

PECC SEMINAR: SUSTAINABLE AND RESPONSIBLE TOURISM

OPENING SPEECH BY MR. EDOUARD FRITCH, PRESIDENT OF FRENCH POLYNESIA |
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Honorable High Commissioner of the Republic in French Polynesia, Honorable Speaker of the House (President of the Assembly) of French Polynesia, Cabinet Ministers, Ladies and Gentlemen, distinguished guests and participants in the PECC seminar on sustainable and responsible tourism.

Dear friends,

First of all, let me welcome you all here on these premises, for this seminar on sustainable and responsible tourism, organized by the Pacific Economic Cooperation Council (PECC) as part of its work on: “sustainable development and the circular economy.”

It is a pleasure and great honor for me to open this event, the subject of which is of utmost importance to the economic and social development of our country.

This seminar dedicated to sustainable and responsible tourism, is a subject that has always retained my attention and I know that our Minister of Tourism is also mindful and totally aware of the outcomes.

We should draw our attention on the type of tourism development that we wish to promote as well as the cooperation we need to implement in order to achieve it at our regional level.

For too long, our tourist destinations have fought and behaved tirelessly as rivals instead of developing its own market through long-haul routes from continental hubs that surrounds us, and have unconsciously neglected the routes and links that should have brought us closer to each other.

However, despite our various ethnic groups, whether we are Polynesians, Melanesians or Micronesians, we form a single homogeneous and coherent Pacific Nation. We all face the same issues and challenges to which we must respond, whether it is the preservation and enhancement of our natural sites, our environment or our traditional lifestyles.

Our competitors are not our neighbors in the Pacific, but rather those of the Indian Ocean, the West Indian arc or the Mediterranean basin. Rather than competing to get the highest number of visitors, we need to build and develop synergies to sustainably and responsibly strengthen our tourism in the Pacific.

In this respect, these recent years I was delighted to see encouraging signs that lead me to a certain optimism. Regional cooperation is intensifying: first, in the face of climate change, second in terms of training, supply chains, or development programs, such as the cruising industry, for example through the SPTO or the APEC. I would like to take this opportunity to thank their representatives for being here today to share their vision and perspectives with us.

We will then have to examine in a transversal way the environmental protection issues in our region. We see it every day – and I have just returned from a historic meeting with the Pope and our friends

from the Pacific Islands Forum – this subject is of growing concern to our Island states and territories, I believe this is also a concern to our tourism professionals, as well as the tourists themselves.

Our visitors feel more and more concerned and seek during their stay, a natural and preserved site. Whether it be in our maritime areas or our coastal and land spaces, the increase in flows associated with increasing urbanization and the evolution of our consumption patterns, tends to cause negative impacts that we have difficulty in stemming, whether in terms of sanitation, waste management, resource use or multiplication of concrete embankment along our beaches.

Tourism must be at the forefront of four environmental priorities. We should be constantly aware of this, and we know it is our most precious asset, that its durability and sustainability are fully protected by respect for and protection of our natural environment – but also of our cultural heritage.

Today we have the duty and responsibility of restoring this environment and this heritage as much as possible. This responsibility, we owe it to our children. It is common sense, a truth, and a reality. What we have inherited, we are compelled to transmit it. It is up to us to implement, as much as possible.

In order to achieve this objective, the experiences of our Pacific Island neighbors and the cooperation at the regional level are essential. This sharing of the vision and experiences that you are proposing to us today is most valuable. It will help us build the future, to measure our actions and to make our tourism industry a stronger and sustainable economy.

This is a challenge for all of us, which requires shared cooperation between the Pacific key players.

As far as we are concerned in French Polynesia, we want this development, we want this economic growth. We want to offer our young people a long-term and attractive employment for the future. We want to settle our populations in the archipelagos and in the remote islands. This would help everyone to live with dignity and harmony with their natural environment.

Since 2015, we have elaborated and implemented a tourism development strategy that should reach its objectives by 2020. This strategy consists of putting Man and its environment at the heart of our actions. This is a challenging and ambitious social project involving all our manpower and governmental institutions.

We are confident of the strength and authenticity of our culture, of our ability to offer to our visitors a totally new experience with a unique reconnection; they will not find anywhere else. The uniqueness of this destination is our People with a strong and vibrant culture, and a lifestyle we can be proud of sharing with our visitors.

Thank you for your attention, I wish you all constructive and fruitful exchanges during this seminar.

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