



INSTITUT FÜR INTEGRATIVEN
TOURISMUS UND ENTWICKLUNG
respect

FAIR
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arbeitskreis tourismus & entwicklung

die klima-allianz

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CLIMATE ALLIANCE
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Vienna, 2008-07-08

World Tourism Organisation
Secretary-General Francesco Frangialli
Capitán Haya, 42
E – 28020 Madrid

Ref.: Climate Change and Tourism – UNWTO's stance on the calculation of flight emissions

Dear Mr. Frangialli,

There are many areas where tourism has been victimised by climate change – manifesting itself in rising sea levels, lacking snow guarantee and heat waves. On the other hand, tourism itself contributes in a major way to global emissions. The fact that UNWTO is taking the offensive and addressing the issue of climate change and tourism is, therefore, highly welcome.

In the Declarations of Djerba (2003) and Davos (2007), UNWTO called on all decision-makers in the tourism sector to take effective measures in the interest of climate protection. Against the background of its commitment to the Millennium Development Goals, the World Tourism Organisation recognised climate change as a priority in the “Davos Declaration”: *“[UNWTO] urges action by the entire tourism sector to face climate change as one of the greatest challenges to sustainable development, and to the Millennium Development Goals in the 21st Century.”*

We expressly acknowledge that with its “Davos Declaration Process” UNWTO is facing up to the challenges of climate change by devising concrete measures for climate protection and by calling for the active support of all decision-makers.

On the occasion of this year's World Environment Day, UNWTO announced its cooperation with ICAO (International Civil Aviation Organization). ICAO has come up with an emissions calculator which UNWTO recommends as an “unbiased and transparent” instrument in the service of climate protection. The travel industry as well as travellers are encouraged to use this calculator as a basis for voluntary payments to set off the emissions caused by flying. The ICAO methodology is also recommended to its members by IATA, the umbrella organisation of air transport companies.

NATURFREUNDE INTERNATIONALE
GENERALSEKRETARIAT

Diefenbachgasse 36
A-1150 Wien

Telefon ++43(0)1 892 38 77/78
Telefax ++43(0)1 812 97 89

e-mail: nfi@nfi.at
<http://www.nfi.at>

Konto BAWAG 05610-665-499

We address this letter to you, because in our eyes the above-mentioned UNWTO decision is half-hearted, incommensurate with the facts of the case and ultimately designed to set a wrong course:

While consistently emphasising the challenges of climate change and urging effective action, UNWTO falls behind the established state of knowledge in climate research, as far as its own actions and attitudes are concerned.

The mentioned emission calculator trivialises emissions and fails to establish the true state of climate change. It fails to take account of radiative forcing and the resultant Radiative Forcing Index (RFI), thus ignoring greenhouse effects which are added to the effect of CO₂ at higher altitudes.

It is now uncontested that an RFI factor must be taken into consideration. In the 2007 IPCC Report, the factor with which to multiply CO₂ emissions at higher cruising altitudes was indicated as 1.9 to 4.7. In 1999, the IPCC had still recommended an RFI of 2.7.

By opting for the ICAO method, UNWTO disregards and undermines the work and findings of the UN Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC): As an associate commission of the UNFCCC (UN Framework Convention on Climate Change), IPCC is tasked with assessing the risks of global warming and with sketching preventive strategies.

Atmosfair, the climate protection organisation, whose patron is the former Executive Director of the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) Klaus Töpfer, uses an emission calculator with an RFI of 3, which is based on current scientific standards. The same RFI is recommended by the German Federal Government, the European Environment Agency and the WWF. This calculation base has earned Atmosfair awards from a number of independent institutions and universities. When taking into account the above-described RFI, green gas emissions on a single flight from Frankfurt to New York are calculated to amount to 2000 kg. Using the ICAO method, the result is as “low” as 416 kg.

Recommending the ICAO methodology puts UNWTO at risk of losing its credibility as an agency of the United Nations. If it refuses to listen to the recommendations of IPCC, which is the scientific adviser of the United Nations, and instead uses an emission calculator of the air transport industry, it evinces a commitment to the interests of the industry rather than to the interests of climate protection.

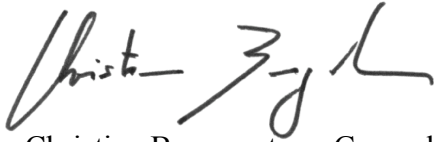
What is currently at stake is nothing but a voluntary off-set. However, credible and effective consumer information on environmental matters needs to be based on established, accurate facts. Camouflaging the actual impact of air transport may ensure short-term profits, but is in the long run inconsistent with the responsibilities of a UN organisation and ultimately nothing but cheap ‘green-washing’.

The undersigned organisations hold that a UN organisation must not define an “emission dumping calculator”, developed for obvious reasons by the air transport industry, as a standardised tool, while the Climate Council is recommending a different method of emission calculation.

Dear Mr. Frangialli, we assume that UNWTO is serious about its commitment to climate protection and we, therefore, urge UNWTO:

- to base its climate protection measures on state-of-the-art scientific standards,
- to refrain from recommending emission calculators that leave the RFI factor out of account and
- to seek to integrate an RFI factor commensurate with up-to-date scientific findings into the new ICAO calculator.

This is the only way in which the measures taken by UNWTO can effectively contribute to climate protection and to the achievement of the Millennium Goals and in which UNWTO can gain credibility and acceptance as a serious and pro-active player within the UN system.



Christian Baumgartner, General Secretary

International Friends of Nature

Also on behalf of the following organisations:

Wolfgang Mehl, managing director

climate alliance austria

Margit Leuthold, director

respect – Institute for Integrative Tourism and Development

Christine Plüss, director

Working Group on Tourism and Development (akte)

Heinz Fuchs, Programme Director

Tourism Watch, Special Desk of Church Development Service (EED)

Angela Giraldo, co-director

KATE-Kontaktstelle für Umwelt & Entwicklung (Centre for Ecology & Development)

Christina Hering, co-ordinator

German Climate Alliance

Ulrike Jansen, director

climate alliance europe

Caesar D’Mello, executive director

Ecumenical Coalition on Tourism (ECOT)