



**MINISTRY OF TOURISM
REPUBLIC OF SOUTH AFRICA**

Private Bag X424, Pretoria, 0001, South Africa. Tel. (+27 12) 444 6780, Fax (+27 12) 444 7027
Private Bag X9154, Cape Town, 8000, South Africa. Tel. (+27 21) 469 5800, Fax: (+27 21) 465 3216

**Remarks by the Minister before ringing the opening bell at Meetings Africa 2015,
Sandton Convention Centre**

24 February 2015

Good morning ladies and gentlemen; friends and partners from across the continent.

Meetings Africa celebrates its tenth anniversary this year. In these ten years, the African business events industry has emerged from obscurity to become one of the most exciting sub-sectors on our continent's tourism landscape. We have demonstrated that we can function well – in fact, very well – in a market that demands accessible, professional, value for money business event products and services.

Besides hosting globally strategic events of the magnitude of the COP17 Climate Change Conference and the 2013 BRICS Summit, we have excelled in providing a home to literally thousands of other business events. This has contributed positively to tourism growth and job creation. According to research conducted by our National Convention Bureau, 40% of all convention delegates attending meetings in South Africa return in the next five years as tourists, boosting tourism growth and job creation years into the future. As such, business events and major conventions have become important components of the economy and our plans to achieve the ambitions outlined in the National Development Plan. As it stands, we have already secured 177 major international association meetings for the next five years - thereby attracting a quarter of a million delegates with an estimated economic impact of R3.5 billion.

I welcome each of you to Meetings Africa 2015: every exhibitor who is here to market and sell their service; all buyers – both hosted and those who have come on their own steam; the more than 70 journalists from around the world who will report on this dynamic industry; and the team from the National Convention Bureau who ensure that Meetings Africa is seamlessly delivered, year after year. It is estimated that the business to be generated by the 184 qualified buyers at Meetings Africa this year, could bring 54 000 convention delegates worth nearly R1 billion in revenue to our shores in the next two years. The three top source markets for qualified buyers at Meetings Africa this year are India, USA & Canada, and China. 66% of our qualified buyers this year are new to the market, which testifies to the major pull of what is on offer.

It is through a team effort that we have grown Meetings Africa into the flagship event that it has become. Of course, that has only been possible because ours is a continent that offers so much. We are proud of our immense beauty and diversity. Our people are warm and welcoming and committed to growing the sector through service excellence. Our infrastructure is excellent and accessibility is improving rapidly. Our business events industry is ambitious, market-focused and strategically organised; they stand ready to meet global market demands and to compete with the best the world has to offer.

During this Meetings Africa, we invite the world to *Rise with Us*. Bring your events to our destination. While you are here, enjoy our hospitality. And plug into our local knowledge economy in fields as varied as mining, astronomy, design, health and medicine,

telecommunications, environmental conservation and many others. The business events industry is not only about tourism, conventions and trade; nor is it only about direct spend and the immediate benefits to the local economy. Business events and conventions are catalysts for new thinking and competitiveness; they connect the best minds to spur innovation; they create platforms to collaboratively solve common global problems; and they create people-to-people connections that advance the cause of our common humanity. The legacy impact of business events extends far beyond its number value. Meetings Africa is therefore also about African professionals partnering to transform Africa, the wonderful continent that we all call home.

With these few words, allow me to restate our commitment, as custodians of Meetings Africa, to *Advancing Africa Together*. I look forward to the next ten years of Meetings Africa and this partnership that has been forged across the continent.

Africa is open for business.

I now declare Meetings Africa 2015 officially open, and I wish you all a productive, profitable few days at this trade platform.

Thank you