

REGIONAL TOURISM AND HEALTH STAKEHOLDERS WORKSHOP

October 4-5, 2017, InterContinental at Doral Miami, Miami Florida

Remarks by

MR. FRANK COMITO, CHTA

Good morning Dr. Indar, Dr. Hospedales and our supporters and partners, including the CARPHA team, the IDB and CTO. On behalf of the CHTA and our 32-member federation of national hotel and tourism associations and our volunteer President Karolin Troubetzkoy and business leadership, I'd like to thank CARPHA and its supporters from bringing us together.

During this most difficult time, when many in our region are lifting themselves out of the tremendous hardship and damage which the recent hurricanes have wrought, the need for coordination, cooperation and collaboration by all regional stakeholders has never been more apparent. And while we are seeing this take shape, it remains to be seen in the coming weeks and months the extent to which we will respond in the necessary collaborative fashion. Indeed, the all-around economic, social and physical health of the affected destinations is at stake and by extension so too is that of our Caribbean family. In an ideal situation, we should eventually emerge from a crisis stronger and better than we were before it struck.

Crisis presents us with opportunity, as is often said. We've seen that on the health front repeatedly, most recently when faced with the challenges of the Zika crisis. There are many lessons to be learned from how, with the guidance and leadership of CARPHA, the region's public and private sectors, primarily through CTO and CHTA, came together, shared information, trained our businesses and communities, collaborated, and communicated both amongst ourselves and to the broader public – all around the common goal to mitigate the impact of a potential humanitarian and economic crisis.

As we engage over the next two days, lessons of how we've worked well, and how we can work better together can inform and guide our deliberations. CARPHA is to be commended for strengthening the ties and communications amongst local health officials, regional and local public and private sector tourism organizations, and the multi-laterals and other national health entities. Our deliberations over the next two days will help guide our sectors regarding their roles – in monitoring and responding to health incidents, sharing information amongst ourselves, in supporting the development and adoption of standards and protocols, and in conducting training and providing our visitors, our public, and our employees with important information to help protect their health.

In the tourism industry we are fond of saying that 'tourism is everyone's business' and in the Caribbean, that cannot ring truer. With nearly 30 million annual stopover or overnight visitors and over 22 million visitors via cruise ships, it's the largest generator of revenue to Governments, the region's largest employer, and the biggest catalyst for locally owned businesses. And it's only forecasted to continue to grow, on average around 3 percent annually.

Our region has been blessed with being located in the most beautiful place on earth. With that gift, we've a responsibility to caretake and protect it, first for ourselves, and secondly, so that the world can enjoy it. If we do that, and do it better, the benefits of this wonderful business we call tourism can only grow.

The correlation between protecting both our physical and economic health is evident. If we take care of it, it will take care of us.

As the CHTA did during last year's zika threat, and as we've done recently during the hurricanes, we are committed to playing our part in this process and are most appreciative to CARPHA for their leadership in this essential arena. Wishing each of us an enlightening and productive workshop. Thank you.