

**International Letter of Protest**  
**regarding the UNWTO's statement**  
**in the context of the**  
**Middle-Eastern crisis**

16<sup>th</sup> August 2006

To

Mr. Francesco Frangialli,  
Secretary General UNWTO  
Madrid, Spain.

Dear Mr. Frangialli,

This is in continuation to the initial protest that was registered by EQUATIONS on 3<sup>rd</sup> August with additional international and national endorsements. We would be keen to receive a response from your institution on this matter.

Over the past weeks, citizens supporting peace and justice the world over are watching in shock the bombardment and devastation of Lebanon by Israel. Latest updates on the scale of the tragedy estimate above 900 Lebanese dead, 3000 wounded, a quarter of the population displaced - with one-third of the casualties being children. People are fleeing their homeland, and those who cannot or do not, stay back to count their dead.

On 21<sup>st</sup> July 2006, the UNWTO (World Tourism Organisation) issued a statement on the situation in the Middle East and its impact on tourism. Its central concern seems to be on the growth of tourism and the safety of tourists visiting the region. At a time when people's lives are shattered and their homes destroyed, the statement of the UNWTO conspicuously focuses on the economics of tourism. It speaks of the damage to tourism infrastructure and hopes for diplomatic intervention for a "very needed rebound of the tourism activity" in the region. Ironically the UNWTO seeks consolation in the fact that "tourist attractions" in the region remained undamaged due to the conflict.

The mission statement of the UNWTO states that, "it plays a central and decisive role in...contributing to economic development, international understanding, peace, prosperity and universal respect for, and observance of, human rights and fundamental freedoms." Its response to the Middle-Eastern crisis sadly reflects none of the above. The UNWTO seems to have missed the point that tourism is about people and that tourism destinations are peoples' homes. It seems that the operative definition for the UNWTO is to privilege interests of tourists and the tourism industry with little concern for people who live in tourism destinations.

Sadly, this is not the first time the institution has reacted in such a manner to a humanitarian and human crisis. When the tsunami of December 2004 left approximately 2,25,000 people dead and many more devastated in South and South-east Asia, the UNWTO's priority was to initiate in haste its "tourism recovery programme".

The World Tourism Organisation is concerned about tourism primarily as a commercial activity. With a stance such as this, we question its status and privilege as a specialized agency of the United Nations.

We, the undersigned individuals and organisations, register our protest at the UNWTO's appalling statement in the context of the crisis in Lebanon.

Signed:

**Organisations**

ACORN-India FDI Watch, India

Action Research and Education Network of Aotearoa (ARENA), New Zealand

Alternative Tourism Group - Study Center, Palestine

Association para la Defensa y Desarrollo de Kuelap, Peru

Cooperative Network for Development Communication, India

Ecumenical Coalition on Tourism, Chiang Mai, Thailand

EQUATIONS, India

Tourism Investigation and Monitoring Team (tim-team), Thailand

Working Group on Tourism & Development (AKTE), Switzerland

**Individuals**

C.R Bjiy, India

Claudia Romiti, Italy

E. P. Menon, India

Jason Too, Hong Kong

Jessica Dempsey, Canada

Prof. M. K. Prasad, India

Mirza Yawar Baig, India

Narpat Jodha, India

Nina Rao, India

Piyush C. Sharma, India

Rania Al-Sahhoum

Sabine Minninger, Germany

Simon Joseph, India

Sudarshan Rodriguez, India

Suprio Dasgupta, India