

TOURISM MUST WALK AND CHEW GUM AT THE SAME TIME. THE LIGHT AT THE END OF THE COVID 19 TUNNEL



By Professor Geoffrey Lipman, President SUN^x Malta:

“Let me start by making it clear that today and for the coming months every government and industry action must be focused on a total response, repeat total response, to the global enemy of COVID 19. To health issues: livelihood issues: family issues and business survival issues. It is war. Nothing is more important than coherent national and international response, where co-ordinated, joined up action is the only path open.”

As the pandemic crisis intensifies, pulling the world economy towards recession it's clear that the Travel & Tourism sector is in the centre of the maelstrom. Airlines are slashing flights: Cruise companies are cancelling programs: Hotels are seeing bookings evaporate. And with it the entire Travel Ecosystem of airports, ports, stations, along with meetings, sports events, theme parks, music festivals and all the attendant hospitality services for feeding and entertaining travellers. Some 10% of the global economy, driven directly and indirectly by this sector is grinding to a halt. Tens of millions of jobs and household livelihoods are threatened. For tourism dependent destinations – like small island states in the Caribbean and Asia or developing countries in Africa, who have pinned their future on the tourism card, massive portions of the economy have simply disappeared.

And it is right that travel is curtailed when health authorities conclude this will help contain the spread of the pandemic. It is necessary, to play our part, in dealing with the urgent unknown enemy of COVID 19, that presents an immediate massive threat to humanity. On the strategic reality side, the health experts led by WHO, see a pattern of widespread growth: slow containment and development of a response. This will take time for research: regulatory approval and scaling to global production levels.

Yet we also know that no matter how serious this crisis is, business will eventually restart, and all industry activity will have to be reset to respond smartly. It may take a year or more, no one knows but when the end comes, we will be ready to pick up the pieces, adapt our socio-economic patterns and get on with life. Travel & Tourism will reignite and continue to be a pivotal part of global socio-economic development. It is in our DNA.

BUT and it is a big **BUT**, the other massive crisis facing humanity, Climate Change, has not gone away; and it will not go away. It is existential and notwithstanding the media dominating, very real devastation of COVID19, we simply cannot afford to take our eye off the climate ball.

To use an analogy, while COVID 19 is like a knife into the body of humanity, it is not an existential threat, it's a very serious wound **BUT** the Climate Crisis is different, it is more like the case of the unsuspecting frog being gradually killed in a pot of slowly but inexorably heating water. There's no reaction. No escape. No recovery. We have 7-10 years to get on the Paris 1.5°C, Climate Neutral trajectory. But only if we act much more decisively now.

At [SUN* Malta](#) we think the sector can walk and chew gum at the same time, and now is the very moment to demonstrate that. When all historical operational and development assumptions are being re-evaluated and countries communities: companies and consumers are re-casting their future Travel & Tourism related plans and actions. It is a perfect time to build Climate Friendly Travel into tomorrow's new operating equation.

We have conceived *Climate Friendly Travel* as a vehicle to help sector transformation – *measured* to manage the good and bad impacts coherently – particularly the carbon related impacts: *green* to reflect the SDG targets: *2050 proof* to tie into the Paris 1.5°C trajectory. We believe all Travel must meet these criteria going forward.

Together with the World Travel & Tourism Council (WTTC), we have issued a Report on the State of the Sector response to the Climate Crisis, that calls for action now and action faster. And with the support of Malta's Minister for Tourism and Consumer Protection, Julia Farrugia Portelli, who has declared her country to be a global Centre of Climate Friendly Travel, we are deploying tools to help the entire sector in its essential transformation. Last month we convened 35 global experts in Malta who underscored the real urgency of a coherent response, starting now. We are building a Registry for Climate Friendly Travel Ambitions for the sector – linked to the UNFCCC Registry, to support commitment. We will showcase good practice to encourage others. We will train 100,000 Strong Climate Champions from the eco island of Gozo, Malta, to deploy across all UN States by 2030, to launch a worldwide education and awareness initiative. We are joining with partners inside and outside the sector in SDG 17 Agreements to advance these goals and we are seeking other likeminded partners to help reinforce and spread the Climate Friendly Travel message.

What can Travel & Tourism stakeholders do to lock into this transformation? Commit to Climate Neutral 2050 & implement a Climate Friendly Travel carbon reduction program: file that program on SUNx Malta's Climate Friendly Travel Ambitions Registry & trust bright young green enthusiasts to keep it up to date and help you fulfil your commitment. We'll help as well: we are all in this together. This was the half century global campaign of our inspirational founder Maurice Strong, the father of Sustainable Development. His vision is our mission.

So do not despair about the dramatically dangerous threat of COVID 19 – be vigilant, we will prevail and rekindle the positive course of human development BUT let's at the same time, respond urgently and respond now to the existential threat of Climate Change. We can and we must do both in synch.



SUN^x Malta is a legacy for the late Maurice Strong, father of Sustainable Development: its goal is to advance Climate Friendly Travel ~ measured: green: 2050 proof. Geoffrey Lipman is former Assistant Secretary General UNWTO; President WTTC; Executive Director IATA.