

**2018 Global Sustainable Tourism Conference
(GSTC2018) in Maun, Botswana
- Opening Speech by Luigi Cabrini, GSTC Chair -**

Ladies and gentlemen

Dear friends,

After Washington in the USA, Barcelona in Spain, Quito in Ecuador, Bonito in Brazil, Huangshan in China, Suwon in South Korea and Coyhaique in Chile, we meet today in Maun, Botswana, in the hearth of Africa.

Thank you to our hosts and a **warm welcome** to all of you!

Listening to the names of places from many countries make our imagination fly and inspire us to travel to get to know people around the world, to visit natural and cultural wonders, to taste exotic food, to experience and appreciate how enriching is diversity.

2018 will close with almost 1.4 billion international tourists and 1.8 billion are expected in 2030, in addition to some 5 billion domestic visitors

Travel and tourism, together with communications, are one of most amazing features of our era, a cause and at the same time a consequence of globalization.

New segments of populations from emerging economies cross a border for the first time to spend their holidays, and people in developed countries travel more often thanks to the decreasing costs of transport and to the possibility to reach almost **every corner** of the planet.

But this planet, the only one we have, is at **serious risk** today.

60% of animal population has disappeared since 1970, according to a recent report from WWF. 6 out 10 mammals, birds, fish and reptiles

have been wiped out by humanity in less than 50 years, leading the world's foremost experts to warn that the annihilation of wildlife is now an emergency that **threatens civilization**.

Climate change is already producing catastrophic effects worldwide and represents a major threat to many regions and people. Unless **we change dramatically** our production and consumption patterns, and the way how governments, industries and societies function, climate change will be irreversible. The world is on track for around 3 degrees of warming by the end of the century if it doesn't make **major reductions** in greenhouse-gas emissions. Just imagine that with 2 degrees of warming, coral reefs would almost entirely disappear!

The oceans are polluted by billions of plastic objects causing **the death** of 100,000 marine creatures and one million sea birds every year. Micro plastics are already into the food chain and their impact on humans is bound to increase dramatically.

Ladies and gentleman,

I could go on, describing how our **irresponsible behavior** is a threat to the world and to us, but it is not my intention to be pessimistic nor to depress you!

The point I want to make is rather the following:

- **"Is tourism part of the problem or can it contribute to the solution?"**

The United Nations has progressively recognized the potential of tourism, if properly managed, as a sector that can contribute to sustainable development. For many developing countries tourism is often the main option to **alleviate poverty**, to create **employment** for women and youth, to provide services in **remote areas**.

Here in Botswana tourism generates directly and indirectly 11% of the GDP and 7% of the national employment. Botswana graduated from the group of Least Developed Countries in 1994, also thanks to the

contribution of tourism. **Africa as a whole** is a continent with a huge potential for tourism, that received 62 million of international visitors in 2017, close to 5% of the global flows. The share of tourism in Africa can definitively increase and it can be done building on lessons learned from regions where a too rapid and **badly managed growth** has provoked undesirable negative effects.

Tourism can contribute directly or indirectly to the 17 Sustainable Development Goals and it has been included as a target in 3 of them, namely on inclusive and sustainable economic growth, sustainable consumption and production and the sustainable use of oceans and marine resources. The World Bank and many regional developing Banks now include tourism projects in their loans and grants.

The 2017 International Year of Sustainable Tourism for Development catalyzed the actions of many actors in the sector. I was pleased to see recently in the front door of a lodge in a small historical village in Portugal, a plaque certifying their sponsorship to the International Year, an indication that its impact went beyond the deliberations of diplomatic delegations in New York.

But tourism is and remains an **economic activity** and small and big entrepreneurs have to make a profit from their businesses. Several studies and researches demonstrated that sustainable tourism generates **higher economic benefits** than a "business as usual" approach, thanks:

- To savings generated by a better management of resources,
- To a healthier and more productive working environment deriving from a shared vision between the management and the staff.
- To an enhanced market access, driven by two main factors:

One: a higher consciousness of the tourist as a **responsible citizen**, who rewards efforts to save energy and water, initiatives for protection

of biodiversity, the respect of local cultures, etc. This tourist **makes choices** based on his or her ethical principles and is ready to spend more when a hotel or a destination show that it cares for their shared values.

Two: sustainable tourism is likely to offer **better quality products** by being more experiential and emotionally engaging.

We know however that sustainability is far from be integrated in the whole tourism chain and that good practices are still the **exception** rather than the rule.

Overtourism is a major problem today, and many voices are calling for a stop to tourism growth.

A system to measure in a comparable way the amount of Greenhouse gas emissions produced by transport and accommodation, **is missing**, and frustrating efforts to lead the tourism sector toward concrete mitigation targets

Small and medium companies often do not have easy access to **innovations** and training that could improve their management.

In most markets of goods or services, including tourism, the prices do not reflect the full costs such as pollution or water and land usage.

These are just few of the **challenges ahead** for the tourism sector

Dear friends,

What is then the answer to the initial question?

It is clear that tourism contributes both to the problem and to the solution.

We therefore can and must strive to **shift the balance toward the positive benefits that tourism can create.**

The way the GSTC criteria are phrased:

"Maximize benefits for local communities, culture heritage and the environment, and minimize negative impacts" indicates that there is no final result, but a continuous process of **knowledge, training and improvement**.

Ten years ago the first set of Criteria for Hotels and Tour Operators was released, followed by Criteria for Destinations and for the Industry. We should be **proud** of the **positive influence** the Criteria have had so far on many relevant tourism stakeholders. Large private companies, national and local Governments, destinations, international organizations, and major certification bodies are among our members today. Their **trust and support** to the GSTC agenda give us strength and motivation to continue our mission.

Last December the "One Planet Network", a UN led initiative where GSTC has an active role, met here in Botswana and adopted the "Kasane call to action", a roadmap that provides guidance to stakeholders on how development and management of tourism can be improved.

A year later we are meeting with the same purpose: **leverage the potential of tourism as a tool for positive change. I am sure that with your active participation this event can make a relevant contribution!**

I wish you an engaging conference and a memorable stay in Botswana!

Thank you,

Luigi Cabrini, GSTC Chair