

ADDRESS BY THE DEPUTY MINISTER OF TOURISM TOKOZILE XASA

AT THE WORLD WETLANDS DAY 2012,

MAKULEKE, LIMPOPO PROVINCE

02 February 2012

Programme Director,

The Deputy Minister of Water and Environmental Affairs Hon Rejoice Mabudafhasi

The MEC of Agriculture Hon Dipuo Letsatsi Duba

The MEC of Economic Development, Environment and Tourism Hon Pitsi Moloto

Hosi Makuleke

Executive Mayor of the Vhembe District Municipality Cllr Florence Dzhombere

The Speaker of Vhembe District Municipality

The Mayor of Thulamela Municipality-Cllr, Grace Mahosi

Members of the Makuleke Community Property Association

Members of the media

Ladies and Gentlemen

Thank you Deputy Minister Mabudafhasi for the kind invitation to come and celebrate the World Wetlands day with the Leadership and the people of Limpopo on this important environmental landmark. This presents us with an opportunity to take time to learn and share about wetland life and conservation as well as to strengthen our working relationships since the split of the departments of tourism and environment in 2009.

This year's theme is "Wetlands & Tourism", focusing on the benefits these areas have on people and wildlife, such as sustainable livelihoods and thriving ecosystems. The Endangered Wildlife Trust defines wetlands "as areas that are permanently saturated with water, allowing for plant and animal communities to adapt to these waterlogged conditions".

Tourism is a principal source of income for many of the developing countries. The tourism sector provides good opportunities for many people both rich and poor.- opportunities for investment in infrastructure, skills development ,jobs , ownership,and contribution to the GDP to mention a few.. Wetlands like coasts, rivers and lakes play a vital part in this success. Coasts, lakes, rivers, mangroves and other wetland areas are an important resource for tourism.

Caution also has to be made that we must not overdo it because we want to derive the above benefits, for it can result in habitat loss, pollution, noise and over-consumption of water. We need to preserve the natural beauty and the biodiversity of these sites which is what attracts our tourists forever.South Africa and Africa in general are endowed with natural resources which if properly utilised can benefit the whole world. Critical is how do we derive benefit and in the process preserve for the future generations.

With climate change realities it calls on all of us to use the opportunities of celebrations of this nature to educate and learn to protect our environment. We seek to protect our richest biodiversity through practising sustainable tourism. South Africa is recognised as one of the most biodiverse destinations of the world.

Tourists enjoy swimming and diving, watching birds and other wildlife or just enjoying the scenery as well as understanding different cultures. Lessons from the 2010 Fifa World cup show that additional to sports people who descended to the country were those who wanted to tour the country.

Those who, additional to the media exposure the country benefitted from, became ambassadors who have since come back with their families for holidays. Our tourism sector strategy approved by cabinet just before the World Cup seeks to position South Africa as one of the top 20 tourism destinations of the world, bringing in about 15 m tourists by 2020, creating 225 000 jobs and contribute 499 billion into the GDP.

The following statistics briefly explain the trends globally including here at home:

UNWTO reports indicate growth of 4.5 between January and August 2011... From 642 to 671 tourists

2012 growth forecast = 3-4%

FD spend = 59billion in 2009 - 72billion in 2010 = 22.6% growth

domestic trips down from 30.3million to 29.7 million in 2010 = 2% decrease...

tourist arrivals to SA went up from 5.9million from January to 6.1 million in September recording 2.6% increase...

Trends have been so positive both globally and nationally. As part of implementing the strategy we identified what levers would make it realizable. Like targeting and sustaining some of our traditional markets, identifying new markets, strengthening regional integration and several new niche markets were identified, lastly that skills development is an anchor to allow the vast majority of our unemployed youth entry into the industry. Awareness programmes are on course on the above.

One of the major priorities for the current term of government is development of our rural areas. Government sees this as an opportunity to diversify the country's product base and focus on the country's natural assets in rural areas. Rural areas, particularly those in South Africa, offer a unique experience that cannot be found anywhere else in world. It is also our view that tourism development can serve as a catalyst for infrastructure development in rural areas.

It is also a fact that the majority of poor South African live in these areas and most of them are women who often are bread winners in their respective households. The lives in these households must change for the better and in this regard wetlands and tourism has a contribution to make. In line with the available resources, government together with the social partners needs to prioritise development and job creation in these areas, one of which is where we are today in the Makuleke Village.

Declared a Ramsar site owned by the community, and part of the TFCAs ,this site provides an opportunity for us jointly as a country working with all stakeholders to develop a business case and integrate it in our plans as well as those of the region as a whole. In the Retosa Ministers Council we instructed the Secretariat to develop integrated projects cutting across borders so that we can market them to the world in order to bring investments in these areas.

We need to work together and develop proposals that would be integrated there coming from this area. Besides as the department of Tourism we also have a social responsibility program that funds projects within the field of tourism. We have the unique opportunity to explore tourism's crucial role and responsibility in safeguarding our country's rich biodiversity. All around the world, South Africa is recognized as one of the most biodiverse destinations in the world.

In line with our vision, to be globally celebrated as a leader in tourism excellence, responsible tourism remains a major aspect of the destination's competitiveness. As a long haul destination, it is imperative that we manage the sector's carbon footprint effectively. We call upon all the tourism stakeholders and travelers themselves to contribute their part of the global responsibility to safeguard the intricate web of unique species and ecosystems that make us to be proud South Africans.

Wetlands and tourism are good friends. We need to pay attention to the two. And thank you to the biodiversity activist Deputy Minister of Water and Environmental Affairs Honourable Rejoice Mabudafhasi.

Ha Khensa!