

**Discurso del Secretario General del SICA, Embajador Aníbal Quiñónez, en ocasión del XLVI
Reunión Anual de la comisión de las Américas de la OMT**

I consider that President Saca was very clear this morning with his accurate and concrete reference to the achievements and current status of the Central American integration. I'll try to say something about it, but first of all, I want to welcome you to Central America, to this Republic of El Salvador home to the General Secretariat of the Central American Integration System and tell everyone that it is a privilege to work in this integration process. We are trying to sell a region to the world, the Central American region; we are not trying to sell individual countries. We want to be a tourist destination as a region, and I think that the statistical estimates confirm the wish of the heads of state and government of Central America and their continued support to tourism. The integration process has been strengthened by the genuine commitment of the Central American heads of state and government to regional democracy, development, peace and liberty.

This express resolve is shown in the institutional scenario through the implementation of regional policies on fishing, tourism, food and nutrition, among others; implementation of a set of measures to guarantee citizen security; plans to create the regional comptrollership of our integration system and establish a single budget for the institutions as well as the creation of a regional unit to negotiate with Europe the partnership agreement; a free trade zone; and a customs union zone.

It is worth mentioning that the 15th European Union-Central America Mixed Commission held last April in Guatemala City, agreed to the prompt launch of the negotiations of a Partnership Agreement between the European Union and Central America, which includes a Free Trade Agreement. This decision places the Central American region in a very special position in recognition of the achievements of our integration process.

It is also pertinent to say that in Vienna, in May 2006, the Regional Cooperation Alignment and Harmonization Forum was aimed at presenting the Central America's interest on the promotion of a better organization of the cooperation for improvement and transparency of the use of resources, higher impact and better results in their execution.

In the last two years, the contributions concerning the Framework Treaty on Democratic Security in Central America and the Regional Security Model were recognized, confirmed and revised.

As it can be noted, the intelligent and focused response to the regional security issues that our heads of state and government are promoting promises significant improvement in the security of our countries. Initiatives such as the observatory on violence, improvement in the situation of youths at risk or in conflict with the law, the permanent combat against drug trafficking and illicit traffic in small arms and light weapons, and strengthening of the dialogues on security held with Mexico and the United States, are headed towards the achievement of a more peaceful climate in our region.

With regard to the free transit of persons, Guatemala, Honduras, El Salvador and Nicaragua, approved the single visa and the Central American passport. Border fees and entry requirements such as the immigration card have been eliminated and will undoubtedly strengthen the development of the tourism sector.

Concerning the air traffic policy, the signing of an agreement among Guatemala, El Salvador, Honduras and Nicaragua, with the purpose of promoting tourism, cultural, economic and trade development, is an accomplishment that facilitates the air traffic services among the signatory countries and the treatment of international flights as domestic flights. This instrument will contribute to improve the supply, facilities and itineraries at competitive costs to promote interregional tourism and the visit of foreign citizens to Central America.

The strengthening of the tourism sector and its position as a strategic sector for the economic and sustainable social development of the Central American countries is the result of the presidential mandates that have included tourism in the state policies given its important contribution to the fight against poverty, employment generation and subsequent improvement of the quality of life of the Central American population.

Dear friends,

To give you an example of the tourism sector dynamism in Central America, in 2006, our region received the visit of 6.9 million tourists added to a total of 2.2 million day-trippers including cruise ship passengers, which generated a total revenues for 5.7 billion dollars and a total 1.2 million jobs.

It is important to point out that in the last 4 years the tourism activity has experienced an average annual increase of 11%. Therefore, the tourism sector is a determining factor of the regional economic growth. Of the total tourists in 2006, 45.64% corresponded to intraregional tourists, thus promoting cultural exchange and cultural identity strengthening and highlighting the historical values and heritage of our people.

It is indisputable that tourism is one of the sectors that play a significant role in the integration process. This sector has unified regional policies and strategies with joint vision and actions between the private and the public sector. In this context, it is important to mention the common brand and identity as the basis for world promotion and positioning strategy.

As part of this strategy, we have created the Central American Tourism Agency (CATA) with headquarters in Madrid. The establishment and operation of this joint office is evidence of the level of tourism integration and the need to be more competitive and successful in the target markets such as the United Kingdom, Spain, Italy, Germany and France, joining resources, visions and actions in one sole purpose.

Recently, the General Secretariat signed an agreement with the government of Spain to grant the Agency the same recognition and status granted to international organizations, which will strengthen the promotion, marketing and public relations actions implemented by the Agency.

Our tourism sector has a strategic sustainable development plan with the permanent support and execution of the Tourism Directorate of the General Secretariat. At the same time, the Technical Secretariat of the Central American Tourism Council is consolidating a regional geographic tourism system as sectorial planning instrument.

We also have the tourism multiproduct concept promoted by several efforts, particularly 3 cultural tourism routes: the World Heritage Route, the Colonial and Volcanoes Route and the Caribbean

Route, with the support of the Spanish Cooperation Agency, AECI, and the PAIRCA Program with funds from the European Union. The rural tourism network, which allows the combination of natural resources and cultural heritage as a regional multiproduct, is being promoted as well. Additionally, the regional awareness program has been recently launched by the Secretariat to make Central American citizens identify with the region called Central America and feel proud of belonging to the region.

There is also a Regional Tourism Training Plan jointly defined by the private and the public sector with the support of the government of Spain through the AECI. This plan includes the implementation of tourism planning and management and tourism quality programs with emphasis on the micro, small and medium enterprise of the member countries, the formulation of investment problems as well as the harmonization of regional tourism statistics, the Colonial and Volcanoes Route signage project, the development of the web portal, and institutional strengthening.

The above has resulted in the implementation of a tourism culture program aimed at the destinations of each country through awareness campaigns, training of trainers that spread the advantages and benefits of tourism and the role of the local players for a sustainable and quality tourism that respects the environment and the cultural heritage.

We have prepared the regional manual as instrument to support the new Central American tourism culture being promoted. On the other hand, the progress of the tourism satellite account of each country has been strengthened with WTO's support. It will allow measuring the impacts and implication of tourism on the economic and social arena.

Within the same spirit, we are implementing an innovative communication program between the private and the public sector in order to contribute to overcome the difficulties that hinder tourism development.

Another fundamental issue is tourism security which, as I mentioned before, receives the support of the Security Commission and we have discussed the regional project prepared with WTO's support and the Tourism Directorate with the collaboration of the Central America Chiefs of Police Association.

Dear friends,

As the Secretary General of SICA, I would like to recognize the work of the Central American Tourism Council for their continued, decisive and innovative work in favor of tourism integration, which has set an example for other productive sectors of the Central American region.

In this regard, I would like to mention once again our support to the work carried out by the CCT through our Tourism Directorate, executing the necessary activities regarding cooperation, logistic support, and follow up and coordination of the plans, programs and project to be defined by the Council.

I would also like to show our appreciation for the collaboration of the European Union through the Support Program for Central American Regional Integration (PAIRCA) as well as the cooperation of

the government of the Republic of China (Taiwan), through the Regional Conscience Program which has allowed this luncheon conference to share with you the efforts made by the Central American Integration System and the Central American Tourism Council towards completion of the integration process, and particularly, the tourism sector as a dynamic leader of this process.

Finally, I wish to express our sincere recognition to the WTO for their support to the Central American tourism sector in their diverse initiatives and programs, particularly, for this meeting as well as our special thanks to the Minister of Tourism of El Salvador, Rubén Rochi, and the government of El Salvador, for hosting this important continental activity.

I wish you the best of success and results in the development of this meeting and our assurance that you will have the support of the General Secretariat of SICA in the fulfillment of the expected goals.

Thank you and welcome again to El Salvador

San Salvador, El Salvador, June 21, 2007.