



STATEMENT BY

**HONOURABLE EDMUND BARTLETT, CD, MP
MINISTER OF TOURISM**

AT THE

UN HIGH LEVEL THEMATIC DEBATE ON TOURISM

ROUNDTABLE 1

**FOR PEOPLE: LEAVING NO ONE BEHIND THROUGH INCLUSIVE
TOURISM**

WEDNESDAY, 4 MAY 2022

UNITED NATIONS GENERAL ASSEMBLY HALL

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Thank you, *Mister Chairman*.

It is my great pleasure to deliver as a keynote speaker in this UN high-level thematic debate under the theme “**Putting sustainable and resilient tourism at the heart of an inclusive recovery**” and in this roundtable focussed on **people**.

People must be considered and consulted. People must be included and involved. People must be at the heart of the policies, programmes and practices, because people are and will always be the foundation and heartbeat of our societies, structures, systems and sector.

My address will focus on broad interventions for tourism workers as well as the efforts geared at enhancing the competitiveness of Jamaica as a tourism destination thereby contributing to the overall development of the country and its people.

Like other countries, Jamaica was hard hit by the COVID-19 pandemic. In 2020, the national economy declined by 10.2 per cent,

and tourism ended the year with an estimated loss of a staggering US\$2.3 billion, with more than 130,000 tourism workers laid off. The phased re-opening of the tourism sector began in June 2020, and by the end of 2021, we had brought back 1.6 million visitors; earnings of US\$ 2.1 billion and 80% of the tourism workforce. Notwithstanding this upward movement, it was still 52 per cent lower than the pre-COVID-19 levels.

In the first quarter of this year ending April 2022, we welcomed approximately one million visitors. It is the expectation that 2022 will close with 3.2 million visitor arrivals, with cruise passengers accounting for 1.1 million and stopover arrivals accounting for 2.1 million, for total revenue of US\$3.3 billion.

Mister Chairman,

It is necessary to develop short-, medium- and long-term strategies to boost tourism's resilience and increase its sustainability during times of crisis and beyond.

Tourism Linkages Network

One such long-term strategy has been the recognition of the deep-rooted linkages that exist between tourism and other productive sectors of the economy. To this end, the Tourism Linkages Network (TLN), established in 2016, positions the tourism sector to increase its consumption of goods and services that can be competitively sourced in Jamaica **thereby including local creators and producers in the supply chain.**

Small and Medium Tourism Enterprises (SMTEs)

The growth and stability of Small and Medium Tourism Enterprises (SMTEs) underpin the survival of the sector. In this regard, Jamaica continues to deliver critical assistance to SMTEs that constitute 80% of the tourism experiences delivered to our visitors.

In support of SMTEs and to stimulate economic activity, over J\$ 3 billion in funding, including loans at concessionary interest rates; training; marketing and management support was made available to these enterprises.

Community Tourism

This support for SMTEs underpin our strategy for community-based tourism which ensures that Jamaicans at all levels can benefit from tourism. Our community-based tourism efforts have received funding support from the World Bank through the Rural Economic Development Initiative (REDI).

Human Capital Development

The Ministry of Tourism has also embarked on a Blue Ocean Strategy which prioritizes human capital development and social protection by creating a tourism workforce that is highly skilled, technologically capable, multi-lingual and culturally competent with internationally recognized certification that is demanded by employers.

For this reason, the Jamaica Centre for Tourism Innovation (JCTI) was established in 2017 as a pathway certification entity to improve stackable credentials of uncertified Jamaican workers who were

competent, thus enabling them to achieve mobility and portability. To this end, we collaborated with the American Culinary Federation and American Hotel and Lodging Educational Institute and have certified more than 20,000 workers in the industry to date.

Beyond training, the Jamaican Government is committed to the welfare of our tourism workers. For this reason, the Ministry of Tourism has partnered with the Ministry of Housing and private housing developers to earmark dedicated units in housing developments for tourism workers to secure adequate and accessible housing.

We also recognized the need for critical labour market reforms in the industry to enable the tourism sector to be more attractive for the required skillsets. As a result, we have established a Task Force dedicated to Tourism Labour Market Reform and to oversee a Labour Market Study to be completed by December 2022 for suitable policy recommendations.

Tourism Workers' Pension Scheme

Mister Chairman,

Jamaica's tourism industry made history in January of this year when it became the first in the world to create a comprehensive pension plan for all tourism workers whether permanent, contract or self-employed, whether craft vendors, tour operators or attraction workers, between the ages of 18 and 59 years. This long-awaited pension scheme assures a financially secure retirement which is expected to benefit some 350,000 direct and indirect tourism workers.

The Tourism Workers Pension Scheme is a defined contributory plan supported by legislation that requires mandatory contributions by both employees and employers. The Jamaican Government has committed J\$1 billion to launch the scheme and will provide immediate payouts to qualified retirees of 65 years and older. This initiative demonstrates our commitment to improving the welfare of industry workers while also developing human capital. It is also our recognition and appreciation of our people as the backbone of our vital tourism industry.

Mister Chairman,

The issue of supply chain disruptions in terms of goods and services and human capital have made the prospects of an equitable recovery challenging. We urge a full debate here at the UN and relevant agencies on the challenges to recovery, with a focus on resilience-building through funding for SIDS who are highly tourism dependent but weakly resourced.

We remain grateful to our partners at the local, national, regional and multilateral levels for their support and commitment which assists with our national efforts. My delegation and I remain available to engage on this important work to leave no one behind.

Thank you.