**UNWTO -RUSSIA by Lakshya Gupta**

 Good morning Distinguished delegates and guests. It is an honour to be present in here such august gathering. The world is facing challenging times because of the COVID-19 pandemic.

**Challenges**

Tourism is one of the world’s major economic sectors. It is one of the sectors most affected by the Covid-19 pandemic, impacting economies and livelihoods. Tourism supports and provides livelihoods for many millions in both developing and developed economies.

Right now tourism is almost at stand still. The recovery cannot begin until the health emergency is under control and travel restrictions can be safely lifted.

In Russia alone , more than 400,000 jobs in travel and are at risk.

**Russia’s Response to the crisis**

We started to respond at the crisis by the end of Jan’2020.The governments anti crisis measures amount to roubles 3. billion. The measures are as follows

1. Tourism companies are eligible for loans
2. Zero interest rate loans to pay salaries, subsidized loans for other purposes also.
3. Subsidies for travel operators to refund payments to tourists and to bring tourists.
4. Additional financial measures are being taken support to the aviation industry.

Russia has seen a decline of 90% in air traffic last year owing to the pandemic.

**Revival of tourism- steps to be taken**

Revival of tourism can begin only when countries can safely lift covid restrictions. Most countries are still in lockdown or heading there again. Russia cannot open it borders to countries when the infection rate is high putting its own citizens at risk.

We need to reopen smartly. After the 2018 world cup there are certain policies and procedures we need to follow up on. Like the simplified visa measures ,accelerate the planned introduction of e-visas, and expedite visa processing.

The government of Russia is investing heavily in the infrastructure to accerelate the growth in the industry and to boost the confidence of the people.Reopening will be effective only if travelers are confident that destinations have taken all the necessary steps to safeguard health of travellers .For that complex measures need to be taken to ensure utmost hygiene standards throughout the tourism chain. These will involve clear hygiene protocols applicable to public infrastructure, transportation, and hospitality service providers,

This crisis is also an opportunity for innovation and and the tourism sector to move towards sustainable solutions.These include investments in the digital transformation of the industry, a shift toward greener tourism.

I end by saying ‘this not my problem or your problem, it is our problem. We all have to work together to defeat this pandemic and see tourism flourish.

Thank you for listening so patiently.