

Address By Mrs. Karen Ford-Warner – St. Eustatius World Tourism Day Celebration

Oranjestad, St. Eustatius - 27th September, 2007

It is my great pleasure and privilege to be with you in Statia during your first celebration of Tourism Week and to address you on this historic occasion - your first World Tourism Day Awards Dinner.

I wish to thank my dear friend, Lady Alida Francis and the St. Eustatius Tourism Development Foundation for the kind invitation extended to me to return to Statia, for I was here once before in 1999 when I worked with the Caribbean Tourism Organization. As before, the hospitality has been overwhelming. Thank you all very much!

Today, I had the pleasure of touring parts of the island, visiting with Nicole Esteban and her team at STENAPA and being shown around the Botanical Gardens, with my enthusiastic and committed guide, Carlton Von Putten. I am so impressed with the progress that has been made since my last visit [in 1999] and with the rich history, culture, flora and fauna that offer limitless opportunities for the development of your tourism industry and your nation.

The theme for World Tourism Day 2007, as you have heard, is "Tourism Opens Doors for Women".

It had been said:

'If you can empower a woman, you can empower a nation'

This tourism is one that can be treated with more levity than most, and that is perhaps why the United Nations in crafting the Millennium Development Goals, decided to assign the crucial 'number 3' a jumpstart deadline of achievement of one decade before the others.

Just to remind us - Goal Number 3 on the UN's main agenda these days, states quite simply:

Promote gender equality and empower women

The key target towards this goal is to:

Eliminate gender disparity in primary and secondary education preferably by 2005, and at all levels by 2015.



[Mrs. Karen Ford receiving a gift from Lt. Governor Hyden Gittens of St. Eustatius](#)

Poverty has a woman's face. Global prosperity and peace will only be achieved once all the world's people are empowered to order their own lives and provide for themselves and their families. Societies where women are more equal stand a much greater chance of achieving the Millennium Goals by 2015.

Every single Goal is directly related to women's rights, and societies where

women are not afforded equal rights as men can never achieve development in a sustainable manner. In Asia, Latin America, and Africa, where women have been given the chance to succeed through small business loans or increased educational opportunities, families are stronger, economies are stronger, and societies are doing better.

The question we need to ask ourselves today, World Tourism Day... is why then are some of our Caribbean societies not as prosperous as we would like them to be?

Save for a few mineral-rich nations like Trinidad and Guyana, we depend largely on Tourism to propel our small economies... and with all the potential, we still do not get the sense that we have been able to get it so right.

Interestingly, last year's theme for World Tourism Day was - 'Tourism Enriches'.

Simple... Pointed... Accurate. With most governments realizing nowadays the need to correct the gender imbalance in national development, this year was a natural corollary to the enrichment highlighted last year.

The UNWTO and the entire community of persons who are active in this vibrant tourism industry would lose face if we did not promote the naturally enriching capabilities of the sector with low entry barriers on the one hand and without ceilings (glass or otherwise) on the other... yet on the other we might be retarding our own development by simply acknowledging the progress of leaders and



Mrs. Karen Ford with the winner of two awards Mr. Darlington Berkel

pioneers such as my Aunt Marion , your Lady Alida Francis and all the women who have made a significant contribution to the development of the tourism industry in Statia. It is good and important that we honour and acknowledge these women who have built and are continuing to build our tourism industry, but we MUST also engage in affirmative action to ensure equality of access and advancement.

The problem is that if we women do not keep this issue front and centre, we can run the risk of being lulled into complacency and deny ourselves the value of the 'woman resource' alongside our partners in the business. From artisans to pilots and tycoons, to waitresses and investors, if women are not actively engaged at each step of the way, we will never know how powerful we can really become as a Market and as a region -

not to mention the enhancement of the quality of life at the micro level within our individual economies.

Coming even closer home - I understand the goals of Tourism Week in Statia to be as follows:

- **Foster greater awareness of tourism in St. Eustatius as a vital economic sector**
- **Encourage tourism and hospitality stakeholders and the community at large to play a more active role in the development of tourism in St. Eustatius; and**
- **Highlight career and business opportunities for youth and young adults in the tourism/hospitality sector.**

Can you see engrained in those key goals the opportunities for men and women of all ages - individually, collectively, and in partnership across gender lines?

Of course, it is certainly not ONLY a matter of gender, important as those issues might be. There are many planks on which this vital industry rests, and each one is critical to sustain the synergies with the other [satellite] industries which benefit from and support this economic activity.

The world order in tourism, these days more than ever, is diversity - in fact, that is the Jamaican brand position... and while I know that not every island is a Jamaica (or a Statia), there are always untapped sources of enrichment to which we can leverage other economic activity.

Maximizing the return on this investment in tourism, as with everything else in life - starts with a sound plan. Jamaica's Master Plan for Sustainable Tourism Development, which was the result of several years of broad-based consultation with the Jamaican people, seeks to achieve five (5) main objectives over the 10 year period 2000-2010:

- **To foster growth based on a sustainable market position.**
- **To enhance the visitor experience.**
- **To foster the participation of local communities in the planning and implementation of tourism development.**
- **To develop an inclusive industry by spreading the benefits from tourism more widely.**
- **To promote environmental sustainability.**



L-R: Lt. Governor H. Gittens, Mrs. K. Ford, Mr. Menno Walther (winner Dive Shop of the Year Award) and Director of Tourism Ms. Alida Francis

Any plan must of course take into account the present position, such as whether your destination is a mature brand, or a relatively new player in the tourism global market place. And it must involve the people in its development.

A colleague of mine loves to say that tourism could never exist without cultural identity - his rationale being that nobody travels to see how 'this half' lives

- it is always about the 'other half', the 'other side of the fence', and the experiences of others from neighbours to distant strangers.

You have a unique position here in Statia - anchored as you are historically to two great civilizations - European (now particularly Dutch) and Africa. I challenge you to dig deeper than diving and take the plunge into other ventures which can add much needed value to the visitor experience here.

Diving here is great, and remains the envy of many who have been poor custodians of their marine heritage, or were just not as blessed with 'natural good looks' J. However - Divers are people first... they have a range of other interests... some are historians, some are health buffs... you might find some who are all three.

... these diver-people-types also have family and acquaintances whom they can convince with a single conversation over coffee [or juice for the health conscious] to come... and stay in Statia.

In Jamaica we have developed niches within niches out of the extensive and involved process of crafting our Master Plan for Sustainable Development. One very gratifying out-turn of this process, now in year 6 of 10, is that our return visitor rate has been at an amazing 45%.

Imagine, nearly half of the visitors that travel to Jamaica each year have been there at least once before. When we do the tracer studies, we find that a couple might have gone to Negril, the 'capital of casual' for diving and partying in their rampant youth, then come back to the Jazz festival in Montego Bay in their 30's as hot shot executives... got married in Ocho Rios on another trip, took the kids on a joy ride along the rustic south coast on yet another outing...and even return for the wedding of these very children against the lush, secluded tapestry of Port Antonio - naturally. 'Once you go, you know', as our marketing tagline goes...

Now, I know that it sounds like a brochure for the Jamaica Tourist Board, but it's much more about how product development can make or break your destination...

Take for instance the fact that Jamaica was last year declared the number one cruise ship destination in the world... this in spite of some challenges with our image. It is because our reputation for easy access to a wide range of attractions and shopping has now spread worldwide.

Mind you, we are loath to risk exceeding our carrying capacity by allowing heavy traffic beyond reason. The idea is to even out the traffic to untapped areas, and garner buy-in from residents outside of the traditional tourism belts. That way, more nationals will see the OUR in tOURism.

In our experience, we have developed two key organizations to support the central government thrust for appropriate policies, regulations, and legislation.

The Tourism Product Development Co (TPDCo.) which I have the privilege of heading, is charged with the awesome responsibility of developing the tourism product. The Jamaica Tourist Board markets Jamaica to the world.

The Mission Statement of TPDCo is to facilitate the diversification, development and improvement of the tourism product, utilizing an experienced and qualified staff to enhance the visitor experience by building consensus and strategic alliances with industry stakeholders in order to engender socio-economic growth. A mouthful!!!

The foregoing mission is undergirded by a set of core values pursued individually and collectively. These core values are:

- **Integrity**
- **Accountability**
- **Team Spirit/ Respect**
- **Results Oriented**
- **Passion/Commitment**

Within our mandate is the demanding quest for the development and monitoring of globally benchmarked standards. We also recommend properties, attractions, contract carriage operators, water sports and others for licensing by the JTB which has the legal authority to so do. All entities must satisfy the minimum legal requirement for health, security and fire in order to be licensed.

Critical to the quality of our product is education and training to empower our tourism personnel to provide quality service, so we have developed a 40 hour tourism awareness training programme known as "Team Jamaica" which is now mandatory for all workers in the tourism industry, from Red Caps, to customs and immigration officers to General Managers. In addition, our Tourism Training Unit Division mounts skills upgrading courses in areas such as foreign languages, tour guiding, food and beverage service and landscaping.

TPDCo also undertakes projects to enhance the visitor experience through upgrading the physical environment. In this regard, we are involved in beautification programmes and upgrading of resort infrastructure.

An important aspect of our work, and part of our mandate to build inclusiveness and encourage community development, is the facilitation of entrepreneurs and community groups in the development and implementation of tourism projects. In this regard, we have launched our Tourism for Prosperity Entrepreneurship Drive to shepherd and assist persons to have greater access to the benefits of the industry. We offer general guidance in product development and help them through the legal and regulatory maze. We also provide some preliminary technical assistance as we are ably staffed with engineers, architects, quantity surveyors, landscape architects and heritage specialists.

The truth is - product is perhaps the lynchpin of the 'P's of marketing [Product, Price and Packaging] .This is where the attention needs to be. After all -what will you promote if your offering is suspect in any way, shape or form?

Before I leave you, I must plant another seed in your collective consciousness. There is a 'P' in marketing outside of all those usually promoted within the management texts. Yet, it is the one that can make or break the very best laid plans.

It is money [i.e. Profit] - that lubricant which drives the mar or the lack of which drives fear into the minds of many governments, communities, families and individuals. This fear saps energy and leads to the debilitating disease of inaction.

In Jamaica, we broke the traditional mould which said that you should not tax non-nationals to fund government programming. However, arising from the findings of the Master Plan, what was recommended was that a Tourism Enhancement Fund [TEF] be established, and a modest amount skimmed from the revenue on each ticket to Jamaica originating off-island.

This has enabled us to fund many micro, small, medium sized and large projects to propel the product on the appropriate path. The very visitors from whom the revenue is drawn are often positively amazed at what we have been able to do with infrastructure, beautification and security - cementing our return rate.

It is basic customer service, but viewed from a fresh perspective.

If we tie the TEF model to today's theme, we see where groups of rural women weaving baskets or stepping up to the plate with creative island cooking - can access the funds required to set them on a sustainable path to success. The TEF has opened the financial door to many groups of potentially marginalized women and families in Jamaica, and similar constructs here might be worth considering.

Every destination is unique - so you will know what to take on, what to hold, and what to throw away from my observations and suggestions here tonight.

The idea is to continue the conversation across the Caribbean divide - for we must. For too long Kingston had been closer to London than to Port of Spain or Statia in practical economic and political terms, even in the face of our cultural and economic realities which are fairly well-aligned.

I close by congratulating your Awardees tonight and encourage them to continue to build the tourism industry and beautiful Statia. I commend to them, and to all of us, the following quote:

'We are what we repeatedly do. Excellence is not an act, but a habit.'

Here's to greater levels of sustained excellence in Statian and Caribbean tourism - excellence that is all inclusive, opening doors for women, men, families and communities.

I wish Statia all the very best... and as we say in Jamaica - One Love... and Walk Good!