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Speech delivered by Minister Marthinus Van Schalkwyk at the opening of Meetings Africa 2013

19 February 2013

Advancing Africa Together

"Good morning ladies and gentlemen,

Last year, I opened Meetings Africa 2012 and officially introduced the new South African National Conventions Bureau (SANCB) to the industry and the world.

Back then, we promised that the business events industry would become more strategic, more focused and more growth-orientated. Since then, the Conventions Bureau has put in place an ambitious yet attainable growth strategy, and is setting its sights on broader targets than just our immediate backyard here in South Africa.

The SANCB and its destination partners have secured 87 new association meetings for 2013 to 2017, which will contribute more than R2,6 billion to the economy.

In 2013 alone, the 38 secured association meetings will bring more than 57 000 delegates to South Africa, who will inject R680 million into our economy. That's indeed a prize worth working for!

The business events industry has a huge impact and influence on the country's macro-economy, as it -

1. stimulates international markets for locally produced goods and services;
2. builds business contacts, trade and research links; and
3. creates access to new technologies, new ideas and new professional networks. It is indispensable if we want to compete in the prevailing knowledge economy.

We have come a long way. The success of the South African business events industry is reflected in the fact that the International Congress and Convention Association has ranked South Africa 37th on its list of the world's top business event destinations and 15th on its list of long-haul destinations, while we have come out tops as the number-one business tourism destination in Africa. South Africa's track record shows we mean business.

We have hosted some of the world's most significant mega-events in recent years:

- The 2010 FIFA World Cup, which was an African event owned by the continent, and is formally said to have been the very best FIFA World Cup ever

- The United Nations COP17 climate change conference in Durban in 2011, which was an unqualified success
- The African Cup of Nations (AFCON) 2013
- And at the end of March this year, we will be hosting the fifth BRICS summit in Durban.

However, the rich potential for growth that the global and regional market offers this industry is immense, and it will be best realised if we unite as destinations across the African continent to give the world one irresistible offering for business events. The theme of Meetings Africa 2013 is “**Advancing Africa Together**”, and the focus is on African professionals partnering to transform Africa. Meetings Africa provides the ideal platform to initiate better and more inclusive continental partnerships, which will work to realise the untapped potential of our continent as a business event destination.

While competition between destinations is a good thing, it is only through cooperation to grow value, widen the variety of experiences on offer and increase awareness of what this continent offers that we will all reap major benefits.

The key message from Meetings Africa 2013 to the world is this: Africa is determined to advance its global rankings and its accessibility. It is united in an ambition to realise the new economic investment, arrivals and job creation potential located in this industry.

To the industry, I would like to say thank you for your continued commitment and dedication to ensure that we (as a collective) achieve our targets entrenched in the National Tourism Sector Strategy.

I wish you a productive Meetings Africa 2013 and declare the exhibition officially open.

I thank you."

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