



General Assembly

Distr.: General
22 July 2019

Original: English

Seventy-fourth session

Item 19 of the provisional agenda*

Sustainable development

Sustainable tourism and sustainable development in Central America

Report of the Secretary-General

Summary

The present report is submitted pursuant to General Assembly resolution [72/214](#) on sustainable tourism and sustainable development in Central America. It provides an update, since the issuance of the previous report on the subject ([A/72/174](#)), on the ongoing efforts of the Central American States to implement programmes to promote and enhance sustainable tourism and sustainable development in its three dimensions.

* [A/74/150](#).



I. Introduction

1. In its resolution [72/214](#) on sustainable tourism and sustainable development in Central America, adopted in December 2017, the General Assembly requested the Secretary-General to submit to the Assembly at its seventy-fourth session a report on the implementation of the resolution. The World Tourism Organization (UNWTO), as the specialized agency responsible for the promotion of responsible, sustainable and universally accessible tourism, assumed the lead role in preparing the present report.
2. The report is aimed at providing an update, since the issuance of the previous report ([A/72/174](#)), on the ongoing efforts of the Central American countries to implement programmes and initiatives to promote sustainable tourism and sustainable development throughout the region. The report is based, among other things, on the responses received from Costa Rica, El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras, Nicaragua and Panama to the request of UNWTO in early 2019 for updates in order to monitor the implementation of resolution [72/214](#).

II. Brief background on developments regarding the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development

3. The international community has been guided since 2015 by the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and the 17 Sustainable Development Goals, which include tourism, as a target in Goal 8 (promote sustained, inclusive and sustainable economic growth, full and productive employment and decent work for all), in Goal 12 (ensure sustainable consumption and production patterns) and in Goal 14 (conserve and sustainably use the oceans, seas and marine resources for sustainable development).
4. Effective follow-up and review of the 2030 Agenda is essential for renewed action and progress in achieving the ambitious and interlinked Goals. At the heart of the process are voluntary national reviews of progress, which have become a critical to efforts to review and implement the 2030 Agenda and the Goals. A total of 111 such reviews have been presented at the high-level political forum on sustainable development since 2016. In Central America, Panama, Honduras, Costa Rica, El Salvador and Guatemala conducted voluntary national reviews in 2017, with all of them making reference to tourism. In 2019, Guatemala will be conducting a voluntary national review for the second time. Costa Rica and Honduras have expressed their commitment to conducting theirs in 2020.
5. The fifteenth meeting of the Conference of the Parties to the Convention on Biological Diversity, to be held in Kunming, China, in 2020, is expected to review the current 10-year Strategic Plan for Biodiversity 2011–2020 and to consider and adopt the post 2020 global biodiversity framework as a long-term approach to mainstreaming biodiversity for the next decade. UNWTO is a member of the informal advisory group on mainstreaming biodiversity, which is tasked with supporting the Executive Secretary and the Bureau of the Conference of the Parties in developing a coherent outline for a long-term approach on mainstreaming for the post 2020 global biodiversity framework.
6. In order to allow government representatives to showcase their ongoing action to accelerate the shift to sustainable consumption and production while contributing to sustainable and resilient societies, UNWTO organized a side event, on the occasion of the high-level political forum on sustainable development, at United Nations Headquarters on 18 July 2018, in collaboration with the Sustainable Tourism

Programme¹ and the Sustainable Buildings and Construction Programme of the One Planet network. The theme of the event was “Tourism and construction: circular economy solutions for Sustainable Development Goal 12”.

7. As an implementation mechanism of Goal 12, the overall goal of the Sustainable Tourism Programme is to ensure that tourism policies and corporate strategies commit to the measurement and monitoring of resource efficiency and greenhouse gas emissions in tourism through knowledge- sharing, dissemination of best practices and research. UNWTO was appointed by the One Planet secretariat of the United Nations Environment Programme to continue to lead the Sustainable Tourism Programme for the period 2019–2022, with France (Ministry for the Ecological and Inclusive Transition) renewed as Co-lead. Currently, the Sustainable Tourism Programme has over 150 members, including 6 organizations from Central America, the Ministries of Environment of Costa Rica and Panama, the National Counsel for Sustainable Development of Honduras, the National Cleaner Production Centre of Nicaragua, the non-profit organization Fundecooperación para el Desarrollo Sostenible, as well as the private sector businesses Península Papagayo and Ecodesarrollo Papagayo SA, both of which are in Costa Rica. The Association of Caribbean States is also a member of the Programme.

8. The UNWTO International Network of Sustainable Tourism Observatories² welcomed the establishment of 4 new observatories between 2018 and the first quarter of 2019, increasing its membership to 26 observatories worldwide, including 2 observatories in the Central America region: one in Panama City and the other in La Antigua Guatemala. The concerted efforts by the national authorities, in conjunction with the private sector, to establish, develop and support these observatories in monitoring the development of tourism at the destination level, are seen as important strides towards achieving sustainability, which will provide timely information for evidence-based policies and decision-making. Sustaining economic growth and improving the profitability and competitiveness of the sector, calls for adaptability in the face of new and emerging challenges, increasing quality, diversifying demand through new and innovative tourism products and accelerating the digital transformation of the sector. Non-traditional data are being tested in different destinations and brings to light new possibilities for timely decision-making related to sustainability.

A. Importance of tourism to Central American economies

9. On the basis of data reported in the January 2019 issue of the UNWTO *World Tourism Barometer*, international tourist arrivals (overnight visitors) grew 6 per cent in 2018, compared with the previous year, to reach 1.4 billion. The Americas (an increase of 3 per cent) welcomed 217 million international arrivals in 2018, with mixed results across destinations within the region. The largest increase in such arrivals was experienced in North America (an increase of 4 per cent), followed by South America (an increase of 3 per cent), while a 2 per cent decrease was experienced both in Central America and the Caribbean, with very mixed results across destinations, reflecting the impacts on the latter of Hurricane Irma and Hurricane Maria, both of which occurred in September 2017.

10. Nevertheless, during the first quarter of 2019 there was a 3 per cent increase in international tourist arrivals in the Americas, compared with the same period in 2018. The Caribbean (an increase of 17 per cent) rebounded strongly during the same period from the impact of Hurricane Irma and Hurricane Maria that had affected the region

¹ See <http://sdt.unwto.org/oneplanet-stp>.

² See <http://insto.unwto.org/>.

in late 2017. Central America (an increase of 7 per cent) also showed growth above the regional average with positive results in all destinations that had available data. Panama experienced an increase in arrivals after several years of negative results, with growth in January particularly strong thanks to the celebration of World Youth Day 2019.

11. The tourism sector has become the main economic activity for many of the countries in the region, creating much-needed job opportunities and bringing in significant income and foreign exchange earnings. For many economies in the region, receipts represent an essential source of foreign revenues that help to reduce trade deficits, promote employment and create development opportunities. Receipts from tourism have grown from \$12.6 billion in 2017 to \$12.8 billion in 2018.

B. Progress towards integrating sustainability into tourism policies

12. Recent research by UNWTO³ indicates that while all national tourism policies reviewed refer to sustainability as part of their objectives or vision, not all of them embrace sustainability as a cross-cutting issue for the development of tourism. Findings also show that countries that place tourism higher in the hierarchy of their administrations have, in most cases, implemented policies with stronger commitments to sustainability, as well as an increased likelihood of identifying resource efficiency as a thematic area and more references to sustainable consumption and production impact areas,⁴ compared with the policies of countries that place tourism lower in their administrations.

13. Interministerial coordination mechanisms for the implementation of national tourism policies also appear to be more common in countries that place tourism higher in the hierarchy of their administrations. This is the case in Guatemala for example, where an interministerial coordination mechanism, the multisectoral round table of sustainable tourism, has been established to support the implementation of the master plan for sustainable tourism, 2015–2025, which will, in turn contribute to the implementation of the national policy for the sustainable tourism development of Guatemala, 2012–2022, which is a national commitment in the context of competitive development.

14. The overall sample for the research study included the six Central American countries that are also contributors to present report. According to the findings, as a region, the Americas have the largest number of national tourism administrations in ministerial structures exclusively devoted to tourism. In fact, since the emergence of such types of national administrations in the late 1970s, the highest emergence of ministries of tourism or equivalent bodies has been registered in the Americas.

C. Country-level experiences in the elaboration, monitoring and implementation of national tourism plans: lessons learned

15. The planning exercise for the national tourism plan of Costa Rica, 2017–2021, was generated through private-public participation. Tourism in Costa Rica has been built around a very particular model of development that has facilitated positioning and recognition of its “tourism brand”, promoting the integration of environmental,

³ World Tourism Organization (UNWTO) and United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP), *Baseline Report on the Integration of Sustainable Consumption and Production Patterns into Tourism Policies* (Madrid, UNWTO, 2019).

⁴ Biodiversity protection and sustainable land use; energy efficiency; reduction of greenhouse gas emissions; waste reduction; and water use efficiency.

social and cultural aspects into the design and marketing of authentic tourism products.

16. Several aspects of the planning process in Costa Rica were improved in order to aim beyond the sustainable development of tourism towards the creation of authentic experiences. The planning methodology was systematically expanded, covering the three dimensions of sustainability and connecting them through a monitoring system that links the development of tourism to social progress and environmental impacts, including in the areas of basic human needs, the foundations of well-being and opportunities arising from tourism.

17. The Guatemalan master plan for sustainable tourism, 2015–2025, was developed through consensus-building and inclusive participation. For its follow-up and implementation, the keys to success have been the joint interinstitutional and intersectoral work carried out through different dialogue spaces, led and coordinated by the Guatemala Institute of Tourism. Public-private partnerships, as well as coordination with communities and municipal and local authorities and actors, are also seen as significantly important.

18. The national agreement for the development of a competitive and sustainable Guatemala, 2018–2032, signed on the occasion of World Tourism Day in 2018, addresses issues such as elaborating public policies for the development and management of sustainable tourism; awareness-raising of the importance of tourism as one of the strategic sectors for the socioeconomic development of the country; promoting regulatory changes to the legal framework through reforms to the Organic Law of the Guatemala Institute of Tourism; and adopting a law for the development and promotion of investment in tourism.

19. The master plan of sustainable tourism development of Panama, 2007–2020, has served as a comprehensive strategic framework for development of the country's tourism sector. The period of implementation of the master plan, coming to an end, having achieved successful completion rates. In April 2018, a process to revise the plan was initiated in order to update it to 2025 and align it with the Goals, identifying new projects and actions that can contribute to the comprehensive and sustainable development of tourism in Panama.

20. The 2017 sustainable tourism standard of Panama is aimed at establishing minimum sustainability parameters in its three dimensions – economic, environmental and social – for tourism service providers to increase their competitiveness. With regard to progress made in implementing the current master plan, there is consensus in the sector on the need to respect the natural environment, as well as an understanding of the importance of developing a baseline and of complying with agreed indicators, which was identified as one the weaknesses of the current plan.

21. In recent years, Nicaragua has consolidated its tourism destination-positioning strategy by strengthening and diversifying its products at the national, regional and international levels. It has also implemented actions with stakeholders to strengthen and develop human talent and technical support, in accordance with the national human development plan, 2018–2021, and the national plan for sustainable tourism development, 2011–2020. The main lessons learned on implementation include the need for coordination and for sharing of responsibilities among the major actors, including the public and private sectors and academia, as well as the need to involve local communities at the tourist destinations.

22. The national tourism strategy of Nicaragua, 2019–2023, currently awaiting approval, is part of the necessary update of the national plan for sustainable tourism development of Nicaragua, 2011–2020. The proposed strategy is based on a

methodological process that serves to review the findings of studies and shared experiences on core subjects and tourism trends, which were discussed with national stakeholders in round tables at the territorial and national level.

23. The national tourism plan of El Salvador, 2014–2019, is aimed at featuring El Salvador as an attractive destination, promoting sustainable tourism at the national and international levels, highlighting its culture, traditions and customs, and positioning tourism as an engine of economic development, social inclusion and poverty alleviation. Consultations, focus groups and forums were held to develop the plan and involved the participation of civil and trade union organizations, academia and government institutions.

24. The national tourism plan includes five-year goals that have made it possible to measure progress in the development of tourism in the country and bolster the promotion of El Salvador as a new and attractive destination for sustainable tourism investment. Goals include increasing the contribution of tourism to gross domestic product (GDP), increasing revenues during the five-year period and increasing employment in the tourism sector. Such data are reflected in the annual reports of the Ministry of Tourism and its related institutions, the Salvadorean Corporation of Tourism and the Salvadorean Institute of Tourism. There are also goals linked to the programme “Living towns” (“Pueblos vivos”) as a national tourism brand related to Salvadoreans living abroad through the “Live your Country” (“Vive tu país”) programme.

25. Through the national sustainable tourism strategy of Honduras, 2006–2021, experience has been gained in integrating the development of sustainable tourism with the conservation of natural resources of high ecological and touristic value, such as broadleaf and conifer forests, mangrove forests, Lake Yojoa, lagoons, coastal lagoons, ponds and rivers, coral reefs and beaches. In addition, regulations and manuals have been developed for the implementation of environmental project assessments and certification systems for providers of environmental services, in order to increase the competitiveness of the sector and promote the development of sustainable tourism.

III. Recent developments and progress at the national level

A. Poverty reduction, protection of the environment and development through tourism

26. Data on the growth of tourism in Costa Rica reflect a success story from the perspective of two indicators: the foreign income that tourism contributes to the economy of the country and job creation. According to Tourism Satellite Account calculations used for the first time in the country in 2018, data up to 2016 show the link between supply and demand in tourism activities and estimates shows the economic contribution of tourism to the country and how the measurement of the direct effect, an increase of 6.3 per cent, will increase to 8.2 per cent when considering the indirect effect. In terms of employment, 211,213 people were employed in tourism in 2016, which represents 8.8 per cent of total employment.

27. Apart from those results, there has been progress in Costa Rica with regard to the development of an innovative social progress index for tourism destinations, which is a tool to measure and understand well-being as a means of improving the way in which public-private agendas are set to promote social progress and inclusive and sustainable economic growth. The index serves as the first comprehensive expansion of measurement to cover 12 thematic components of social progress through a set of 53 indicators.

28. In Honduras, new initiatives were launched to generate jobs, in particular local jobs, aimed at boosting employment as well as increasing the numbers of visitors and tourism by between 3 and 8 per cent per year. In the period 2015–2018, 233,670 jobs were created directly through tourism.

29. Since 2016, tourism has been considered a presidential priority for Guatemala, which has allowed it to be prioritized at the highest level, with a corresponding impact on the sustainable development of the sector. The Guatemala Institute of Tourism funds a management system to monitor the quality and sustainability of tourism companies, parks and archaeological sites, which allows for the development of best practices and helps to reduce operating expenditures and consumption levels. Decree 19-2018 was adopted to approve the reform to the law that promotes domestic tourism, which has decreased the impact of the seasonality of tourism, thereby generating a greater economic impact for destinations.

30. Through the “Impulsa” programme of the Guatemala Institute of Tourism, Guatemala has strengthened and promoted sustainable tourism projects in protected areas. The programme was created in 2015 with the main objective of enhancing the capacities for growth of entrepreneurs and small and medium-sized enterprises through specialized advice, networking and opportunities for accessing seed capital. Twenty entrepreneurs and companies have been selected to date, with 40 projects of entrepreneurs, small and medium-sized enterprises or protected areas expected to be added for the 2018 and 2019 editions (years of the programme). The programme has resulted in significant growth in Guatemala in 2018, more than 95 million quetzales in reported sales, the creation of 106 direct jobs, an average growth rate of 62 per cent compared with 2017, improved living conditions for more than 8,000 people and 187 hectares of protected forests. In addition, the Institute trained 8,166 people in 2018 on tourism issues, and the Technical Institute for Training and Productivity trained 29,747 people on issues related to tourism.

31. A review of sustainable tourism in El Salvador made it possible to create a database that will serve to monitor the social impact of tourism in the country and to provide essential input for the development of the national tourism policy. In addition, through the El Salvador Tourism Corporation, reports are prepared on Goal indicators, in particular with regard to Goal 8, on tourism’s contribution to GDP, employment and international tourism expenditure. A matrix has been completed on follow-up to public policy interventions associated with the Goals.

32. According to the Salvadorean Institute of Social Security, in 2018 there were 856,497 active contributing workers, out of which 102,862 were estimated to have been employed in the tourism sector. The Ministry of Tourism has also developed a series of plans, programmes and projects to generate employment and income for disadvantaged groups, such as women, young people and rural and indigenous communities in order to improve their technical, operational and management skills with regard to tourism initiatives. Activities include proposals for staff training, assistance in the managing, organizing and developing manuals, and proposals for improving or diversifying tourism services.

33. The “Living towns” programme of El Salvador is aimed at fostering partnerships with local authorities, for example, on local institutional capacities, infrastructure and territorial brands. The strategy has resulted in the greater involvement of local governments, which have assumed an increasingly active role in the development and management of various aspects of tourism, in accordance with decentralization trends, expanding the participation of municipalities, from 56 in 2009 to 253 in 2017, representing more than 95 per cent of municipalities nationwide.

34. Sustained economic growth in Nicaragua has been accompanied by significant progress in terms of social indicators. Findings of the living standards measurement

survey, carried out in October 2016, highlight that, compared with 2014, overall poverty went from 29.6 per cent to 24.9 per cent, while extreme poverty went from 8.3 to 6.9 per cent, and the inequality coefficient improved from 0.38 to 0.33. Regarding the impact on labour, 48,152 direct jobs were generated in 2014 and 52,474 in 2018. Of the total employment generated, 92.7 per cent resulted from micro-, small and medium-sized tourism enterprises.

35. Panama has made important strides over recent years with regard to governance in at least five priority destinations, where tourism has been developed in accordance with a participatory approach. Furthermore, in August 2018, the tourism promotion fund was regulated as a private-public entity assuming responsibility for promoting tourism at the international level and increasing the creation of tourism products, thereby providing an improved experience for visitors and redistributing national tourism-generated revenues.

B. Conservation and management of natural and cultural heritage, including ecosystems and biodiversity

36. Central America is a region of natural resources. Its rich biodiversity provides invaluable benefits to its populations and to its economies. Countries are improving their institutional and policy frameworks, and strategies and action plans are being revised and adopted.

37. The green tourism action plan of Panama, 2016–2026, is focused on strengthening ecotourism in protected areas. In addition, Resolution No. 49, by which technical standard No. 510-2017 of the Directorate-General for Industrial Standards and Technology and the Panama Commission for Industrial and Technical Standards on tourism sustainability standards was approved, serves the purpose of establishing minimum sustainability parameters on the economic, environmental and social dimensions of tourism in order to increase the competitiveness of tourism service provider. Criteria and indicators on responsible management, quality control, safety, natural and cultural heritage, waste, water, energy, pollution and the protection of ecosystems, are addressed in the standard. In October 2018, Panama announced the creation of a commission to formulate, develop and monitor a national policy on oceans.

38. The Ministry of Natural Resources and Environment of Nicaragua developed a pilot initiative for four municipalities located in the dry corridor of the country (Juigalpa, Murra, San Ramon, San Juan de Limay) aimed at increasing their resilience to climate change. The initiative is aimed at protecting sources of water through technical assistance, training and environmental incentives provided to 354 local actors who had implemented environmental restoration systems. As a result, 98 per cent of environmental restoration systems improved vegetation coverage by 46 per cent on average over an area of 2,496.45 ha, which had a positive impact on the visual quality of the landscape and on the development of ecotourism in the four municipalities.

39. Protected areas are a priority for the management and conservation of biodiversity in Nicaragua and for the development of low-impact tourism, which has promoted the conservation of cultural and natural heritage, and the inclusion of indigenous and local communities in its planning, development and operation, in particular in the protected areas of the Caribbean coast. The Nicaragua Institute of Tourism has been working with tourism service providers to implement good practices. Success stories include the Puesta del Sol Association on Ometepe island, Rivas, which is a community-based rural tourism initiative that has been in operation for 11 years and helps families to engage in traditional agricultural activities,

developing tourism as an alternative means of economic and community development with a focus on sustainability and environmental preservation.

40. The project on incorporating biodiversity management in fishing and tourism activities in coastal marine ecosystems, 2012–2015, one of the projects driven by the Ministry of Tourism of El Salvador, is aimed at improving biodiversity of global significance in coastal and marine areas and has impacted the entire coastal area of the country, including 32 coastal townships marine areas. Other relevant projects focus on tourism development in rural and natural areas and the development of community-based rural tourism in indigenous communities for jobs and income-generation.

41. The Guatemala Institute of Tourism and the National Council of Protected Areas of Guatemala manage joint projects to conserve protected areas, natural monuments and the country's biodiversity. In addition, a system is in place to monitor quality and sustainability management both for tourism companies and for parks and archaeological sites. Funded by the Institute, the system allows for the development of best practices on issues of quality and sustainability, helping stakeholders to reduce their operating expenditures and levels of consumption.

42. In Honduras, important advances have taken place in efforts to implement the national ecotourism strategy and management plan and reach the 2021 long-term objectives, with 25 protected areas in 2018 out of the overall goal of 30 to be reached in 2021. Other examples include the following: 41 of the 45 joint private-public sector projects have been carried out; 7 of the 10 mountain guide associations have included minority ethnic groups and local communities as participants; five out of seven archaeological parks and cultural monuments have a management plan; and four of seven archaeological parks and cultural monuments have been protected under a public use plan.

43. In 2018, Honduras adopted a strategic framework for sustainable consumption and production in order to increase the competitiveness and productivity of the priority economic sectors of the country, while ensuring the protection of the environment and better use of resources, resilience to climate change and the generation of opportunities for Honduran society. The prioritized sectors included agrifood, construction and tourism. The cross-cutting drivers for sustainable consumption and production included sustainable lifestyles, cities, procurement and micro-, small and medium-sized enterprises. UNEP and the National Council for Sustainable Development supported the development of the national framework.

44. Costa Rica attaches great importance to its protected wildlife areas. The existence of national parks, wildlife refuges and marine areas along with other management categories represent 166 protected wildlife areas, with a surface of 1,354 ha covering 26.55 per cent of the national territory. The marine protected area is approximately 50 per cent of the total territorial waters of Costa Rica. There are more than 120 reserves affiliated with the Costa Rican network of private natural reserves that protect 2.1 per cent of the national territory.

45. In 2018, the national policy for sustainable consumption and production, 2018–2030, was adopted by the Ministry of Environment and Energy, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Culture and the Ministry of Planning and Economic Policy as the outcome of a participatory process with various key stakeholders. The policy includes an assessment of the situation of sustainable consumption and production in Costa Rica, where gaps have been identified and achievements highlighted. The main components of the policy are sustainable agri-food systems, sustainable tourism, sustainable lifestyles, sustainable construction and sustainable public procurement.

C. Policy synergies and trade-offs (environment, health, transport) in national policies and strategies on climate change

46. The “Ecological blue flag” programme of Honduras is aimed at establishing local committees in order to foster conservation and development in order to protect natural resources and the implement actions to address climate change. The initiative is carried out by a national Committee made up of private and public sector representatives. Currently, there are approximately 10 local committees that have already begun to implement actions to address climate change and best practices in the tourism sector. The initiative also has different categories that are focused on beaches, educational establishments, natural areas and communities.

47. The national adaptation plan of Costa Rica was officially adopted in 2018 and is aligned with the national tourism development plan. Synergies are taking place and inter-sectorial work is being carried out in order to achieve the objectives and goals set for 2030. Costa Rica also has decarbonization plan for the period 2018–2050 and, although the transition to a low-carbon economy requires a profound transformation, Costa Rica has achieved major advances in previous decades, including a 95 per cent emissions-free electric network and very low rates of deforestation, with forest coverage exceeding 52 per cent of the territory. Costa Rica seeks to inspire actors at all levels to go beyond the norm and be part of this positive transformation.

48. The national strategy of Costa Rica to minimize single-use plastics in the period 2017–2021 is another important initiative of the Government that is aimed, with the support of the United Nations Development Programme, at stimulating collective and voluntary action from the public and private sectors, and from civil society, and at empowering the productive sector and Costa Rican society to replace single-use gaskets, utensils and packaging made with non-renewable or non-compostable materials or from petroleum derivatives with renewable and compostable products. In line with its 2016–2021 plan for integrated waste management, Costa Rica has established a national recycling strategy, which in its most broad and inclusive sense involves separating and recovering waste and waste valorization.

49. In its national legal framework, Guatemala has established the reduction of greenhouse gas emissions as a priority. In Decree 7-2013, Guatemala defines the legal framework of climate change in the country and calls for the establishment of an energy growth plan based on renewable resources and for promoting efficiency and energy savings. It also provides for a mandate to compensate for the emissions produced by burning fossil fuel and to reduce emissions by changes in land use.

50. One of the most relevant actions in terms of waste management carried out in Guatemala originated at the local level, including in various villages in the Department of Sololá and in La Antigua Guatemala, Department of Sacatepéquez, which have approved regulations on prohibiting the use of plastic and promoting the use of ancestral practices for packing products. In addition, “Cleanathon” campaigns aimed at recycling, clean-up and embellishment efforts have been carried out in local communities and are among the most common voluntary activities.

51. The national tourism plan of El Salvador establishes specific lines of action to minimize environmental impacts in the following areas: greenhouse emissions; protected areas; energy and water consumption; and the development of enterprises in ecological sectors. The country also has a regulatory framework involving associated institutions and other regulatory bodies such as the Ministry of Environment and Natural Resources to ensure compliance with the regulations.

52. The Ministry of Tourism of El Salvador participates actively in the Cabinet of Environmental Sustainability, the National Council on Environmental Sustainability

and Vulnerability and other inter-agency entities such as the Intersectoral Health Commission. In that regard, actions have included: coordination to promote sustainable consumption and production initiatives; awareness-raising efforts; the establishment of a committee on energy efficiency; and the recycling of paper. In addition, a series of actions have been carried out jointly with related institutions, such as the Salvadorean Corporation of Tourism and the Salvadorean Institute of Tourism, within the framework of the national policy on tourism.

53. Nicaragua currently implements a national strategy aligned with the mechanism on reducing emissions from deforestation and forest degradation in developing countries, the goal of which is to reduce the deforestation rate by 50 per cent by 2040, in accordance with a proposals on improving intensive production systems, employment and the preservation of biodiversity through synergies and agreements. With regard to forests, Nicaragua aims at reducing approximately 11 million tons of carbon dioxide emissions and will receive incentives in return that amount to \$55 million over five years. With regard to energy, the Government has increased the production of renewable energy from 25 per cent in 2007 to 46.6 per cent in 2018.

54. Nicaragua has implemented a national policy of mitigation and adaptation to climate change, with work carried out on disaster risk reduction and adaptation to climate change through public investment. It also has a national system to prevent, mitigate and respond to disaster involving State institutions. The country is currently Co-Chair of the Green Climate Fund, which carries out climate change activities to support adaptation and mitigation, and is working to promote replenishment of the Fund and sustainable development, with a focus on restoration, involving the rural population in such efforts.

55. The Nicaragua Institute of Tourism has carried out a “bond” programme through its tourism sector, whereby bonds are delivered for best practices by local actors making use of environmentally friendly technologies in their establishments. The programme was implemented in two phases, in 2016 and 2017, and 2,568 bonds were delivered, of which 1,417 were for solar panels and 93 were for eco-stoves. In addition, campaigns have been carried out in conjunction with the national utility company to promote the efficient use of water, as well as related measures on conserving and preserving water. These efforts are carried out primarily in the six resorts managed by the Institute.

56. Panama has adapted fishing and tourism to climate change since the waters of the Gulf of Montijo are becoming warmer and are altering the dynamics of the traditional fishing communities in the area. At the same time, the erosion of the coasts is forcing tourists to opt for other beaches. For this reason, fishing communities and tourism entrepreneurs, who are being affected by climate change, are looking for solutions that enable them to fight against the impacts of this phenomenon on their livelihoods and to adapt to the new realities of their environment. A strategy identified in this regard is to diversify tourism products and introduce other experiences for tourists, such as viewing sea turtle nesting activity, watching birds in the Gulf of Montijo and learning about the biodiversity and history of Coiba National Park.

IV. Regional efforts and initiatives of relevance to sustainable tourism

57. One of the fundamental objectives of the Central American Integration System is to identify, establish and maintain coordination and specific actions for the preservation of the environment through responsible stewardship in harmony with nature and sustainable development. The system’s regional strategic agenda is in line with the 2030 Agenda and the 17 Goals.

58. The Integrated Central American Quality and Sustainability System implemented by the Secretariat of Central American Tourism Integration serves as a regional tourism quality seal and is a highly useful tool for promoting tourism, which explains why tourism occupies a prominent place among the economic sectors best positioned to advance the sustainability agenda.⁵ The Integrated Central American Quality and Sustainability System, implemented in Honduras by the Honduras Institute of Tourism, involves providing qualified audits and advice to tourism companies. Once the System verifies that a company meets certain guidelines and criteria, the company receives certification that helps them to compete in an increasingly demanding market. By 2017, there were 34 certified tourism companies. The implementation of the System has increased the awareness of entrepreneurs of sustainability issues, improving their competitiveness and the quality of the tourism services provided in such areas as accommodation, food, tour operators and car rentals, and, positioning Honduras as well as the other Central American countries as sustainable and attractive tourism destinations.

59. The Central American Tourism Council, a body of the Central American Integration System composed ministers of tourism from the region, is aimed at facilitating and promoting action for the development of tourism in the region. Until June 2019, Guatemala served as the pro tempore president of the Council, which tracks, for the ministries of tourism in the region, projects that are related to sustainability, quality, innovation, connectivity and security and that have an impact on the development of the tourism sector in the region.

60. The Organization of the Mayan World, which comprises Belize, El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras and Mexico, intends to ensure the development of sustainable tourism in countries that are inheritors of the Mayan culture. It intends to attract multi-destination tourism and promote quality tourism in each member country. Guatemala has the pro tempore presidency of the Organization of the Mayan World for the period 2018–2020.

61. The Association of Caribbean States promotes consultation, cooperation and concerted action for all Central American countries and seeks to strengthen and integrate the countries of the Caribbean region, addressing common areas of interest and concern that include the preservation of the Sea, sustainable tourism, trade, natural disasters and transport.

62. Nicaragua, as a member of the Association, has participated since 2015 with the Corn Islands and Ometepe Island destinations for the implementation of indicators for the Sustainable Tourism Zone of the Caribbean. Efforts include a pilot project to implement a virtual tool that will allow progress to be made in the validation of indicators to assess the destination. Nicaragua has also participated in the Sustainable Destination Alliance for the Americas – a multisectoral partnership – with Ometepe Island as the pilot destination to start a diagnosis process and action agenda to improve the tourism management and the competitiveness of 30 destinations in Central America and the Caribbean in 2017.

63. The Regional Action Group of the Americas for the Prevention of Sexual Exploitation of Children in Travel and Tourism promotes responsible tourism in which human rights are respected. Costa Rica, Guatemala, Honduras and Nicaragua participate in this initiative, with Guatemala hosting the eleventh meeting of Group, which was held in November 2018.

⁵ World Tourism Organization and Organization of American States, *Tourism and the Sustainable Development Goals: Good Practices in the Americas* (Madrid, UNWTO, 2018).

V. Conclusions and recommendations

64. Since the adoption of resolution [72/214](#) in 2017, countries in the region have strengthened efforts to promote sustainable tourism and sustainable development, as well as enhanced inclusiveness and coordination among all stakeholders. Countries have also highlighted the key role that sustainable tourism plays in achieving the Goals.

65. The progress reported by the countries in the region on the development and practical implementation of tourism strategies and policies at the national level underlines the key importance of linking the sustainability agenda with national planning, sectoral strategies and public consultations as a means for public policy coherence. It also highlights the increased interest among countries for timely measurement and monitoring of tourism at destinations in order to support evidence-based tourism policies and ensure sustainable and inclusive growth.

66. As reported by the Member States, and also reflected in most of the voluntary national reviews from the region, the involvement of all levels of government, including local, and horizontal coordination are critical for the achievement of the sustainability agenda. This is particularly important for the tourism sector since the development of tourism is a cross-cutting area and involves a range of policy actions that often fall under the responsibility of various government institutions and ministries.

67. The tourism sector in the region has shown progress in addressing environmental issues, including climate change. Tourism is also contributing to fighting poverty through the creation of jobs and entrepreneurship opportunities, in particular benefitting youth, women, indigenous and disadvantaged communities. Strengthening such progress through appropriate policies and financial support within a broader framework of sustainable development policies is vital.

68. The most notable regional efforts include initiatives to promote the sustainable development of tourism in the framework of support provided to regional integration through improving destination management, advancing a multi-destination marketing strategy and measuring results based on defined and actionable targets. It is therefore essential to continue consolidating recent regional advances.

69. Addressing the need for improved monitoring of the development impacts of tourism requires rethinking and changing traditional practices in order to incorporate multiple data sources to provide public administrations and the tourism sector with the most updated intelligence on tourism. Progress is being achieved through the UNWTO International Network of Sustainable Tourism Observatories, which is focused on continuously monitoring the impacts of tourism, tackling the three dimensions of sustainability, strengthening evidence-based decision-making and creating a culture of continuous and timely monitoring and measurement. Governments and other stakeholders of the region are invited to join the initiative.

70. The positive role of tourism in the conservation of biodiversity and in fighting climate change provides a further argument to enhance the environmental components of tourism policies and to better utilize the potential of tourism as an enabling agent of change. Upcoming global milestones, such as the 2019 high-level political forum on sustainable development, and the seventy-fourth session of the General Assembly, the post-2020 global biodiversity agenda,

the climate summit called for by the Secretary-General and the Climate Change Conference to be held in Santiago, within the context of the twenty-fifth session of the Conference of the Parties to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change, present key opportunities that Central American countries could exploit or capitalize upon.

71. Governments, the tourism sector and relevant organizations in the region are encouraged to join the Sustainable Tourism Programme of the One Planet network, a collaborative platform bringing together and scaling-up existing initiatives and partnerships, in order to accelerate the shift to sustainable consumption and production patterns in the tourism sector.
