

Diplomacy works! A message to Donald Trump by Walter Mzembi, African Union Candidate for UNWTO Secretary General

HARARE, ZIMBABWE, January 31, 2017 /EINPresswire.com/ -- The United Nations World Tourism Organization (UNWTO) earlier issued a statement on the recent executive order by US President Donald Trump on restricting travel to the United States from Iran, Syria, Somalia, Sudan, Libya, and Yemen.

While none of the candidates running for the post of Secretary General of UNWTO has said anything, the Hon. Dr. Walter Mzembi, the African Union candidate, again has taken the lead for a pro-active approach and issued a strong statement:

Recent Executive Decisions by the U.S. Administration effective 27th January 2017 have generated global debate, anxiety, reciprocal action and consequently engendered unprecedented apprehension in the global tourism industry. For a period of 120 days, the temporary order suspends entry of any refugees into the U.S. It also prohibits all Syrian refugees from entering the U.S. until further notice. Additionally, it bans the citizens of seven majority-Muslim countries—Iraq, Iran, Syria, Somalia, Sudan, Libya, and Yemen—from entering the U.S. on any visa category, which include those travelling on tourism purposes. While it is too soon to determine if the Executive Order impacts tourism, it has certainly generated a crisis of confidence in the travel-market attendant with negative reputational implications on the 'American Dream.' America was founded on the basis of its openness to immigration—all of 'us' searching for this now increasingly elusive dream.

Tourism is one of the largest sectors in the U.S.A. making a total contribution of 1.47 trillion U.S. dollars to its GDP in 2014, and it is forecast to reach 2.25 trillion U. S. dollars in 2025, based on a policy thrust by the last administration, on visa facilitation and travel liberalization. That policy thrust gave hope to a world gravitating towards more openness in travel business with many regions advocating strongly for seamless travel in order to boost tourism performance and benefit local economies in a world beset by economic meltdown and commodity price downturn. It is pertinent to note that the travel GDP of the U.S. is equivalent to direct exports of the entire global tourism sector of US\$1, 5 trillion as at 2015!

Tourism boasted virtually uninterrupted growth over time, despite occasional shocks, demonstrating the sector's strength and resilience. International tourist arrivals have over time increased from 25 million globally in 1950 to 1, 24 billion in 2016. Likewise, international tourism receipts earned by destinations worldwide have surged from US\$ 2 billion in 1950 to US\$1.7 trillion in 2016. Employing 1





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*Hon. Dr. Walter Mzembi,
African Union candidate for
UNWTO SG*

in every 11 people equivalent to 288 million jobs directly and indirectly with the U.S.A. alone accounting for 6 million jobs. In addition to receipts earned in destinations, international tourism also generated US\$ 211 billion in exports through international passenger transport services rendered to non-residents in 2016, bringing the total value of tourism exports up to US\$ 1.5 trillion, or US\$ 4 billion a day on average. International tourism now represents 7% of total world's exports and 30% of services exports (World Tourism Barometer, 2016), up from 6% in 2014 as tourism has grown faster than world trade over the past four years. As a worldwide export category, tourism ranks third after fuels and chemicals and ahead of food and automotive products. In many developing countries, tourism ranks as the first export

sector.

Clearly, tourism's importance cannot be under-estimated, and that also behooves us to ensure travel is facilitated optimally, and we all have a stake to enable legitimate tourism in the midst of this crisis. The Executive Order seem to be at odds with the pledge to stimulate the US economy by reducing its trade deficit and increasing exports. Travel expenditure by foreigners in the USA and any destination for that matter is captured as export proceeds, so actions that stymie tourism are direct impediments to exports and will exacerbate the trade deficit. Over and above its positive economic impacts, tourism is one of the sectors contributing to U. S socio-economic development since it increasingly allows citizens to become aware of other people's cultures, thereby symbolically inculcating cultural tolerance, social harmony and co-existence. Even when nation states are in a state of fall-out, the tourism bridge should never be collapsed as it allows for an effective people to people diplomacy - the most effective diplomacy, and more so in this IT age.

A wholesale ban on travel which does not differentiate between legitimate and illegitimate tourism will have far-reaching consequences on the global tourism economy - hence my concern as current Chair of the UNWTO Regional Commission for Africa, and three-time past President of the U. S based Corporate Council for Africa's Travel Association, in which capacities, for the past nine years, I have lobbied, advocated and promoted travel between Africa and the U.S.A.

The social and cultural traditions and practices of all peoples, including those of minorities and indigenous peoples should be celebrated and recognized in terms of their worth, and barring other nationalities arising out of insecurity fears may not be the best option to guarantee peace in destinations. Seamless travel through safe, secure and seamless borders, must be our common objective imploring us in the process to exercise restraint where this is threatened by avoiding reciprocal action. An 'eye for an eye' approach will leave the world blind. In fact, travel should be used to secure peace, tolerance and understanding through greater interaction of humanity.

Equally the perennially nagging question of migration in the Americas, and within Europe itself, cannot find answers in restricting movement of other nationalities nor the building of walls, literal or figurative, or in reversing the gains of openness that we have achieved in the last decade. Part of the solution as a key component of my candidature proposition, certainly, lies in recognizing and proactively promoting tourism as an effective vehicle for job-creation and economic empowerment, building common understanding and ultimately the promotion of peace. The 1, 24 billion people who traversed the world in 2016 reached their destinations as peace ambassadors with their capital spent in destinations of their choice.

It is on the basis of the peace-building characteristics of this sector that I have a value proposition that seeks to bring into the fold of the UNWTO, principally the United States of America, Canada, Australia, the United Kingdom, and others, to induce a sense of universality and inclusivity: for it can only be on this basis that lasting solutions to the challenges can be found.

It is my sincere hope that this temporary measure is temporary for real, and that the prescribed 120 days will afford all concerned parties ample time for deeper reflection and more widespread consultations - including with institutions such as the UNWTO which maybe in a position to offer wise, practical and impartial counsel.

For further details about my value proposition, I refer you to my website www.waltermzembi.org with the full outline of my vision for global tourism and how we can use it to secure peace for the globe as an extension of the use of soft power, a philosophy I have advocated time and again as an indispensable adjunct to the use of hard-power.

Diplomacy works!

Hon. Walter Mzembi
Zimbabwe Ministry of Tourism and Hospitality Industry
+2634775402
email us here

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