



UN Tourism Confirms New Secretary-General: Shaikha Al Nowais to Become First Woman Leader in 2026

Riyadh, Saudi Arabia, 9 November 2025 - Shaikha Al Nowais has been confirmed as the new Secretary-General of UN Tourism. Meeting in Riyadh, the Organization's General Assembly formally ratified her nomination and showed their strong support.

Ms. Al Nowais will be the first woman to lead the United Nations Specialised Agency for tourism in its 50-year history. She will begin her term at the start of 2026, having gained significant experience in the private sector, most notably as Corporate Vice President at Rotana Hotels. She also chairs the Abu Dhabi Chamber's Tourism Working Group and serves on the boards of the Abu Dhabi Businesswomen Council and Les Roches Hospitality Academy.

Addressing the Assembly, the Secretary-General-elect said: "This is a triumph for all of us. It is a shared moment that reflects our collective vision for a stronger, more connected, and more compassionate world of tourism. Together, we represent the hopes of millions whose lives are touched by this sector. Together, we carry the belief that tourism, at its best, can uplift nations and unite humanity." Looking ahead, to her mandate, she outlined five core priorities: "Responsible tourism, capacity building, technology for good, innovative financing, and smart governance — each designed to make our sector more inclusive, resilient, and human."

Ms. Al Nowais also paid tribute to the incumbent Secretary-General Zurab Pololikashvili, commending his "vision, commitment, and role in strengthening UN Tourism's voice and global presence."

26th General Assembly advances UN Tourism vision for sector

The new Secretary-General was nominated by UN Tourism's Executive Council in May. Following protocol, her nomination was put before the 160 Member States at the 26th General Assembly for their confirmation.

The appointment of the new Secretary-General for the term 2026-2029 was the highlight of the first day of the UN Tourism General Assembly. Over the course of the Assembly, delegates will participate in four plenary sessions, numerous meetings of seven specialized committees.

The start of the General Assembly came directly after the conclusion of the 124th session of the UN Tourism Executive Council - the organization's highest executive body - which provided Members an update on the shared Programme of Work, built on the pillars of boosting investments, supporting innovation and widening education and opportunity in the sector.