



**2ND TOURISM RESILIENCE SUMMIT OF THE AMERICAS:  
BUILDING TOURISM RESILIENCE FOR SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT**

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***“Resiliency in its Broadest Context:  
Lessons Learned and Opportunities Presented”***

**Keynote Address**

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Good Morning and thank you Permanent Secretary for that kind introduction.

With protocol having been established I would like to acknowledge and recognize the Co-chairs and visionaries behind the Global Tourism Resilience and Crisis Management Centre Dr. Taleb Rifai and the Honorable Minister Edmund Bartlett without whose tireless efforts we would not be here today. Thank you gentlemen.

As well, appreciation is extended to the University of the West Indies for helping to provide the home and resources essential to the establishment and development of the Centre.

It is always a pleasure to be in Jamaica....home to some of the most hospitable, resourceful and resilient people in the world. As a Bahamian resident and representative for the Caribbean Hotel and Tourism Association's federation of 33 destinations throughout the region, I must be careful not to appear to favor one destination over another, but Jamaicans like all of us in the Caribbean basin are indeed special people.

It must be the abundance of God-given sunlight which warms our hearts, the relaxing rhythms of the waves which brings us peace, and the softness of the sands which comforts our souls. Mother nature is so close to our people, that we need not strain too hard to hear her ache, to feel her pain, nor see her anger and wrath from the neglect of her children.

She has so much more to teach us. As Miguel de Cervantes said "Diligence is the Mother of good fortune, and idleness, its opposite, never brought a man to the goal of any of his wishes". We cannot afford to be idle, given the incredible challenges which we face.

When Minister Bartlett first suggested I deliver this keynote....did I say 'suggested'?..... As many of us know, even a so called suggestion from the Minister is a mandate....delivered with all the care and persuasive smile which says 'you will do this'.... I couldn't help but think that surely there must be someone else more appropriate to speak with you today.

But as I thought about it, I think I came to understand his wisdom, as he wanted me to share some of my perspectives from many years working in the trenches and the lofts of our industry with countless dedicated professionals, many volunteers who only have wanted to make a positive difference to help make tourism better – not just for their

companies, but for the people in the workplace, for their communities, countries, region, and the world.

Like many Jamaicans and people of the Caribbean....I am resilient. Having been thru 16 hurricanes and major tropical storms, I stand here today to personally attest to resiliency. During my ten years as the private sector chair, along with our Government's Chair, the Director General for Tourism in The Bahamas, for the National Emergency Management Agency, NEMA, ESF for Tourism, we learned how to be both planners and on the ground implementors, helping to develop the protocols, procedures and actions around disaster readiness, response, and recovery.

While at the Caribbean Hotel and Tourism Association, we've worked in collaboration with many of our region's public and private sector stakeholders on crisis management, response, communications and a range of training and readiness activities.

Locally and regionally, I've been fortunate in that the organizations and many of the entities we've worked with and their many incredibly talented, dedicated and selfless volunteers and leaders have understood 'sustainability' in its broadest context.

That the environment is not just about nature – but about the sustainability of our physical and natural environment, protecting, respecting and enhancing it for both our use and enjoyment and that for many generations to follow.

That people development isn't just about a few periodic training courses but about approaching it to empower our people thru a lifetime continuum from cradle to grave to adapt, continually improve and grow, and utilize the various mediums for education and training to be self-reliant and resilient, to grow professionally and personally.

That infrastructure development isn't just about building an airport, hotel, home, roads, and public spaces, but about planning and building in both a practical, efficient and aesthetically pleasing way with a sense of place and as a lasting place.

That farming isn't just growing for the sake of growing but supported by policies and practices which link it to our broader economic viability and for the good health of our people, and to the extent possible in today's demanding marketplace – to our self-sufficiency.

And that the creativity and ingenuity of our people, expressed in our cultures of foods, crafts, arts, design, stories – is not just for an annual or local celebration amongst our own....but experiences to proudly share with the world – for joy and yes - profit.

These sustainable approaches are not done in isolation. They require leading by example. We've sought to approach our work through partnerships – understanding the power of collaboration with various public and private sector stakeholders and regional entities to jointly solve problems, advocate, and advance solutions, like we've done with many of our federation member associations in 33 destinations throughout the region.

As we've done with our public sector counterpart, the Caribbean Tourism Organization. And on public health and safety matters in partnership with the Caribbean Public Health Agency.

In broadening the awareness and understanding of tourism as the socio-economic development tool it is.....we've benefited from collaboration with CARICOM and international organizations like the United Nations World Tourism Organization and the World Travel and Tourism Council.

To improve our understanding of and capacity to prepare and respond to natural disasters, connectivity with CEDEMA and the Organization of American States proved invaluable many years ago.

And in further recognition of the power of the collaborative - CTO and CHTA have worked with multi-laterals like the Inter-American Development Bank on energy efficiency...with the EU on capacity building...and the Caribbean Development Bank has increasingly become an authoritative voice in providing research on the importance of tourism – to the health and wealth of its member countries.

Through memorandums of understanding and commitments to collaboration with groups like the Nature Conservancy, the Center for Responsible Tourism, and the Caribbean Institute for Meteorology and Hydrology, we've found new ways of thinking and connections to insights and information which have helped to advance our focus and activities.

And advancing and promoting the work of foundations – like the Sandals Foundation, which we've recently recognized for their outstanding leadership in corporate social responsibility, and the Punta Cana Foundation with whom we recently piloted a coral reef restoration project in three destinations impacted by hurricanes Irma and Maria, and numerous local organizations and nonprofits in our region on small, local projects to help build-back our tourism economies in a more sustainable way following natural disasters.

I cite these examples, not to toot our horn, albeit I'm often told we don't do enough of that, but to point to the power of collaboration, of partnerships, and continually looking at how we connect the dots.

We've succeeded and we've failed in most of what we've set out to do....and our best and worst practices, like those of many of us in this room personally and collectively stand as lessons learned....but only as lessons learned as we apply those lessons learned.

Ironically, one of our collaborative readiness activities last April was in The Bahamas - with Tropical Shipping, CEDEMA, its local equivalent NEMA, the Government of The Bahamas, and the Bahamas Hotel and Tourism Association. Out of all the destinations where we chose to conduct two of our annual crisis readiness and response workshops – they were in Abaco and Grand Bahama.

The Lord works in mysterious ways.

And while all the stakeholders sought to be prepared and ready, nothing can prepare us for the unprecedented wrath which an angry mother nature wrought on The Bahamas. Once again....as has and is occurring all too frequently in our part of the world, the likes of the Abacos, Grand Bahama, Haiti, Dominica, Grenada, Puerto Rico, the Virgin Islands, Guatamala, El Salvador, Mexico....the list goes on and on....are challenged with how to better prepare and respond to these unfortunate and increasingly frequent occurrences and pay the cost of restoration.

In many of these instances, we refer to them as 'natural disasters'. Perhaps we need to begin to separately classify them as 'natural' disasters, or 'manmade disasters'. Could one not make a case that what we saw just over a month ago was realized in its intensity because of the undeniably warmer sea surface temperatures in the waters around The Bahamas, caused in large part by mans own making. Could one not make the point that the hundreds of lives lost, tens of thousands displaced, and billions of dollars sapped from another delicate, and vulnerable economy....that these are the early victims of

climate change and but a sign of things to come. Where and with whom lies the responsibility? Certainly not with the victims and most vulnerable.

So...Why are we here today? In this room....to discuss a range of topics around the worthy theme of 'Tourism Resilience for Sustainable Development'.

What can we truly affect with certainty in a world filled with uncertainty?

With so many external forces constantly at play, what can we change? Can we really change destiny....our future? What is our destiny in a world which seemingly is surrounded by uncontrollable natural and manmade chaos? Is it uncontrollable?

So many questions....looking for answers.

Monster storms, killer earthquakes, parching droughts, rising sea levels, life-threatening pandemics, cycles of economic expansion and collapse, crime, poverty.....this and so much more seeks to sap our spirit and our will to move forward.

But we as people have no choice. We must move forward. We constantly bounce back from adversity with a resolve and determination to achieve the seemingly unachievable....as enough of us imagine the unimaginable.

The philosopher Bernard Williams said "Man never made any material as resilient as the human spirit".

And to bring it closer to home, it was St. Lucia's gift to the world Derek Walcott who said "The future happens. No matter how much we scream."

The reality of our world is uncertainty. This is certain. Embracing uncertainty .....should it not be transformative for ourselves and for our world?

I would venture to say yes.....but only if we are grounded in purpose. As we are challenged by what many of us believe is a transformative age, it is purpose that will help to provide a sense of certainty when much around us appears unpredictable, uncontrollable and unsustainable.

So what is our purpose here today that will give us the force of intentionality to drive us with greater resolve and intent....that will help to refine a purpose led culture....a culture with an outcome of how we better do what we do....how we make better decisions....how we better allocate limited resources to help us become more resilient....how we communicate better....how we work together better. The operative word being 'better'.

Our purpose today and tomorrow is to learn, understand and action how we better build tourism resilience for sustainable development....again, the operative word here being 'better' ....because we do much good and should not discount that but like American Airlines latest motto – are we aiming to do 'great'? In today's world....nothing short of 'great' will create a future which so many of us envision and aspire to.

Having worked with organizations in the Caribbean for well over 30 years, I've been a part of many partnerships and collaborative efforts with the range of stakeholders from education, NGOs, unions, trade



associations, governments, businesses, multi-lateral organizations and regional and international bodies. With the best of intentions, we've worked, individually and collectively on economic development, social development, infrastructure development, education, training, protecting and enhancing our environment, crisis readiness and response....an almost endless number of critical areas requiring focus.

These institutions which many of us in the room are part of, have done and continue to do laudable work in many areas – incrementally moving the long hand of the clock forward developmentally. But the clock keeps ticking, and today we are faced with a race against seemingly insurmountable odds to protect and enhance our lives and livelihoods and that of our children and future generations.

As change has accelerated, so too must we hasten our pace to affect sustainable change. This requires a sense of collective purpose....whose directive can only be effectively and readily advanced with a new enabling culture....a culture which allows for us to set aside silos and egos and work together better towards that which binds all of us – that being a sustainable future. For the sake of understanding – I'll refer to this as the collective culture.

This is the body and the muscle which can propel us to wrestle the seemingly insurmountable challenges of our age. Should we choose to not meet those challenges...we shall atrophy and finding and executing solutions will be so much more difficult if not impossible.

We can have strategies, execution plans, and all the resources necessary at our fingertips, but if we don't have a culture led by purpose which binds us and has the individual buy-in to affect positive changes, then we will never be properly anchored.

I personally and continually wrestle with how to help create and be part of that enabling, purposeful culture....straddled by my own sense of limitation, so many competing desires to effect positive change, shortchanged by the lack of capacity of human and financial resources.

But the good news again is – that we are resilient. And the good news is, that we, particularly in the Caribbean, we are incredibly skilled at seeking out solutions and ideas from other’s experiences and adapting them to our own purposes.

More good news.....there is much that we can draw from to be sustainable – in its broadest sense. We’ve many excellent examples to draw from in this regard.

With that backdrop and my appreciation for your indulgence in it, good morning again colleagues.

This forum will allow us to explore what can help drive us towards ‘Tourism Resilience for Sustainable Development’. We’ll look at and hopefully learn from both best and worst practices in a number of the key areas critical to our resilience and sustainability including: communication; collaboration, partnerships and social responsibility; risk management and capacity building; the application of technology as a tool; and how we map a course to work better together in these critical areas and others which will surface in our discussions.

The mapping is essential, as it must speak to both being resilient and sustainable. It should also speak to the directions and actionable ways we can be better – individually, as companies, as governments, education and religious institutions, nonprofit organizations, trade organizations, unions, and multilateral organizations – locally, regionally and globally.

But a map has limited use, unless we connect the dots.

In America it is often said that among the greatest achievements and some say inventions was the interstate highway system, whose greatest proponent was President Dwight Eisenhower. Prior to that system it took much time and expense to connect one area with another via small roads. And many communities were isolated from the rest of the country. It was the interstate highway system which connected the dots on the map, and enabled people and communities to better connect, trade and advance socially and economically.

Fast track forward to the so called 'information age' where we have many dots of communities, and we have the means to connect them. But are we truly connected. Every day, we see new 'information highways' being established. Just yesterday, the organizers of this event sought to 'connect the dots' – setting up a WhatsApp group for this event.

So what's my point. I'd venture to say that the fundamental way in which we need to connect....to communicate....to collaborate....to educate....to advocate....to share.... – that support infrastructure has not been developed. We communicate in an all too fragmented way. Far too many of us are not reached....not connected.

So my challenge to all of us....and to the GTRCM....is to build the new infrastructure which will allow us to better connect the dots. As the US and later many nations in the world, connected peoples through highways and interstates....so too must we give far greater attention to connecting the dots....connecting our people, organizations, companies, institutions, government and multi-lateral enablers. This is foundational and fundamental to our ability to be 'better' at what we do and to build a purpose culture.

All the pieces are there, and all the pieces have been resilient in their own right – working to build a more sustainable environment, and specifically around tourism – whose linkages and pervasiveness throughout many of our societies in the Americas provide for a unique opportunity to build not even a more resilient tourism industry, but a more resilient society – as prescribed in the United Nations World Tourism Organization’s Sustainable Development Goals. This bold agenda sets out a global framework to end extreme poverty, fight inequality and injustice, and address climate change.

Imagine that – tourism can be a force globally to address the most urgent and critical challenges facing mankind. A far greater force for social, economic, and ecological change.

Can not that be a core purpose for our gathering... As tourism stakeholders to be a global force to address the most urgent and critical challenges facing mankind? Seeking and advancing solutions. Asking the right questions, seeking the right solutions, advocating for them, and sharing and implementing the right solutions. Collectively, collaboratively...around a common purpose.

It was inspiring in 2016 to see the process which brought about the Paris Climate Change Agreement. While many of us wanted to see it go further, if not for the collective and collaborative efforts of the Caribbean and the 25 countries in the Caribbean Basin, many led in large part by the leadership of the collective through CARICOM, to play a pivotal advocacy role – that global policy decision would not have been possible.

And those 25 countries were not alone – proudly joined by many companies, institutions, influential citizens and bodies, like the Caribbean Hotel and Tourism Association.

This is a best practice and but an example of the power and influence of a collaborative, collective effort driven by a shared purpose and resolve to make our world better, our direct world, the one we wake up to with the warm embrace of the sunshine, the mesmerizing sparkle of the sea, the refreshing mist of rain on our cheeks, the sounds of the abundance of life, the scent of the Frangapani, the rhythms which never stop.... Or will they? Only our individual and collective resilience and resolve will tell.

Thank you for listening and allowing me to share these thoughts with you.