



มูลนิธิเอกสัมพันธ์เพื่อการท่องเที่ยวที่ยั่งยืน

Ecumenical Coalition On Tourism [ECOT]

Poverty, AIDS and Tourism – the global challenge

Tourism is one of the world's largest industries, with tourist arrivals counted in the millions. This needs to be juxtaposed with the significant numbers of HIV and AIDS cases in many of the world's poorest countries which are promoted as “exotic” and “paradise” destinations. Here, tourism is likely to provide a conducive environment for HIV and AIDS. However, the tourism industry generally has not taken up the challenge of addressing in an appropriate way and on a global scale the threat of HIV/AIDS infection.

Sex tourism accounts for up to 20% of worldwide travellers, according to the estimates of ECPAT, the network working to protect children from pornography and sexual abuse in tourism. Adult sex tourism is a breeding ground for AIDS when tourists in a ‘holiday mood’ have sex with other tourists or nationals and do not take precautions. Sex trafficked women and young men from the poorest regions in South and South East Asia are particularly vulnerable to HIV/AIDS in the tourism context.

When travelling, tourists, both male and female, seek to extract the most out of their trip and are keen on adventures and leisure to fulfill the paradise expectations promoted by the media and tourism industry. In such a setting, increased drug and alcohol use makes tourists more vulnerable to HIV infection as information about AIDS protection is often unavailable for them in tourism destinations.

Local people working in tourism in their countries are poorly paid, as increasing competition of tourism operations within the globalization context means businesses want to offer the lowest prices. A hotel employee may then “sell her/his body” to a domestic or international ‘client’ in order to earn some additional money. Illiterate, often illegal (women) migrant workers are especially at risk when dealing with tourists.

Tourism Destinations in new development corridors such as the Greater Mekong Subregion are major ‘arrival ports’ for migrants expecting to earn money there which they can send home to their desperately poor families. This is their way of combatting their poverty, though, a dangerous one.

The UN World Tourism Organization has launched the ST-EP initiative to eradicate poverty as a response to the Millennium Development Goals (www.unwtostep.org). The majority of these endorsed tourism development projects are in Africa with only one project supported in Asia, namely Vietnam.



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However, none of the ST-EP projects is addressing HIV and AIDS prevention, care or support. Stopping HIV and AIDS must go hand in hand with the eradication of poverty. The aim to “increase tourism to eradicate poverty” is likely to fail, however, if no action is taken to combat HIV and AIDS in tourism development areas.

Visitors might be discouraged to travel to a country or destination identified and stigmatised as with high AIDS prevalence. The tourism industry and the governments of the poorest countries where tourism contributes considerably to the General Domestic Product (GDP) are not addressing Aids and Tourism.

The Ecumenical Coalition on Tourism (ECOT) urges the UN and governments to make HIV and AIDS an integral component of all ST-EP projects as well as other tourism development programs around the world. The tourism industry has to address HIV and AIDS within the framework of its corporate social responsibility (CSR). Tourism destinations have to do so within their “fair (trade) tourism labelling” efforts.

At the same time, ECOT calls on all faith based and civil society groups to include tourism related issues in their work to combat HIV and AIDS. In both tourist sending and receiving countries, religious and non-religious groups are called within their specific contexts to campaign and act for a fair and responsible tourism including AIDS prevention.

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