

**Statements for the Ministerial Conference on Cultural Tourism and
Poverty Alleviation -
Mr Duncan Pescod, Deputy Commissioner for Tourism
Hue, Vietnam, 11 June 2004**

Mr Chairman, Minister Vo Thi Thang, Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen. Like to add my thanks to the WTO and the Vietnamese National Administration for Tourism for organising this conference and for the tremendous hospitality we have been shown by everyone associated with it.

I am pleased to have this opportunity to speak on behalf of the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region (SAR) Government on this important topic.

Tourism is a key driver for economic growth, a significant earner of foreign exchange, a major source of tax revenue for governments, and an important generator of business opportunities for enterprises large and small. More importantly, tourism straddles many sectors and is a labour intensive industry and hence a major employer at all economic levels. Undoubtedly, it is an effective force to combat poverty.

Hong Kong is a rather developed and generally affluent economy. Despite this, the role of tourism in Hong Kong follows the logic of tourism everywhere: it is important for the job opportunities it brings for local residents and for enhancing their quality of life. By creating job opportunities at different levels, the tourism industry in Hong Kong helps absorb relatively low-skilled labourers who would otherwise become unemployed due to the restructuring of our economy. Tourism is helping in our efforts to grow the economy and alleviate the conditions of certain population segments in Hong Kong.

Building on our convenient location and good connections to the rest of the world, and capitalising on our rich tourism resources, the Hong Kong Government has designated tourism as one of four pillar industries for Hong Kong and is committed to fostering the development of the tourism industry of Hong Kong. We showcase in particular the diverse attractions, the cosmopolitan lifestyles, the unique "East meets West" culture, the rich inventory of both modern and traditional architectures and

artistic performances.

Travellers are looking for a variety of travel experiences in the countries and cities they visit: different cultures, different traditions, different heritage and different lifestyles. Opportunities exist for us to build on these expectations to enrich the attractiveness of destinations. To continue to maintain and enhance Hong Kong's status as the most popular city destination in Asia, we adopt a multi-faceted strategy – the aim is to enhance the diversity of tourism by building new attractions and enhancing existing facilities. To take this forward, we recognise that Hong Kong's cultural tourism has the potential to be expanded and that careful planning and development in this field will bring about economic benefits and opportunities.

To enhance the development of cultural tourism for economic development, we are actively pursuing cultural projects with an emphasis on sustainable development for the benefit of the local community. We have an appropriate planning mechanism that takes into account the technical, financial, transportation and conservation aspects of each project.

We will strive to promote local tourism to support the growth of small businesses and employment by taking appropriate initiatives to attract wide participation from the private sector and local community in the development of cultural products and the provision of tourism services. We believe the enhancement of tourism products in the local community will improve quality of life, especially in rural areas, which are characterised in Hong Kong by population decline, unemployment and environmental problems.

To ensure benefits flow to the local community, we will actively support participation by local residents and operators in taking forward local cultural initiatives. We will strive to incorporate in the planning of local cultural projects practical means whereby tourism spending will benefit the lower-income groups.

Effective collaboration is necessary to ensure the presentation of tourism product to our visitors. We will continue to enhance communication and liaison between different stakeholders for the development of cultural tourism by building effective and efficient partnerships between all parties concerned.

We will also strive to raise the awareness in the tourism industry of the importance of cultural tourism for economic development. In addition, we will also endeavour to raise the community's awareness of tourism benefits generally.

Recognising the importance of the sustainable growth of the sector, we believe there is a need to strike a balance between cultural and heritage conservation and the continual modernisation and development of the tourism sector. Challenges exist as increased visitation to historical cultural and heritage sites will stress these often fragile sites. To ensure cultural assets are viably used for sustainable poverty alleviation, it is necessary to protect and manage our assets properly.

We recognise the critical importance of accessibility to our attractions. Improvements in transportation links and hardware infrastructure will continue to be pursued under existing policy initiatives in order to facilitate visitors to enter into and move around Hong Kong.

Tourism is a fast growing industry with few boundaries. Intra-regional travel is becoming a worldwide trend. Under increasingly tight time constraints for travelling, visitors are looking for multi-destination itineraries to experience different cultures in one single trip. The Hong Kong SAR Government and the Hong Kong Tourism Board are committed to develop partnerships with countries in the region and we will continue to identify new opportunities for the development of suitable partnerships.

Finally, we recognise and support the effective work carried out by the World Tourism Organisation (WTO) in promoting cultural tourism for poverty alleviation. The Hong Kong SAR Government pledges its continued support to the WTO's initiatives in this field.

Tourism Commission
Economic Development and Labour Bureau
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