



PRESS RELEASE

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UNWTO Secretary General Appointed as PolyU Adjunct Professor

The Hong Kong Polytechnic University bestowed Adjunct Professorship on Dr Taleb Rifai, Secretary General of the United Nations World Tourism Organisation (UNWTO), on 9 February in recognition of his valuable contribution to the development of the world's tourism industry.

Immediately after the conferment ceremony, Dr Rifai shared his insights with industry practitioners, academics and PolyU students in a public lecture entitled "World's Tourism Industry: Current Challenges and Prospects".

Professor Kaye Chon, Chair Professor and Director of the School of Hotel and Tourism Management (SHTM) said, "While the whole world has been affected by the economic downturn in one way or the other and is now looking to a rebound, we are most pleased to have Dr Rifai sharing with us his visions for the global tourism industry. As head of a world body of tourism and in his new capacity as our Adjunct Professor, the School and its students look forward to benefiting from Dr Rifai's insights and vast industry experience on the area of tourism management."

At the lecture, Dr Rifai talked about the exceptionally challenging year of 2009. He said, "The global economic crisis aggravated by the uncertainty around the A (H1N1) pandemic turned 2009 into one of the toughest years for the tourism sector. However, the results of recent months suggest that recovery is underway, and even somewhat earlier and at a stronger pace than initially expected."

Against the backdrop of both the upsurge in international tourism figures and overall economic indicators in recent months, UNWTO forecasts a growth in international tourist arrivals of between 3% and 4% in 2010. The International Monetary Fund (IMF) has just recently stated that the global recovery is occurring "significantly" faster than expected. "As a result, 2010 would be a year of transformation providing upside opportunities while not eliminating downside risks," said Dr Rifai.

Although recovery seems to be on track, Dr Rifai cautioned that 2010 would still be a demanding year. "Many countries were quick in reacting to the crisis and actively implemented measures to mitigate its impact and stimulate recovery. While we expect growth to return in 2010, a premature withdrawal of these stimulus measures and the temptation to impose extra taxes may jeopardize the pace of rebound in tourism," he remarked. Indeed Dr Rifai called on global leaders to seize the spirit which united the world community in confronting these challenges and take the opportunity to craft a truly sustainable future.

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Dr Taleb Rifai took office as Secretary General of UNWTO in October 2009. He was a Professor of Architecture, Planning and Urban Design at the University of Jordan from 1973 to 1993. From 1993 to 1995, he headed Jordan's first Economic Mission to the US, promoting trade, investments and economic relations. In his capacity as Director General of the Investment Promotion Corporation in Jordan from 1995 to 1997, Dr Rifai was actively involved in policy making and developing investment strategies. As Chief Executive Officer of the Jordan Cement Company, he directed the first large-scale privatisation and restructuring project in 1999.

Dr Rifai served as Chairman of the UNWTO Executive Council from 2002 to 2003 during his term as Minister of Tourism. From 2003 to 2006, he was the Assistant Director-General and Regional Director for Arab States of the International Labour Organisation. Dr Rifai was appointed Deputy Secretary General of UNWTO in 2006. He assumed the post of Secretary General in October 2009 and will hold office until the end of 2013.

SHTM was ranked second in the world among hotel and tourism schools based on research and scholarship, according to a study published in the *Journal of Hospitality & Tourism Research* in November 2009. The School has a long-standing affiliation with UNWTO, a specialised agency of the United Nations and a leading international organisation in the field of tourism. Since 1999, the School has been designated by UNWTO as one of its global training centres in the Education and Training Network. The School also serves on UNWTO's Education Council Steering Committee.



The Certificate of Appointment was presented to Dr Taleb Rifai, UNWTO Secretary General, by Prof Kaye Chon, Chair Professor and Director of SHTM



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Dinner in honour of Dr Rifai was hosted by PolyU President Prof Timothy Tong (fifth from right), at SHTM's Millennium Training Restaurant

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