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**Keynote address by Deputy Minister of Tourism – Mr Fish Mahlalela**

**International forum - South Africa-China Tourism Cooperation: “Opening New Horizons”**

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A collaboration of the University of Johannesburg Confucius Institute (UJCI),  
The Centre for Africa-China Studies (CACs), and the School of Tourism and Hospitality (STH)

Leaders of Business and Industry  
Your Excellencies  
Member of the media  
Comrades and friends

I greet you all

May I once again extend our warmest welcome to those whom amongst are visitors to our beautiful country. It is a great honour and privilege to address you on the occasion of this special gathering.

The year 2020 was challenging year for South Africa and the whole world. The arrival of the pandemic has stopped the world from travelling.

China's success in fighting the pandemic has served as a good reference for South Africa and the rest of the world. We are grateful to China for its outstanding contribution in fighting the pandemic.

It needs to be observed that this year is the 23rd anniversary of diplomatic ties between China and South Africa. From trade and investment to education and technology, from arts and culture to tourism, and close political ties, the tree of friendship between China and South Africa has blossomed in all respects.

The tourism industry is of great significance and potential to South Africa and is one of the six key sectors of economic growth. China has always been an important global source market for the tourism of South Africa and is a strategic trade partner to South Africa. This symbiotic relationship will definitively drive recovery in the sector.

Equally, business and trade between South African and China has seen tremendous growth in the last decade alone, and that has only happened because you in attendance here today, made it so happen. We must seize the opportunities and fully leverage the strengths of mutual trust, economic cooperation and translate our ambitions into concrete results that benefit our people.

Ladies and gentlemen,

According to the latest United Nations World Tourism Organization (UNWTO) reports, the global tourism sector outperformed the global economy for the seventh consecutive year, being the fastest growing broad economic sector in 2017. It has outperformed manufacturing (4.2%), retail and wholesale (3.4%), agriculture, forestry and fisheries (2.6%) and financial services (2.5%) respectively.

South Africa remains China's number one trading partner in Africa and has experienced an upward trend in trade from 2015 to 2019, increasing from R1.182 trillion to R1.412 trillion respectively.

We are proud to say that before COVID-19, China remained the leading growth market for South Africa's tourism industry, with year-on-year growth recorded at 38 percent in 2019, accounting for the largest number of international visitors to South Africa.

A clear horizon for Tourism cooperation has been set.

The relationship between South Africa and China gives expression to the Chinese New Year, the symbol of the Year of the Ox and embodies an ethos of rejuvenation and revitalisation.

China and South Africa have pledged mutual support for each other's tourism ventures and we are deepening cooperation on all fronts of human development anchored in the high level Comprehensive Strategic Partnership (CSP) from the SA-China Cooperation Agreement, signed 23 years ago.

Article 20 of the Declaration of the Cooperation Agreement talks about "co-operation in tourism training, capacity building, promoting and developing cultural and medical tourism as well as promotion campaigns and information sharing, thereby acknowledging that the tourism industry is a generator of economic growth and empowerment, employment and foreign exchange".

Pursuant to this, South Africa and China signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) on Co-operation in the field of Tourism on 28 October 2013.

The areas of cooperation identified in the MoU includes:

- a) Information Sharing;
- b) Tourism Investment;
- c) Marketing and Promotion;
- d) Skills Development and Training; and
- e) Tourism Safety and Service Standards.

We have committed to continue to nurture the sector and drive increasingly impactful and collaborative strategies and programmes for sustained, inclusive growth into the future.

#### COOPERATION IN SKILLS DEVELOPMENT

South Africa have identified skills development in the tourism and hospitality subsectors as a fundamental priority, and we are proud of the realisation of the commitments made to assist South Africa through institutions in China.

Further discussions with the Chinese Culture and International Education Exchange Centre has created and sustained our Mandarin language training for the travel, tourism and hospitality in South Africa.

The intention is to place the successful students in various vocational training and emphasis is placed in the fields of Chefs, Tourist Guiding, and Hospitality Reception for the development of a sustainable and reliable "skills pipeline" which is a national need as it is critical for the growth of this sector.

Some of those skills are aimed at ensuring that we are primarily well positioned to cater for our increasing Chinese tourists arrivals and includes amongst others:

- Specialisation course on Chinese traditional cuisine
- Tourist guide and front-line staff training in Mandarin to equip them to better service the market
- Training or upskilling of new entrants on adventure guiding

#### IMPROVING EASE OF TRAVEL

The issue of improving travel freedom through visa waiver for ordinary passport holders has been topping the agenda in various bilateral engagements between the two countries to increase tourism and people-to-people exchanges.

South Africa and China registered a historic milestone in improving the visa regime between the two countries through the signing of the Visa Requirements Simplification Agreement during the State Visit on 24 July 2018.

Consequently, South Africa established eleven Visa Facilitation Centers across China, in the following cities: Beijing, Shanghai, Guangzhou, Chengdu, Xian, Shenyang, Wuhan, Jinan, Hangzhou, Chongqing and Kunming.

This new measure is extended to business visitors holding diplomatic, official/services and ordinary passports, who apply for visas to visit South Africa for short-term business purposes and is valid for ten years.

#### IN CONCLUSION

With the successful development and gradual trial and distribution of the vaccine, we believe that South Africa's tourism industry could welcome renewed impetus. It is my hope that the tourism industry in both China and South Africa will continue to yield even more fruitful results in future.

The relationship between South Africa and China over the years has been mutually beneficial and guided by trust, respect and friendly relations.

We hope that there will be a new outlook in the upcoming year, both in our tourism industry and in the bilateral development between China and South Africa.

On behalf of the Tourism of the Republic of South Africa, I look forward to welcoming all of you again to discover South Africa for yourselves soon.

To conclude, let me wish the forum a great success!

I thank you