

Jamaica Supports International Effort to Improve Visa Regimes

Jamaica has thrown its full support behind an international drive to improve visa regimes in order to facilitate ease of travel.

This as the issue was placed high on the agenda of matters discussed today, Wednesday May 16, 2012, at the Fourth Ministerial Meeting of Tourism (T20), in Merida, Mexico, where Jamaica is being represented by Minister of Tourism and Entertainment, the Hon. Dr. Wykeham McNeill.

Dr. McNeill, along with other Ministers of Tourism and Heads of Delegation of the G20 and other countries, as well as representatives from international organizations, have gathered for the meeting, being held from May 15–16. The main topic of this ministerial meeting is Tourism, an Alternative to Stimulate Job Creation, and is aimed at finding corporate solutions for job creation through travel facilitation policies between the members of the G20.

The world leaders today agreed to influence changes within their own countries through improved measures that, without being a detriment to the discretionary authority of each State, should simplify visa application, processing formalities and improve the timeliness of visa issuance. At the end of the meeting the leaders agreed on a declaration outlining their commitment to instituting these changes. The ultimate goal is to increase the number of tourists traveling to participating countries and by extension the generation of jobs within these countries.

The declaration came after examination of a report prepared for the ministerial summit - The Impact of Visa Facilitation on Job Creation in the G20 Economies. The study was commissioned by the United Nations World Tourism Organization (UNWTO) and shows that in 2011, 656 million international travelers visited G20 countries and spent approximately US\$830 billion, generating nearly 78 million jobs. It states that in some cases, when visa-related policies and processes improved, the result was dramatic increases in visitation. The conclusion was that improving visa regimes across the board could result in significant economic dividends and stimulate job creation.

Minister McNeill underscored that “supporting this declaration is in-keeping with our efforts to improve the flow of persons through immigration and our island’s international airports by making the process seamless but safe.”

The Minister maintained that “visa requirements continue to hamper our efforts to enter new and emerging markets. Hence supporting this declaration underpins the steps Jamaica is taking to address this matter which include waiving visa requirements for persons traveling to Jamaica from countries in South America such as Panama, Columbia, and Venezuela to make traveling easier.

The leaders are set to approve the 4th T20 Ministers Meeting Declaration during the final session of the ministerial summit. They will present the final results and proposals arrived at during the meeting to Mexican President, Felipe Calderon Hinojosa, during a private meeting later today.