



**MINISTRY OF TOURISM
REPUBLIC OF SOUTH AFRICA**

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**Remarks by Minister Derek Hanekom: International Tourist Guides' Day Celebrations,
Maropeng**

20 February 2015

Deputy Minister Thoko Xasa

Prof Wally Serote (from whom I have learned such a lot and continue to learn from)

Acting DG: Mr Victor Tharage

Tour guides

Program Director: Anthony Paton

The world we live in is filled with stories. We are bombarded by stories every day of our lives - from the news media, from social media, from talking to our friends, relatives, and colleagues. Some of the stories are lighthearted and entertaining, some are informative and help us understand things, and others are sad and even worrying.

One thing we know: human culture and even human advancement has been built around speech and story telling. It's what gives sense to the seemingly senseless, and gives meaning and life to what might otherwise be lifeless. We, who all have our roots in Africa - perhaps even right here in the Cradle of Humankind - are essentially curious creatures. We yearn for the stories that tell us about who we are, where we come from, how things work, what lies beyond the horizon.

Storytellers help us to experience our world and enrich our lives. And that is what guides are: storytellers. People who give life and meaning to what otherwise might be lifeless and meaningless.

Indeed, all of us in the tourism sector should concentrate on this singular goal: to provide our tourists with the very best experience, so that they come back as repeat visitors, and they tell others about their incredible experiences.

Our country is privileged to own the biggest story in the history of the world: the story of how humankind originated; how our common needs and our desire to live together formed the world's first communities, and how we spread from here to every corner of the globe. This place where we are gathered today is, course, the place that tells the profound story of where we all come from; and where we say to our visitors: Welcome Home.

This place reminds us that there is so much more that unites humankind than that which divides us.

What an amazing story! But it doesn't stop there.

In the not too distant future, South Africa will be at the centre of another one of the world's biggest scientific stories. The Square Kilometre Array, which is currently being built in the Karoo, is expected to bring us more evidence of how the universe was formed, and maybe even how it is likely to evolve in the future, and where there is life out there.

For every era in the vast expanse of time between humankind's early steps and where we are heading in the future, we have wonderful stories to tell.

From the formation of the ancient Vredefort Dome and the geological history behind it, to the liberation of all our people and the cultural history of how the impossible became possible, we have great stories to tell.

The realization of our vision for tourism depends very much on how our tour guides - and the rest of us - tell our story, the narrative of South Africa, and how we interact with that individual that is so precious to us - the tourist.

Our vision is to ensure that tourism continues to grow; that we move towards a more representative ownership; that we have a competitive, sustainable and responsible tourism sector that cares for the environment and people, and that tourism creates jobs and livelihoods for as many people as possible. By the end of this decade we want to be one of the top 20 global tourist destinations in the world.

To achieve this we will have to intensify our marketing efforts, improve our infrastructure and enhance our key tourist destinations, build on our training and skills development programmes, and ensure that quality assurance is deeply embedded in the system.

We already have a robust grading system that gives our tourists the confidence that they will get what they expect when they arrive at their accommodation, after a day of sightseeing, game drives, shopping, or experiencing our colourful cultural diversity. Similarly, tourists need to know that they can trust and believe our accredited guides.

It is essential that we in government and our tourism partners work together to enhance the quality of tourist guiding that is offered at every single destination and place of interest in our country.

We need to ensure that our tourist guides develop a variety of skills to service our traditional and emerging source markets according to their different needs. This will include training tourist guides in various languages, in subject matter knowledge, in cultural understanding, and in specialities like how to cater for travellers with disabilities.

The Tourism Act sets out a framework which regulates the tourist guiding sector. The Department is in the process of establishing new regulations which will elaborate on the prescripts in the Act.

This will involve widespread consultations with the tourist guiding fraternity. It presents an opportunity for both government and the guiding sector to make improvements to areas such as the required competencies for tourist guides, effective systems to address non-compliance, and to strengthen reporting and other administrative processes between provincial and national stakeholders.

Success in the tourism sector depends on effective working relationships between the public and private sectors. Several years ago, government called for tourist guides to organise themselves, so that they could speak with one voice.

I understand that many attempts were made by the guiding fraternity to formalise structures that would represent their interests and needs, but - a national body that represents tourist guides still does not exist.

From data submitted by provinces, we know that the registration of tour guides has grown by almost by 28% over the past five years, from 8 657 to 11 078 at the end of the 2014. The participation of Black tourist guides has grown to 30% in 2010, and the number of female tourist guides grew to 3574 last year.

This growth is encouraging, particularly because it supports our commitment to growth which is more inclusive and more representative of our people throughout the tourism value chain. Now we need to really concentrate on improving the quality of this incredibly important service to the tourism sector.

In conclusion, my message to all our tour guides is this: go out there, commit yourselves to service excellence, and tell our story well. Tell it with passion, with accuracy and authenticity, and show the world what we are all about. Let them feel the emotions that are attached to the sites they visit, and help them to experience our world in a meaningful and memorable way.

You are the face and the voice of our tourism industry. Do that thing that you have chosen to do really well. You might find inspiration from these words of Martin Luther King:

"If a man is called to be a street sweeper, he should sweep streets even as a Michaelangelo painted, or Beethoven composed music or Shakespeare wrote poetry. He should sweep streets so well that all the hosts of heaven and earth will pause to say, 'Here lived a great street sweeper who did his job well.'"

As you take our visitors through the places they want to see, you will be taking tourism to the place where we want it to be, so that it continues to improve the lives of all our people.

And caption to the photograph, taken by the tourist, should say: 'Here is the tour guide, who showed us the place, told us the story, and did her job well!'

I thank you.

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