



Tourism Advocacy and Action Forum-Istanbul Statement

EQUATIONS
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RATIONALE

We have gathered in Istanbul because of our shared recognition of the urgent need to rebuild an international network and forum for courageous dialogue on global tourism impacts. We are gravely concerned about today's converging global crises, which are manifesting with particular and increasing intensity through tourism, and include both the biosphere crisis and the numerous intensifying social crises that accompany it. These multiple crises profoundly affect humanity, especially today's children and future generations worldwide, and merit our immediate collective action. We therefore strive for a proactive global tourism advocacy and action platform.

We call attention to the accelerating inequities and injustices characterizing both the global tourism industry and its industrial models for development. This is a historical moment for all actors in the global tourism arena to rethink tourism and recognize that tourism is not a right but a privilege, and increasingly a controversial privilege. Accordingly, we wish to inspire a growing community of care, equipped to engage in advocacy and action for a fundamental shift in tourism policy and practice. From here forward, our endeavour must include naming and confronting the social, economical and political realities, underlying the exploitative relationships characterizing the global tourism industry.

Tourism is a political force which may benefit or harm. Considering the serious and accelerating challenges of tourism such as climate change, destruction of biodiversity, and culture loss - which carry immediate local and global threats for all humanity - we highlight the need to look at the structural underpinnings of these widespread yet often unevenly distributed injustices. We stress the need to support the well-being of vulnerable and oppressed populations affected by tourism, including Indigenous Peoples and other socially marginalized populations, notably women and children.

We also note the need to support those affected by inequities within travel freedoms - such as pastoralists, refugees, and migrant workers. Among these social groups, many are displaced from their ancestral lands, sacred sites, and other places of cultural heritage and dispossessed of basic life necessities (for example, water, shelter, and food). An alarming number of these peoples, communities and individuals are forced by the tourism industry to work in slavery or slave-like conditions. Given these trends, we must dismantle the institutional barriers that prevent the physical and social mobility, continuity in cultural practices, as well as dignified and secure livelihoods which are vital to their well-being. It is our responsibility to work together for harm avoidance.

In recognizing these patterns that must be confronted and changed, we call for the honouring of local peoples whose daily lives are immediately impacted by tourism. Solidarity and concerted action are necessary to lay foundations for ethical pathways for the radical transformation of tourism policy and practice.

VALUES

Recognizing the profound costs of tourism, it is vital to define the values and principles by which we will shift the dominant discourse on tourism.

Our initiative has a distinct vision, shaped by values arising from the realities, experiences, needs, aspirations, and rights of peoples and people's struggles in and/or from developing countries, as well as others experiencing oppression and disparity as a result of tourism.

First, we clarify the values of our initiative which will define our organizing. As a group, we are reflecting on our path of advocacy, both what we have accomplished as global networks, as well as the limitations of our work - especially,

in working with and serving the local peoples affected by tourism. We affirm our commitment to being the change that we want to see in the world. Within our network, we strive for collaboration - through a mutually supportive, non-competitive ethic - dedicated to transparent and accountable ways of interacting. We emphasize inclusiveness, based on our common values, principles, and visions. That said, we point out that our work is characterized by independence from corporate interests. We seek respectful engagement with those holding differing viewpoints; however, we shall confront the actors which undermine the values of shared humanity, starting within our own networks of tourism NGOs.

We are determined to promote a holistic approach to tourism. This requires a radical review of the mainstream discourse on tourism. Decolonization of the global tourism debate is necessary. This entails striving for equity and justice within all discourses and processes on tourism. Foremost, we want to open new spaces for peoples vulnerable to tourism to articulate their experiences and needs in their own voices, languages, and customary ways. Our priority is to amplify the voices of affected people(s), especially children and women.

PRINCIPLES

We are calling for a comprehensive decolonization of tourism and all tourism related processes, including institutional frameworks and dialogues on policy and practice. We are guided by the principles of self-determination and care for our fellow humanity. Tourism narratives must put disadvantaged peoples and communities, including today's generation of children, at the centre. It is crucial to discern local forms of tourism which are a political force for good from globalized tourism models that ultimately hurt people(s) and place(s).

We have a shared responsibility to evaluate tourism alternatives across multiple scales, with both an ethic of justice and an ethic of care - understanding the present global challenges through local struggles. Therefore, we emphasize the need to critically re-examine the political and economic structural barriers to genuine sustainable tourism, within both local and global frameworks for governance (for example, in the institutions and processes responsible for policy development).

Our work must assure non-exploitative relationships in tourism. This includes fighting the destructive forces of capitalism, racism, and other forms of discrimination and oppression. This is the basis for our solidarity. It entails caring for both the biosphere that we share and all peoples and living beings residing within it.

We commit to principles for action grounded in social justice, including support for peoples' and communities' rights to say no to tourism. We especially note the historic significance of inter-generational rights today, in light of the biosphere crisis, current rates of culture loss, and the erosion of Indigenous knowledge systems globally.

The misguided development models of the global tourism industry must be corrected. One vital component of this is the degrowth of tourism. Further accumulation of tourism debt (that is, social, cultural, and environmental damage) is not an option. Humanity sits at a juncture where we must reject practices that are inherently unsustainable.

We urge a precautionary approach, grounded in wisdom.

ACTION

Our action is oriented to a profound transformation of the tourism system, to support the emergence of a society which honours justice, equity, diversities, inter-dependence and peace. Central premises for our action include:

- Advocacy highlighting and supporting local struggles, grounded in proactive action research respecting customary law and cultural protocols;
- Making people's voices visible in national and international arenas;
- Linking people(s) so that they can mobilize together to safeguard their rights;
- Acting as 'whistle blowers' to illuminate violations of the rights of people(s), including rights to a healthy biosphere;
- Opposing the cooption of the terminology of social justice, human rights and sustainability - particularly by institutions and agencies whose own mandates undermine these core principles;
- Exposing the UNWTO as an industry-serving body which is inherently unable to develop or oversee a vision of sustainable tourism;
- Symbolic acts and protests to express our concerns and visions.

We stand together, for deeply transformative practice across the tourism sector - premised on mutual care.

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