



**MINISTRY OF TOURISM
REPUBLIC OF SOUTH AFRICA**

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Opening address by Tourism Minister Derek Hanekom at the African World Heritage Youth Forum at the Nelson Mandela Gateway in Cape Town

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Organisers of this UNESCO youth forum,
Our colleagues in the Department of Arts and Culture

Good morning to all of you!

Welcome to South Africa. Welcome to Cape Town, and to the Nelson Mandela Gateway, the point of departure to the iconic Robben Island, one of South Africa's eight unique World Heritage Sites.

The island has special place in our liberation history. It also has a very special place in our collective memory of the past, and our common aspirations for the future.

It holds painful memories for many liberation heroes who were held there in captivity for long periods. But Robben Island also holds hope for all humanity. It is a universal symbol of the enduring capacity of human beings to find it within ourselves to transcend the pain we sometimes cause each other, to forgive, and to restore the values and the spirit of human togetherness in our society, despite our personal pain.

The island symbolises that critical period of transition from a dark and oppressive past to a better future. It jolts us into acknowledging what we have to do right now, in the present, if we are to learn from our divided past, and apply our wisdom to forging a united future.

A special welcome to all the young people taking part in this event. You shape the future, you are always at the very centre of transition - growing into your own lives, finding your place in society, making your way in the world, changing the world and being changed by it.

You are the bridge between our past and our future, and you have a big task ahead of you. You are required to grasp the baton from the generation before you, run your race as best as you possibly can, and pass it on to those who are waiting to sprint after you. As we move into the future, every one of you here today will have a direct impact on the values of your generation, the shape of our society, and the sustainability of our planet.

There is an exciting and exuberant spirit in the air. It's the vibe that you get when young people come together to share experiences, make their voices heard, and find their place in the action plan for a better world.

And your voice will be heard. I was pleased to hear that the outcome of this forum will include an African Youth Declaration, which will be presented at the 40th World Heritage Committee Meeting in Istanbul in July this year. I am sure that you will use this opportunity to make a compelling case for the preservation of our continent's tangible and intangible heritage.

This forum has brought young people together from many parts of the continent to discuss how youth can be involved in the conservation and preservation, promotion and presentation of World Heritage Sites in Africa, leveraging social and economic benefits for communities, our countries and the world. It is fitting that the event takes place at the start of Africa Month, when we celebrate the natural and cultural splendour of our continent, and re-commit ourselves to resolving our challenges.

Thank you to the Department of Arts and Culture, the African World Heritage Fund, the UNESCO World Heritage Centre and Robben Island Museum for partnering with the Tourism Department, and for hosting the UNESCO Regional Youth Forum in Africa for the first time. This level of collaboration shows what amazing things can be achieved when we put our resources and efforts together. I'm certain that this gathering will succeed in its aim of empowering young people in the conservation of the world's heritage.

This forum aims to build a sustainable platform for the youth of Africa to protect and promote the heritage of Africa. This dovetails perfectly with the Department of Tourism's strategy to develop and enhance our World heritage Sites.

We have improved interpretive signage at these sites. On Robben Island we will be installing a renewable energy source later this year, we will be training guides to improve the experience of tourists, and digitising important historical records to preserve them for future generations.

We are doing these things for three reasons.

Firstly, we know that cultural and heritage tourism is on the rise around the world. Tourists are seeking more meaningful experiences. By growing heritage tourism, we are diversifying our offer and strengthening South Africa's status as a preferred tourism destination. And in growing visitor numbers, we are improving tourism's overall contribution to jobs and to the economy.

Secondly, we know that youth travel has an impact on the tourism economy. The travelling youth of today are leading the charge for more meaningful cultural experiences with authentic experiences. More young people are travelling, and spending more on their travels. Young people are also changing the way the industry operates, relying on their mobile connection to make their way around the world, and constantly sharing experiences on social media. To meet the growing demand, providing WiFi services at tourism establishments is the new norm, not an exception.

And thirdly, we want our heritage sites to continue telling the story of our planet and its people, and for the stories of human endeavor to spread understanding, social cohesion and world peace and harmony. Every one of our eight World Heritage Sites is unique. Who can stand at the edge of the Vredefort Dome and not marvel at the sheer power of the cosmos, and the one-in-a-trillion chance that one particular meteorite travelling through space hit our lonely planet, all those millions of years ago, possibly sparking life on earth?

Who can stand in the cell that was home to our revered Nelson Mandela for more than two decades, and not be moved in the most profound way, and not feel something stir deep within the core of our being?

Young people inherit the responsibility of protecting and presenting the value of World Heritage Sites. The stories of these unique natural and cultural sites weave a thread, binding us together in pursuit of a better world because we share a common humanity.

These are humanity's treasures, handed down by each generation to the next for safekeeping, for learning how the past informs the present and shapes the future. We are counting on you, and I know that you will not let us down.

From the time that our early human ancestors, including the newly discovered species in our own genus, *Homo naledi*, roamed in the Cradle of Humankind, young people have been at the forefront of finding innovative ways of feeding themselves and protecting themselves from predators and the sometimes harsh forces of the natural world. And so, despite our vulnerabilities, we have survived as a species. But the role of our young people in today's world goes far beyond biological survival.

We look to you to take up the next phase of human development, to build on what has gone before you, to discover, to innovate, and to change the world into a much better place for everyone. To look after our planet. To care for the less fortunate. To correct the mistakes and excesses of the generations before you.

One of you here today could well be the one who wins a Nobel Prize for your country, who discovers an effective vaccine for Aids, Ebola or Zika virus. You could be the one who is operating the Square Kilometre Array radio telescope in the Karoo on the day that we discover other living beings elsewhere in the universe.

So this is my simple challenge to you: use what you will learn at this forum to change the world that we have into a new and better world for everyone.

Make it a place where we appreciate the heritage that has been bestowed upon us, where we aspire and work together for a better future, and where the bonds that tie us together into the family of humanity are strengthened with each passing year.

I thank you.

Enquiries

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