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PRESS RELEASE FROM HOLIDAYTRAVELWATCH™

CONSUMER GROUP CALLS FOR RESPONSIBLE SELLING FOLLOWING THE DAHAB BOMBING

HolidayTravelWatch deplores the senseless killing in Dahab on the Sinai Peninsula. The Organisation sends its thoughts and sympathies to all families who were affected by the death of a loved one, to anyone who sustained injury or to anyone subjected to the carnage and its aftermath.

Frank Brehany, the MD of HolidayTravelWatch, has already written on the effect of such attacks, and in his press release of 2 October 2005, expressed the view:

"If there is one thing that I would wish to say, it would be – 'for all that is good in God, please, please do not attack ordinary people whose only crime is to go about their working day; or enjoy some pleasure from their hard work. No problem or agenda is justified by bloodshed. The killing of ordinary working people does nothing to advance a cause, whether that cause is justified or not'."

That sentiment still stands.

However, the Organisation has noted the debate now raging amongst, Government, the Travel Industry and Travel Writers, and is concerned that holidaymakers may be, or will become exposed to unnecessary dangers. The debate issue is simple; terrorism will not defeat us, and anyone refusing to go to any troubled area, will allow the terrorists to win.

The debate temperature was upped this week when the British Ambassador for Yemen, clearly working to help the Yemenis to develop their trade and industry, sang the praises of Yemen. Nothing of any concern in that expression. As an Organisation we would not criticise such an initiative. However, within the Telegraph article (30/4/06), the Ambassador suggested, that within a country that

has a population of '20 million people and 80 million guns', it was "perfectly possible for British Tourists to come here". This view was supported by the Yemen's Minister for Tourism, Nabil Alfakih. He suggested that the arrival of tourists will see the "benefits of helping to ensure stability and security, thus improving the situation".

HolidayTravelWatch would be concerned if innocent holidaymakers were being used as part of a global solution to a political problem.

As if to echo that concern, Cath Urquhart in her article in the TimesOnline (29/4/06), summarised her feelings following the Dahab bombing. She stated, "When I go on holiday I want to relax, not to be a foot soldier in the war on terror".

Frank Brehany states, "On behalf of British Holidaymakers, we support the sentiments of Cath Urquhart". He adds, "Why should holidaymakers be lulled into a fall sense of security? It is bad enough that smiling happy resorts are sold to unsuspecting travellers; they are not privy to the detail of security warnings, and now seem to acquire the 'stakeholder' responsibility of improving the domestic politic of a country".

HolidayTravelWatch has noted the response of the Travel Industry to the Dahab bombings. In an article written by Jeremy Skidmore in the Telegraph (29/4/06), Andy Cooper, from the Federation of Tour Operators stated:

"People are becoming more resilient to terrorism……there is never a good time for an act of terrorism, but we are moving into a quieter period for Egypt, which is more popular in the winter".

The article was concluded by an unnamed spokeswoman from the Association of British Travel Agents, who suggested that if someone wanted to cancel their holiday they would have to pay normal cancellation fees because, the article concludes, "[the] FO has not warned people to avoid travelling to Egypt".

Frank Brehany states, "The Travel Industry demonstrate through this article that they continue to abdicate their responsibility to the travel consumer. I am amazed that a senior member of the travel industry has suggested that ordinary people are becoming more resilient to terrorism! Further, the suggestion that consumer rights are somehow dependant upon the Foreign and Commonwealth Office is misleading to say the least. This may be part of a wider campaign, in which the Package Holiday is being deconstructed, thus attracting fewer consumer rights".

He adds, "I congratulate the Foreign & Commonwealth Office for their timely and constructive response in Dahab, led by the British Ambassador for Egypt – they should not be made scapegoats for the 'failure' in giving or advising the consumer of their legitimate rights".

Frank Brehany points to his comments to the Travel Industry following the Indonesian bombing (HTW Press Release – 2/10/05). In that article he asked the Travel Industry to;

"As we have written previously, we hope that we do not see British tourists being sent into risk areas, all for the sake of inflexibility on the part of an Operator. Tour Operators should be advising holidaymakers of their rights at this time and helping them as they are required to do so by the Package Travel Regulations".

HolidayTravelWatch advise that they have been contacted by concerned travellers, about to travel to Egypt, but are receiving an unsympathetic hearing from the Travel Provider. Frank Brehany asks, "Would the majority of those in the Travel Industry be happy to send their loved one's into a danger area? Probably not!"

The point made by ABTA that compensation rights are dependant upon the Foreign & Commonwealth Office miss the point. Consumers should realise that the tour operator is responsible under the

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Package Travel Regulations for ensuring that they supply a safe product, and do not expose holidaymakers to any unnecessary and foreseeable danger.

HolidayTravelWatch asks, is it now time for the Travel Industry to completely reassess its strategy in sending holidaymakers into politically sensitive areas?

Frank Brehany states, "Based on the fact that the Travel Industry does not just rely upon the advices of the Foreign & Commonwealth Office, but also their own local sources, I would suggest that Travel Providers can no longer rely upon the force majeure clause, particularly when they continue to send people into a target area".

He adds, "We have no desire to dissuade travellers from cash starved areas of the world, however, even a cursory examination of news items within the Middle East will demonstrate that there are wider and difficult issues that affect local people, none of which are within the power of the ordinary tourist to resolve. The Travel Industry must engage in a more mature approach to the selling of their products".

Frank Brehany continues, "I echo my comments within an earlier Press Release (28.9.05) in which I stated, "A properly managed common sense approach to these catastrophic events, providing the consumer with their rights, will pay dividends for tour companies through repeat business. It will also generate a greater understanding of the problems that confront these devastated areas. The holidaymaker will see the proof that the company they have bought their holiday from actually has their interests at heart – if properly cared for, they will also be more motivated to return to such countries providing a much needed cash boost to local people".

He concludes, "The time has come for the Travel Industry to stop making irresponsible or ill informed comments, they have a responsibility to assess dangers properly, and provide an open, clear and unambiguous warning system to the travel consumer".

HolidayTravelWatch is a National Consumer Organisation which provides information, advice and assistance to the holidaymaker or independent traveller, who experiences problems with their travel arrangements. In ten years 100,000 people have benefited from the help provided by HolidayTravelWatch, with some 40% being empowered to resolve their own claims by the information the organisation provides on their consumer rights.

HolidayTravelWatch has campaigned in the past for improvements in travel safety and is proud to have been associated with some of the leading broadcast and print media projects aimed at informing the consumer. HolidayTravelWatch continues with that campaigning spirit and continues to work closely with the media and government departments alike.

Full details of the work of HolidayTravelWatch can be found on www.holidaytravelwatch.com

For further information on this press release and any other associated matters please contact Frank Brehany on 01217478100

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