

Ecumenical Coalition On Tourism



CLIMATE CHANGE AND TOURISM: CALL FOR ACTION BY CIVIL SOCIETY GROUPS

A Statement by the Ecumenical Coalition On Tourism (ECOT), endorsed by Acció per un Turisme Responsable (ATR), Alba Sud, Alternative Tourism Group (ATG), Asian Muslim Action Network, Asian Resource Foundation, Caritas Asia, Christian Conference of Asia, Coastal Development Partnership (CDP), Commission on Justice, Peace and Creation of National Council of Churches India (NCCI), Echoway, Imagine Peace, KABANI- the Other Direction, Korea Anabaptist Centre, Mangrove Action Project (MAP), Pacific Conference of Churches (PCC), Peace for Life (Pfl), Christian Church of Bali (GKPB), Sekolah Tinggi Ilmu Manajemen Dhyana Pura (STIM DP– School of Advanced Scientific Management).

Climate Justice and Tourism

People are at the heart of this call to action. Local communities in developing societies who have contributed least to global warming will be among the first to suffer its devastating consequences. Some are already experiencing them.

As with the overall model of development, climate change illustrates the growing urgency for a paradigm shift in the tourism industry, a sprawling industry ever in search of new destinations, including some to replace those threatened or disappearing due to global warming! In order to meet the challenge of ensuring that global warming remains below the dangerous threshold of 2 degrees Centigrade, every nation, every industry sector and every human being is called to take on a fair share of the mitigation burden. This call is directed to the tourism industry too.

Greenhouse gas emissions – contributions from tourism

The global tourism industry is a significant contributor to climate change. However, it should be noted that just 2 % of the world's population actively takes part in air passenger transport¹, contributing to tourism's share of global warming which is up to 12.5 % (if non-CO₂ effects are taken into account)². Aviation alone contributes 4.9 %³ of this.

¹ Peeters, P., Gössling, S., Becken, S. (2007): Innovation towards Tourism Sustainability: Climate Change and Aviation. *International Journal of Innovation and Sustainable Development*. 1(3): 184-200.

² Scott, D., Peeters, P., and Gössling, S. 2010. Can tourism deliver its 'aspirational' emission reduction targets? *Journal of Sustainable Tourism* 18(2), in press.

³ Lee, D.S., et al. (2009): Aviation and global climate change in the 21st century. *Atmospheric Environment*, Volume 43, Issues 22-23, Pages 3520-3537. Amsterdam: Elsevier.

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Alarming, it is forecast that carbon emissions from tourism will grow by 162% in the period 2005-2035⁴. This is only to be expected as massive expansion of airports and increase in low-cost carriers pave the way for such growth in emissions. Moreover, the tourism industry is notorious for high per capita consumption of water, poor energy efficiency, waste management issues, which leads to serious negative environmental and social impacts.

The kind of issues the world community will face arising from the effects of climate change and its link to tourism is provided by the Maldives in Asia. It is now well accepted that the sea level rise due to global warming threatens to fully submerge the islands in the coming years, a point dramatically made recently by the Maldivian government holding its Cabinet meeting underwater! What will be the fate of the Maldivian citizens who will be forced to become refugees from climate change when their home is submerged, as is plausible if global warming continues apace? And yet tourists, whose emissions are contributing to such a situation, are still encouraged to go to the Maldives, perhaps to enjoy a last 'before it is too late' experience. The Pacific is another region where the islands are under threat from global warming.

Integration of international aviation and maritime transport into mitigation agreements

The travel industry claims to be aware of their climate responsibility and to aspire to reduce carbon emissions throughout its value chain. Mere statements and "aspirations" are not enough. International air transport is the biggest source of tourism emissions, but still remains exempt from the Kyoto Protocol. In the last 12 years, no noticeable progress in creating an appropriate climate regulation regime for bunker emissions (emissions from aviation and shipping) has been achieved – a responsibility which was given in 1997 to the aviation and shipping sector itself. No concrete measures to reduce the emissions have been proposed, and as a result of this serious negligence, emissions from the sector have increased considerably during this period. Both the IMO (International Maritime Organization) and the ICAO (International Civil Aviation Organization) have been finding ways to escape their responsibilities since the Kyoto Protocol. Given the urgency induced by the global need to ensure the less than 2 degrees threshold, such an irresponsible performance is not acceptable anymore. It is now crucial that the UNFCCC includes bunker emissions in its regulations by pursuing 'a cooperative sectoral approach, with Parties collaborating to reduce emissions that occur in international space'⁵, thus guaranteeing that revenues will be spent in developing countries. Developing countries must be the beneficiaries.

Sustainable mitigation needed – Biofuels a false hope

Sensitive to the charge that they are unconcerned about the climate change impact of flying but still adhering to the growth path, the aviation industry and the tourism sector have recently been hailing the development of "sustainably grown biofuels". The United Nations World Tourism Organisation (UNWTO) is also waiting "for the earliest possible global introduction of sustainable aviation biofuels."⁶ These so-called sustainable biofuels constitute a panacea so that the 'business-as-usual' mode can continue.

⁴ Peeters, P., Gössling, S., Becken, S. (2007): Innovation towards Tourism Sustainability: Climate Change and Aviation. *International Journal of Innovation and Sustainable Development*. 1(3): 184-200.

⁵ CAN Position paper, Emissions from International Aviation and Shipping.

⁶ Discussion paper on climate change mitigation measures for international air transport, UNWTO, Madrid.

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Are biofuels the answer? Environmental and development organisations claim that these alleged “sustainable biofuels” lack appropriate safeguards. Using them on high commercial levels simply cannot be sustainable. Massive land, resources and energy will be needed, so that the outcome cannot really contribute to reducing global warming. Using agrofuels for commercial aviation will only shift climate problems to other areas such as environmental or social concerns including fresh water shortages, soil run-off and erosion, deforestation, space use, endangered food security. Food shortages and the consequent community anger have the potential in some countries to endanger national security.

So far, these “sustainable biofuels” cause more problems than they solve. If the next generation of biofuels, such as algae, looks promising – as they are not expected to cause further social or environmental problems - it will take years before these sources can be used. Global warming does not give us the luxury of time to remain inactive and wait for new solutions. Action is needed now and biofuels appear to constitute another false hope.

Clean Development Mechanisms (CDM)

Alarmingly, the UNWTO put up for discussion the proposition that “Some Clean Development Mechanism and Emission Trading projects and trading revenues be earmarked for specific allotment to related aviation and tourism projects...” The experience suggests that while on the one hand, CDM projects from big enterprises might be able to create employment and reduce emissions, on the other hand, CDM was misused greatly by Western companies to offset emissions in the South instead of in the North, therefore not tackling the problem at its roots. CDM has become a moneymaking tool, and even though its basic requirement is to finance climate friendly projects, research done by independent NGOs such as International River Organisation or CDM-Watch show the opposite. Many ‘business-as-usual’ projects were financed by CDM.

In this context it is not acceptable that UNWTO considers raising income through CDM applied to tourism and aviation development. Both the tourism and aviation industries should consider mitigation of their emissions as an integral part of their decision making and business operations, which should also include climate responsibility. Communities and movements in the Global South have expressed a clear stand that market-based mechanisms such as CDM and carbon trading are false solutions. As a major source of emissions, Northern countries need to mitigate their emissions in their own countries. Furthermore, the call for climate justice implies that, having acknowledged their responsibility for GHG emissions, Northern countries should be prepared to make substantial financial transfers to the South for coping with the inevitable impact of global warming, such as natural disasters, sea level rise, food shortage or mass migration.

Poverty alleviation: the myths of tourism

The UNWTO, like some tourism dependent nations, argues that a regulative framework for limiting growth of emissions from shipping and aviation could have negative impacts on tourism revenues that contribute to poverty alleviation in developing countries (so-called “Spillover Effects”). As a highly globalised economic sector, tourism is often viewed as a development motor, benefitting the poor. The groups endorsing this Call for Action state from their experience that the idea that tourism alleviates poverty is a

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myth, and this is substantiated by research⁷⁸⁹. While it is acknowledged by civil society that climate response policies must not undermine development outcomes that are appropriate and genuinely beneficial to third world poor communities, there is concern expressed with regard to the distribution of tourism revenues. It must be questioned how much of the income generated from tourism contributes to the national and local economy with what part of this eventually reaching the poor and does not 'leak out' from developing economies through foreign-owned tour operators, airlines, cruise companies, hotel chains, and food and drink imports¹⁰ (in turn relating to the unsustainable consumption patterns tourism promotes). As well, through the market laws of supply and demand created by tourism, the supply of limited vital resources inflates prices beyond the reach of the local population. As well, natural resources are diverted for the sake of tourists in search of a pleasurable time around a swimming pool or in a golf course to the detriment of local populations struggling to access water for their everyday needs.

The endorsing NGOs express their grave concern about UNWTO's lack of a people-centred, community perspective in relation to climate change and tourism policies. We must raise critical questions, such as who really benefits from tourism? Why do the poorest people, who are the least responsible for the negative impacts of tourism, suffer the most? Why do they have to pay the carbon bill others have caused? What is the logic of relying too much on international travel that is contributing to rising sea levels and devastating millions of people's livelihood through its carbon emissions and ill effects? We are concerned that well-known problems will just worsen in climate change disaster aftermaths. These include problems caused by international tourism such as land conflicts, struggle for water access, missing mechanisms of social security, commercial sexual exploitation of children or sex tourism. Hence disaster prevention measures in tourism should be part of the response to the climate change challenge. CSR strategies should be implemented in order to genuinely protect people, not just as an attractive self promotion means. Such considerations should be part of the basis to shape climate justice policies that are most beneficial to the local communities.

While tourism may bring economic benefit to few in the shorter term, in many places such benefits are likely to be overshadowed by the impact of climate change and other negative impacts of tourism. The propagators of so called tourism development should therefore rethink their strategies and take into account the fact that tourism is not a viable option for the poor and should not be promoted as a development model for poor nations. The threats caused by tourism to climate change and vice versa very clearly show that tourism is not a sustainable livelihood option for the communities (especially the poorer sections). The idea of creating poor nations' dependency on an industry like tourism that is highly vulnerable to many external factors needs to be questioned.

⁷ Ashley, C., Boyd, C., Goodwin, H. (2000): Pro-poor Tourism: Putting Poverty at the Heart of the Tourism Agenda. In: Natural Resource Perspectives No. 51. London: Overseas Development Institute and Sustainable Living.

⁸ Leeds Development Education Centre, Tourism Concern (1993): The Final Frontier?

⁹ Thai Institute for Development and Administration (1989). A Research Report on Linkages and Leakages of Tourism Income in the Accommodation and Travel Agency business.

¹⁰ IFC, World Bank, MIGA (2000): Tourism and Global Development.

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A paradigm shift

A broad and urgent paradigm shift is called for the tourism sector. The following delineates the dimensions of such a shift with a people-centred approach, and the appropriate actions needed.

- The tourism sector does not come under any emission regulations. This must change. Binding reduction targets must be compulsorily imposed - 40% by 2020, with a base year of 1990. In this regard, an action plan based on UNWTO's "Davos Declaration" that is measurable and transparent must be developed and binding.
- Given the position it holds, UNWTO needs to set for its members clear emission reduction targets with timelines rather than leave it to self regulation which has been ineffective, and is unacceptable. National governments that determine and implement policies for tourism should be held accountable for climate impact outcomes resulting from them.
- Accurate and reliable methods to calculate emissions in tourism, including carbon and non-carbon emissions, should be used. Additionally, social and environmental disclosure of tourism practices, like disclosing carbon footprint or eco balance as a method of accountability, is also necessary to raise consumer awareness.
- Market-based mechanisms and false climate solutions such as CDM, REDD, agrofuels, carbon trading are not acceptable. Facing the dramatic acceleration of global warming, stated in the last IPCC report, Annex-1 countries have to reduce their emissions at home.
- It is not acceptable that the tourism and aviation industries demand support from emission trading or CDM to finance climate protection measures. They should finance this themselves within their own core business strategies and operations. As the industry showed Corporate Social Irresponsibility in mitigating their own emissions, we ask for binding regulative measures rather than rely on the industries' voluntary efforts.
- Climate protection in tourism requires a significant transformation of current forms of mass tourism and a serious engagement of governments on this issue to reduce tourism's climate change footprint. Small scale, fair, just, people-centred and participatory tourism, should be given a much higher attention.
- Nations highly dependent on tourism need to develop alternative sources of income to become less dependent on this highly vulnerable and often devastating industry.
- Disaster prevention measures should be incorporated within core business operations of tourism industries including mechanisms of social security, protection of women and children in tourism, labour standards.
- A fair and just tourism model must be developed. This model should be based on a labour rights-based approach and should ensure that pro-labour standards are adhered to. Communities should also be able to democratically share all benefits from tourism.

We call for the tourism industry to be conscious of the plight of local communities: tourism does not always alleviate poverty and it creates environmental and social damages, it often aggravates poverty and undermines Millenium Development Goals. The profits gained from tourism are repatriated to powerful investors, while its damaging effects remain on the ground for local communities to suffer from both in the short and long term. The link between tourism and climate change cannot be denied anymore and it is now time for the tourism industry to take measures that will take into account the people without whom tourism would not be possible.

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Alternative Tourism Group (ATG) - www.atg.ps

Asian Muslim Action Network - www.arf-asia.org/aman

Asian Resource Foundation - <http://www.arf-asia.org/>

Caritas Asia - <http://www.caritas.org/worldmap/asia/index.html>

Christian Conference of Asia - <http://www.cca.org.hk/>

Coastal Development Partnership (CDP) - <http://www.cdcbd.org/>

Commission on Justice, Peace and Creation of National Council of Churches India (NCCI) - www.nccindia.in

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Peace for Life (Pfl) - <http://www.peaceforlife.org/>

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