-private partnerships and sustainable destination management, involving the participation of host communities both in the provision of tourism goods and services and as recipients of economic benefits.

2. UNDERSCORE the pioneering efforts of Honduras to implement a National Geotourism Strategy that includes the design and implementation of an initiative focused on sustainable destination management as a pilot project which may be replicated in other countries of the Americas, establishing the country as a center for the promotion of geotourism activities in the Americas.

3. ENCOURAGE local, national and regional efforts to improve and promote tourist attractions of communities by organized groups, business owners, microenterprises, and small- and medium-sized businesses, cooperatives, and other production units in order to diversify sources of income and to preserve the culture and heritage of local communities, including, among others, indigenous peoples, afro-descendant communities and other vulnerable groups, the instruments developed by each member state for this purpose.

4. RECOGNIZE with appreciation the initiative of the regional owners and operators of small hotels to establish the Latin American and Caribbean Network of Owners and Operators of Small Hotels in San José, Costa Rica, in April 2013 as a mechanism to promote closer links among Caribbean and Latin American small hotels in order to share experiences, case studies, best practices, and joint activities. In addition, the participation of all member states will be encouraged and support will be given for holding the Second Meeting of Latin American and Caribbean Owners and Operators of Small Hotels.

5. UNDERSCORE the importance of promoting facilitation of financial resources from the public and private sectors, as well as international cooperation agencies, in order to foster geotourism as one of the instruments to advance the human development of communities.

6. ENCOURAGE the participation of representatives from the private business, civil society, NGOs, and academia, as associate members of the Inter-American Committee on Tourism (CITUR), to contribute their technical knowledge, experience and human resources to enrich the tourism development dialogue and Inter-American tourism cooperation.

7. EXPRESS APPRECIATION for the generous contributions received from the Ministries of Tourism of Barbados, Belize, Ecuador, El Salvador, Honduras, Mexico, Nicaragua and Trinidad and Tobago to provide capital for the Hemispheric Tourism Fund (HTF) agreed in the Declaration of San Salvador for Sustainable Tourism Development in the Americas as a financing and cooperation mechanism to support communities that live in extreme poverty and have tourism potential in their environment but cannot fully achieve development; urge countries to present proposals that respond to the objectives put forth in the Fund; and note as well with satisfaction that

three (3) projects were approved by the CITUR for execution during the first programming cycle of the HTF.

8. URGE member States to continue contributing to the HTF and to invite those that have not done so to make voluntary contributions to continue supporting the development and execution of projects to benefit communities that are in extreme poverty but have tourism potential.

9. INSTRUCT CITUR, with the support of the Executive Secretariat for Integral Development (SEDI), and subject to the availability of financial resources in the program-budget of the Organization and other resources, to:

- a) Follow up on the mandates emanating from previous meetings of the Inter-American Congress of Ministers and High-level Authorities of Tourism;
- b) Consider and begin to implement, as appropriate, its Work Plan by December 31, 2013.
- c) Make arrangements for a Second Programming Cycle of the HTF in 2014 once the necessary resources are available at a level approved by the CITUR;
- d) Report to the XXII Inter-American Congress of Ministers and High-level Authorities of Tourism and subsequent Congresses on the execution of the HTF;

10. UNDERSCORE the initiatives and efforts of travel industry associations and chambers in the Americas and their work to advance hemispheric business cooperation and collaboration with subregional private associations.

11. RECOGNIZING geotourism, as one of the instruments for assessing that tourism strategies, activities and projects sustain or enhance the character of our destinations and the well-being of residents. In this sense, we consider it important to:

- a) Foster tourism sector cooperation policies, programs, and projects that enhance the development of sustainable tourism;
- b) Emphasize the commitment of the tourism sector in the protection of the environment, protected natural areas, and cultural heritage, as well as in a good destination stewardship as critical elements to sustain tourism's benefits for host communities;
- c) Promote a sustainable and responsible approach to tourism development in the Americas with a view to engendering more equitable and inclusive economic development that contributes effectively to the reduction of poverty and inequality;
- d) Continue to promote the development of small tourism enterprises and community-based tourism projects as a means of securing alternative livelihoods, encouraging gender equity and the empowerment of women, and expanding the positive impact of tourism development;

- e) To recognize CICTE's work in implementing the Tourism Security in the Americas Program, including the mechanisms of coordination and communications, as well as the technical support provided in holding the Conferences on that subject. To furthermore urge the OAS Office of Tourism and Culture to provide support for those efforts, as needed.
- f) Encourage the development of community tourism operations through, inter alia, the sharing of successful experiences and the promotion of joint activities.

12. ACCEPT with satisfaction the offer of the Government of Barbados to host the XXII Inter-American Congress of Ministers and High-level Authorities of Tourism in 2014; and express our gratitude to the Government of Peru and the Ministry of Foreign Relations and Tourism of Peru for their generous offer to host the XXIII Inter-American Congress of Ministers and High-level Authorities of Tourism in 2015.

13. THANK the Government and the people of the Republic of Honduras for their warm and generous hospitality and for their commitment and contribution to the success of the XXI Inter-American Congress of Ministers and High-level Authorities of Tourism in the framework of the OAS.