



**MINISTRY OF TOURISM
REPUBLIC OF SOUTH AFRICA**

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**Speech delivered by Tourism Minister Derek Hanekom at the opening of Meetings Africa 2016
at the Sandton Convention Centre on Tuesday**

23 February 2016

MEC for Economic Development, Environment, Agriculture & Rural Development, Mr Lebogang Maile,
Member of the Mayoral Committee for Economic Development, Mr Ruby Mathang
Acting CEO of South African Tourism, Ms Sthembiso Dlamini,
Partners in the business events industry across the continent;
Members of the Tourism Educators of South Africa
Esteemed exhibitors and buyers;
Ladies and gentlemen,

I am extremely delighted to be here, because Meetings Africa represents two aspects of tourism which I consider to be very important for our future.

Firstly: the meetings and events segment contributes significantly to the overall performance of the tourism sector in South Africa, and it has huge potential to contribute to tourism growth in our country.

And secondly: this event brings Africa together, and helps us to move forward as a continent united through tourism. There is great potential for us to do even more to reap the full benefits of tourism for the continent.

Today, we are ushering in a new era for Meetings Africa. We are more united in our aims and aspirations, and we are more focused on delivering against this event's mandate of Advancing Africa Together.

Over the years, we have worked well together to advance the African agenda with one goal in sight: to build a globally competitive business events industry.

But there are additional layers to this agenda. A competitive events industry will improve the performance of tourism. And a successful and growing tourism industry will provide the means for social and economic development on a vast scale. People throughout Africa will benefit significantly from growing the tourism footprint through, more jobs, and more opportunities to become part of the tourism value chain.

We should take on this challenge with vigour and pride, because, as we progress on every step of this journey, we will be creating a better future for generations of Africans that will follow us.

Over the last two decades tourism has grown phenomenally in South Africa, from around four million in 1994 to just under nine million in 2015. This growth represents opportunities for our people to get jobs, opportunities for entrepreneurs, and opportunities for communities to join the tourism value chain.

Ladies and Gentlemen, let me warmly welcome you to the eleventh edition of Meetings Africa.

Welcome to the Sandton Convention Centre, which symbolises the cream of what our events industry has to offer. Our host city, Johannesburg epitomises what Africa can deliver, not only for tourists, but

for travellers connecting to all parts of the continent, for business people and entrepreneurs, for industrialists - all of whom are riding the wave of global investment in our continent.

Welcome to every exhibitor who is here to market their products and services, to all the international, regional and local buyers, and to the national and international journalists who have come to report on the dynamic African growth story.

This event is about our continent at its best, it's about putting our excellent tourism products and services on the world market.

From our Convention Centres, hotels, lodges and restaurants, to our professional conference organisers; from our banks, roads, airports and telecommunications infrastructure to our universities and colleges, Africa is advancing.

Today we are proud to welcome our brothers and sisters from 15 African countries who are represented at Meetings Africa. We also have the pleasure of welcoming seven tourism boards from the continent. We have forged extremely useful partnerships this year, and we have access to the highest number of experts in global and regional business events attending since the show's inception.

Today, we can truly say: Africa is open for business.

We are extremely optimistic about the prospects for tourism in our country and on our continent, and we are working with our partners to take full advantage of the opportunities.

This is not just another trade show. South African Tourism has gone all out to make Meetings Africa 2016 a genuine one-stop shop, packed with insightful discussions and opportunities to network with industry players. Well done to the entire team for an excellent job!

You have ensured buyers will be exposed to products and services which prove that Africa is a great place to host meetings, conferences and exhibitions.

I thank all our industry associations, partners and sponsors who have come on board to make this such a rewarding show.

They have heeded our call to partner with us and to *Advance Africa Together*.

The entire tourism value chain benefits from Africa's capabilities, efficiency and hospitality when associations bring their events to our continent.

Our warm and welcoming people are committed to growing the sector through service excellence. Our business events industry is ambitious, market-focused and strategically organised to meet the demands of the global market.

I thank the entire team at the South Africa National Convention Bureau who organise Meetings Africa, our partners, and the management and staff of the Sandton Convention Centre, who make sure that Meetings Africa is delivered seamlessly year after year.

Ladies and gentlemen, it gives me great pleasure to declare that Meetings Africa 2016 is now officially open for business.

I thank you

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