



The Secretary-General

SDT/2008

Madrid, 6 August 2008

Mr. Christian Baumgartner
General Secretary
International Friends of Nature
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Dear Mr. Baumgartner,

I wish to refer to your letter of 8 July 2008, in reference to the UNWTO's stance on the calculation of flight emissions.

First of all I would like to reassure you and the other organizations signatories of the letter that UNWTO is fully committed to the implementation of the "Davos Declaration Process" and to respond to the daunting challenges posed by climate change to the tourism sector and its economic and social implications. UNWTO continues to raise awareness on the relations between climate change and tourism and to develop capacity building of tourism stakeholders in order to strengthen adaptation response and to promote the adoption of effective mitigation measures.

Notable progress has also been achieved in the scientific research, with the first comprehensive study on the relations between climate change and tourism published by UNWTO and available, free of charge, on our web page. This study, led by a group of prominent scientists, and based on the broader research conducted by the IPCC, makes an extensive reference to the impact of radiative forcing on climate change. It however concludes, in line with the IPCC Fourth Assessment Report, that there still exists a substantial degree of scientific uncertainties associated with the Radiative Forcing Index (RFI) and other non CO₂ effects, though recognizing that they are potentially significant. The IPCC report quoted above as well as the 1999 IPCC report on Aviation and Global Atmosphere confirm that carbon dioxide emissions are the largest and most certain sources of GHG emissions from the aviation sector.

Due to the uncertainties and diverging opinions in science on non CO₂ impacts, ICAO decided, at this stage, to consider only the CO₂ amounts released into the atmosphere by aircraft engines during a flight, for its Carbon Calculator.

UNWTO, as a specialized Agency of the United Nations, cooperates closely on climate change activities with several other UN Organizations such as the United Nations Environment Programme, the World Meteorological Organization, and the International Civil Aviation Organization (in relation to aviation and climate change), within the UNFCCC framework.

UNWTO, on the basis of the above considerations decided to support the ICAO Carbon Calculator, while looking forward to scientific advances that will allow a better measurement of the impacts of aviation on climate change. ICAO is in fact in process of requesting the IPCC to explore and provide advice on which, if any, multiplier metrics should be used in the context of offsets.

I wish also to inform you that together with UNEP, we plan to organize an experts meeting with the aim of developing a methodological and operational framework for carbon offsetting in the tourism sector. The rapid increase in the number of organizations offering to offset emissions, doubt about the credibility of a number of the schemes, the lack of transparency in the market and the lack of comprehensive guidelines are a concern for the tourism sector. In the implementation of this initiative we will be looking at receiving input from a wide spectrum of stakeholders, including organizations like the one you represent.

I trust that this letter clarifies our position in response to the concerns raised.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, consisting of a stylized 'F' followed by a series of vertical strokes and a horizontal line at the bottom.

Francesco Frangialli