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Minister Hanekom's New Year Message to the Tourism Sector

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The beginning of 2019 - the 25th anniversary of the achievement of our democracy - is an opportune time to reflect on the sector's achievements and challenges and for us to shape what lies ahead.

In 1993, South Africa received 3.4 million international visitors and tourism contributed 4.6% to GDP. Growth to 10.29 million arrivals, 9% contribution to GDP and 1.6 million people employed across the tourism value chain is no small achievement.

Despite the tough economic conditions, tourism continued to grow in 2018, albeit at a slower rate than we were all hoping for. January to September 2018, saw international arrivals grow by 2.2%, compared to the same period in 2017 (which was an impressive growth year) driven mainly by growth from the African markets. Our overseas markets saw a decline of more than 1% in the same period, with the Cape Town drought scare as the main - although not only - contributing factor. The safety of tourists was and continues to be a matter that warrants attention.

Happily, dams in Cape Town are now 65% full, but the take away lesson is that we must emphasize responsible tourism and general responsible use of scarce resources,

We are seeing daily successes of the SAPS in fighting crime and there are special plans in place for tourism areas, including the deployment of 1450 "Working for Tourism" safety monitors. We are determined to make it safe for tourists - domestic and international - to visit our beaches, to hike, and to visit our spectacular attractions around the country.

On the matter of land reform and expropriation of land, the take away message is that President Ramaphosa has strongly affirmed that there will be no arbitrary land grabs, and has called on all South Africans to help solve this historical injustice.

Tourism growth must be the desire of every patriotic South African. It translates into economic growth, jobs and opportunities for many. In 2017, tourism supported 31 752 new jobs. In 2019 the collaboration between the public and private sector must be strengthened to further grow and drive the industry to reach even greater heights. It is the one industry that can readily deliver the jobs and economic growth that our country so urgently needs.

I am pleased to report that, together with my colleague Minister Cwele, we will intensify our efforts to make it easier for people to visit South Africa through an improved visa regime. The revised regulations making it easier for foreign children to visit our country have been gazetted. The Department of Home Affairs has committed itself to piloting the new electronic visa system in New Zealand. The intention is to start rolling out e-visas to other visa requiring countries in the course of 2019.

Despite the challenges we faced during 2018, the start of the of the new year offers us an opportunity to move forward positively and decisively. Let us make 2019 a magnificently successful year - a year in which we lay a solid foundation for even greater successes in future years.

Let me take this opportunity to extend my appreciation to our whole vibrant tourism community who continue - with passion - to invest, innovate and enhance our tourism offering; provide excellent services and deliver memorable experiences to all our international and domestic

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visitors.