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## **SPEECH**

**DATE: 25 FEBRUARY 2025**

**Minister of Tourism, Patricia de Lille, Meetings Africa Trade Floor opening speech**

***Note to editors : The following speech was delivered this morning, 25 February 2025 at the Meetings Africa 2025 trade floor opening ceremony at the Sandton Convention Centre. Read more below...***

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Deputy Minister of Tourism, Maggie Sotyu

MEC of Economic Development in the Gauteng Province, Lebogang Maile

Chairperson of the Parliamentary Portfolio Committee on Tourism, Lungi Annette Mnganga-Gcabashe and Members of the Parliamentary Portfolio Committee on Tourism

Members of the Select Committee

Director General at the Department of Tourism, Victor Vele

South African Tourism Board Chair and Board Members

South African Tourism Chief Executive Officer, Nombulelo Guliwe

Board members of the various Provincial Tourism Authorities

Board Chairperson of the Tourism Business Council of South Africa, Mr Jerry Mabena and board members

CEOs and Executive Management of Provincial and local Tourism Authorities

Delegates from all over the world

African Industry Associations, and Tourism Stakeholders and partners,

All media representatives, Ladies and Gentlemen

Good morning,

Someone once said, 'Today is a good day to have a great day!' and it is indeed a pleasure to be with you all at Meetings Africa 2025.

This is an even more exciting event this year as South Africa Chairs and hosts the G20, a historic occasion as this gathering takes place on African soil for the first time. This means that Africa is not just rising; Africa is ready.

Across our vast continent, we have the talent, the resources, and the vision to host the world's most influential business events.

From vibrant cities to state-of-the-art, quality-assured conference venues and facilities beaming with service excellence, Africa is proving that we are a powerhouse for global gatherings, innovation, and opportunity.

Africa is home to the world's youngest and fastest-growing workforce and our economies are among the most dynamic.

We have the infrastructure, the hospitality, and, most importantly, the energy to convene the world's brightest minds.

But to unlock our full potential, we must Advance Africa together – and that is why we are here over the next two days.

Amongst us at Meetings Africa over the next two days are members of governments, businesses, entrepreneurs and global partners.

I have no doubt that we are united here because we are convicted in the idea that when Africa wins, the world wins.

Meetings Africa brings business events professionals from around the world together. At this trade show, we are focused on investing in our people, showcasing our quality-assured facilities and venues, and together, positioning Africa as the go-to destination for world-class business events.

Meetings Africa is testament to the strength and resilience of the African tourism and business events industry.

As the Department of Tourism, we are once again proud to have funded the participation of 25 SMMEs in the tourism sector to showcase at Meetings Africa this year.

Through funding by the department, we have removed the financial barrier for these businesses and have provided them with an opportunity to connect with the leaders in business events, secure partnerships and deals that will help their businesses and our economy grow.

Over 100 SMMEs are in attendance at Meetings Africa this year.

To our esteemed exhibitors, buyers, delegates and partners from across the continent and the world, welcome to your gateway to Africa's boundless opportunities.

I also extend my deepest gratitude to our partners: the Gauteng Tourism Authority; the Johannesburg Tourism Company and the Sandton Convention Centre, whose tireless support and dedication has made Meetings Africa 2025 possible.

Every year, your commitment gives us the opportunity to showcase not only South Africa's event-hosting capabilities but also the entire continent's amazing diversity and value as a premier Meetings, Incentives, Conferences and Exhibitions (MICE) destination.

To all our media delegates, it's great to see you – your presence here is invaluable. Over the next two days on the trade floor, you are the storytellers who will share our continent's narrative with the world and truly showcase our world-class venues, top-tier hospitality, rich heritage, and, above all, our warm African welcoming people.

## **MEETINGS AFRICA SHOWCASING AFRICAN EXCELLENCE IN BUSINESS EVENTS**

Meetings Africa is a powerful platform where ideas meet opportunity, where connections spark innovation, and where Africa stands together to showcase its limitless potential.

This year, we reaffirm our commitment to positioning Africa as a global powerhouse in the MICE sector.

Meetings Africa is not just an annual business events trade show, it is a Pan-African showcase of excellence, where our strengths come together to unlock new possibilities for the industry.

This event is a powerful economic growth enabler as it provides the business events sector with opportunities to connect with partners and buyers from all over Africa and the world.

Last year, Meetings Africa injected an estimated R420million into South Africa's economy, of which R215 million was to the Johannesburg economy.

This year, we are proud to welcome over 410 exhibitors from 27 African countries, with a special mention to our debut delegates from Chad, Guinea, Morocco and Madagascar. We welcome you all.

Your presence here adds to the rich tapestry of African experiences and business events products that contribute to reinforce Africa's role as a premier hub for MICE events.

An extra-special welcome also goes out to the 85 first-time exhibitors who are joining us this year.

Your decision to be at Meetings Africa 2025 speaks volumes about the value of this event in helping to foster business growth, drive collaboration, and open new market opportunities.

To our international buyers, you're in the right place. In the coming few days, you'll have the opportunity to engage with the finest business events, products and services that Africa has to offer. We know you'll find what you're looking for.

With participants from 27 African countries and buyers from 63 international markets, Meetings Africa 2025 is a powerful platform from which to amplify Africa's business travel and tourism capabilities.

The business events industry is projected to grow significantly in the coming years and it is the connections and business that we will do here over the next two days that will achieve that income for the African continent.

To the exhibitors and buyers on the trade floor this year, I encourage you to remember that collaboration is key. Make the most of every interaction, every opportunity and every conversation – you never know when or where deals can be struck.

By working together here at Meetings Africa and beyond, and making meaningful connections, we can drive lucrative investments, create jobs, and ensure Africa claims its fair share of the global business events market.

According to Allied Market Research, the global Meetings, Incentives, Conferences and Exhibitions (MICE) industry was valued at approximately 523.3 billion US dollars in 2023 and the South African MICE industry was valued at 6.6 billion US dollars in 2023.

While South Africa is the number 1 ranked business events destination in Africa and the Middle East, we can see from the numbers above that South Africa has a small share of the global business events market. We must do a lot more to grow South Africa and Africa's share of the global business events market.

With our collective expertise and shared vision, we can continue our drive to make Africa the world's most sought-after business events destination.

South Africa's business events sector is on a strong growth trajectory as is our tourism and travel industry.

Between January and December 2024, South Africa welcomed 8.92 million tourists reflecting a 5.1 % year-on-year growth compared to 2023.

The rest of Africa continues to drive most of the arrivals, contributing 76% of all tourists' arrivals to South Africa in 2024.

In terms of attracting business events and conferences, since the start of the 2024/25 financial year, which is 1 April 2024; the South African National Convention Bureau (SANCB) has sourced and submitted no less than 81 bids for international business events.

So far, South Africa has won 53 international business events to be hosted between 2024 and 2029, which will contribute R617 million to South Africa's economy and bring over 24 000 delegates to our shores.

These events will be hosted in world-class venues in Johannesburg, Tshwane, Ekurhuleni, Cape Town, Port Alfred, Gqeberha, Magaliesberg, Sun City, Richards Bay, Polokwane, Muldersdrift and Stellenbosch.

## **SOUTH AFRICA GOVERNMENT: MAKING OUR COUNTRY MORE ACCESSIBLE**

Ladies and gentlemen, with partnerships in mind, our Government of National Unity (GNU) has identified and recognised the power of business events to drive economic transformation, not only in our country but also on the continent.

The Government of National Unity's Priorities are:

- Firstly, to drive inclusive growth and job creation.
- Secondly, to reduce poverty and tackle the high cost of living.
- Thirdly, to build a capable, ethical and developmental state.

The Department of Tourism has identified the following key priorities aligned to the GNU priorities to grow the tourism sector over the next five years in partnership with the private sector:

- Improved Visa Regulations
- Enhanced Destination marketing
- Safety and security
- Product development
- Aviation Route Development for domestic and international air arrivals
- Investment in Tourism infrastructure and services
- Job creation

In alignment with the GNU's three key priorities, the government is actively addressing barriers to tourism.

As part of the G20 Tourism Ministers' Meeting in September this year, we will also be hosting a Tourism Investment Summit.

To further cement our reputation as a gateway to Africa, the government has introduced critical visa enhancements to facilitate smoother access to our country. These include:

- The Trusted Tour Operator Scheme (TTOS), which simplifies group visa applications for key markets like India and China, making it easier for business travellers and tourists to visit South Africa.
- The Electronic Travel Authorisation (ETA) - a game changing innovation for seamless travel.
- The Digital Nomad Visa - a step toward attracting long-stay business travellers and remote professionals. The Department of Tourism will use these visa enhancements as enablers to grow tourism and the MICE Sector.

These improvements are not simply administrative changes: they are strategic steps that contribute to positioning South Africa as a preferred global business events and leisure travel destination.

## **HOSTING THE G20 SUMMIT IN AFRICA**

For the first time on African soil, we will proudly host the G20 Summit. It's a defining time for South Africa and indeed the rest of the African continent.

With G20 nations representing 85% of the global economy, 75% of international trade, and 67% of the world's population, the G20 Summit will also bring together global heads of state in South Africa.

As the only African member country of the G20, South Africa will provide that vital voice on global discussions, especially as they relate to issues affecting developing nations and the African continent.

We do not take lightly the responsibility of using this to highlight Africa's development agenda and promote greater equity in global governance and indeed we are committed to aligning our G20 efforts with the African Union's Agenda 2063.

Under the theme ‘Solidarity, Equality, Sustainability’, South Africa’s G20 presidency will also highlight our commitment to tourism innovation and investment; enhancing air connectivity; and developing inclusive and sustainable tourism policies.

More than 130 G20-related meetings will be held across South Africa, providing unparalleled opportunities for showcasing our country’s venues and facilities, displaying business collaboration, contributing to job creation and driving investment.

The G20 summit is more than just an event - it is a statement to the world that Africa is ready to take its rightful place in global economic leadership. It is also a demonstration of our proven ability to host safe, world-class events of scale.

## **AFRICA’S TRAVEL INDABA**

Ladies and gentlemen, as always, we will meet again to showcase Africa’s excellence at this year’s Africa Travel Indaba in May.

Registration for exhibitors is now open and more than 7,000 businesses have received their exclusive invitations to secure a coveted spot at Africa’s premier travel trade show.

Africa’s Travel Indaba takes place from 12 to 15 May 2025 at the Inkosi Albert Luthuli International Convention Centre in Durban, providing the perfect platform to connect with global buyers and African exhibitors.

Under the theme, “Unlimited Africa”, delegates at Africa’s Travel Indaba can look forward to:

- Insightful sessions designed to drive the growth of the African tourism sector forward
- Opportunities to forge new and sustained partnerships through the various networking sessions
- Updates on South Africa’s global tourism marketing strategies
- A deeper focus on the economic significance and impact of the tourism industry
- An overall showcase of the greater African tourism sector at work

## **CONCLUSION**

Ladies and gentlemen, in closing, once again, at this year’s Meetings Africa, we’re reminded that we must all do more to market the continent to Unlock Africa’s Opportunities Through Quality Connections.

We’ve seen how, time and again, that it’s through meaningful collaboration, that we can unlock doors to economic prosperity for our country and the continent.

Honoured guests, by being here at Meetings Africa, we are we’re not only saying to the world that we are open for business – we are saying we are ready to host big events and that we are in fact, we are excellent at it.

Over the next two days, as you engage with each other on the Meetings Africa trade floor and the various networking events, remember that every handshake, every partnership, and every deal struck here today is a step towards a brighter future for our beloved African continent.

To our exhibitors, buyers, and delegates, I know your time will be productive, worthwhile and filled with new opportunities. Let us not wait for the future to come to us—let's build it, together. The time is now. The place is Africa. And the opportunity is limitless.

Today is truly a great day ... so it is with great pride that I officially welcome you all to Meetings Africa 2025. Let us make Meetings Africa 2025 a resounding success for the people of our beautiful continent.

Thank you and God Bless.

ENDS

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