

***BalACLava, Mauritius, May 22 (Infosplusgabon) - ¶ Mauritian Minister of Ocean Economy, Marine Resources, Fisheries and Shipping Premdut Koonjoo has said that tourism has become a vibrant industry and is the first pillar of the economy in Mauritius, contributing around 10% to GDP and sustaining more than 100,000 jobs.***

He was speaking Monday night at the opening of the Global Business Network Private Sector Partnership Forum 2018 of the Small Island Developing States (SIDS-GBN), a platform to enable the members to explore and develop partnership opportunities and exchange know-how and best practices for sustainable tourism development.

Quoting from official statistics, the Minister said earnings from tourism represent around US\$ 1.8 billion and tourist arrivals peaked to 1.3 million in 2017. The figure is expected to reach around 1.4 million in 2018.

He said the successful transformation of Mauritius came about with sound economic policies over the years and “more importantly it was based on new emerging sectors of growth such as the tourism industry”.

“From the very beginning the synergy between Government and the private sector to build the tourism industry was crucial,” he said.

Mr Koonjoo pointed out that the very principles of sustainable tourism that are being discussed at the conference are highly relevant to SIDS.

“SIDS are called upon to establish appropriate national policies and structures to make the tourism sector more resilient following the meeting,” he added.

The Minister said the tourism ecosystem is an ever-changing one and SIDS countries have many common issues, face similar challenges and are highly vulnerable to the effects of climate change.

“SIDS generate less than one percent of greenhouse gas emissions yet have to face problems due to global warming,” he observed.

Koonjoo cautioned that tourism is a key sector of the economies and as a result of the projected growth, the 57 SIDS countries cannot afford to go wrong with their respective tourism industries.

He called for the need to uplift SIDS' value propositions, innovate and transform to rise above competition.

"It cannot be business as usual and we have to change our strategies to become successful in the future and this will depend on many factors such as reinforcing connectivity to compensate for our remoteness, building partnership to promote sustainable tourism and putting resources together to find solutions in the future", he said.

Also in attendance, the UN Under-Secretary-General and High Representative for the Least Developed Countries, Landlocked Developing Countries and Small Island Developing, Ms Fekitamoeloa Katoa Utoikamanu, pointed out that the concept of partnership is not a new one for SIDS as it is the motto, the cornerstone for policies and actions for SIDS sustainable development.

On his part, Mr Raju Jadoo, Secretary-General of the Mauritius Chamber of Commerce and Industry, said that SIDS' population are more outward-looking, broadminded and open. He added that the 57 SIDS across the world have one common goal - ensuring sustainable development and a sustainable tourism model cannot be dissociated with the ocean.

According to him, one in every ten jobs throughout the world is directly or indirectly based on the tourism industry which accounts for 10% of global GDP and as a crucial economic driver the sector's importance will increase as international tourists' arrivals will go up from 1.2 billion in 2017 to 1.8 billion by 2030.

“This means that tourism will remain a key contributor to growth, investment and employment in the decades to come.”

Around 60 delegates from 12 SIDS countries as well as international organisations are attending the conference that focuses on tourism as a driver of the Sustainable Development Goals, promoting tourism through cultural heritage, improving connectivity for tourism, environmental sustainability and renewable energy and financing for sustainable tourism development.

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