



## **First Pan-African Conference on: Sustainable Tourism Management in African National Parks**

**22 October 2012**

This was the first Pan-African Conference on Sustainable Tourism Management in African Parks organised by the UNWTO hosted by an African country, Tanzania. The Conference aimed to encourage professional approach to better position “park tourism” as one of the core components of overall national park management in Africa and to acquire an overview of the current challenges in terms of demand and supply chain.

Representing South Africa, the Deputy Minister of Tourism - Tokozile Xasa informed the Conference that Tourism is one of the top six priority sectors in the government’s economic growth plan. The country’s presence at the Conference was critical as South Africa ranks amongst the top countries in terms of biodiversity and boast around 21 National Parks and almost 600 protected areas. The natural environment and its biodiversity component is an important asset, which is closely linked to tourism development in South Africa.

Opening the Conference, “Nature is one of Africa’s greatest assets,” said UNWTO Secretary-General, Taleb Rifai. “Many of the 50 million international tourists visiting Africa each year are driven by the continent’s unparalleled wildlife and natural scenery. These tourists spend in the local economy, sustain jobs, and provide an incentive for conservation, making tourism a powerful engine for sustainable development.”

A presentation by the Deputy Minister of Tourism in South Africa focused on Sustainable Tourism in National Parks and Protected Areas: A Legislative overview. In response to Policy and Legislation Supporting Sustainable Tourism in National Parks and Protected Areas, Deputy Minister Xasa emphasised that South African Government has developed a number of environmental laws and policies that seek to promote conservation and the sustainable use of natural resources. The National Environmental Management: Protected Areas Act (Act 57 of 2003) provides:

- for the protection and conservation of ecologically viable areas representative of South Africa’s biological diversity and its natural landscapes and seascapes;
- for the establishment of a national register of all national, provincial and local protected areas;
- for the management of those areas in accordance with national norms and standards;
- for intergovernmental co-operation and public consultation in matters concerning protected areas; and
- for the continued existence, governance and functions of South African National Parks.

Another key legislation for the conservation of biodiversity and protection of natural assets is the National Environmental Management: Biodiversity Act (Act 10 of 2004) which provides:

- for the management and conservation of South Africa’s biodiversity within the framework of the National Environmental Management Act;
- the protection of species and ecosystems that warrant national protection;
- the sustainable use of indigenous biological resources;

- the fair and equitable sharing of benefits arising from bioprospecting involving indigenous biological resources; and
- the establishment and functions of a South African National Biodiversity.

In terms of the policy framework, Xasa highlighted that a number of policies have been introduced to promote the conservation and the sustainable use of natural resources. The White Paper on Biodiversity (1997) has the goal to ensure the conservation of the diversity of landscapes, ecosystems, habitats, communities, populations, species and genes in South Africa and to use biological resources sustainably and minimize adverse impacts on biological diversity.

At the end of her presentation, Deputy Minister Xasa accentuated that, “in order to achieve our sustainable development objectives, it is important that there is coordination amongst key stakeholders in the promotion of sustainable tourism and the conservation of natural resources in our national parks and protected areas. Stakeholders from various sectors responsible for environmental management and economic development need to interact in many intergovernmental and multi-stakeholder platforms to deal with key policy and strategic issues in relation to government’s effort to fight climate change, protect the natural environment, and to ensure that the country transition to a green economy.”

The importance of sustainable tourism development for national parks and the people living in and around them was echoed in the Arusha Declaration, adopted by attending tourism ministers, tourism private sector representatives, and conservation officials.

Signatories to the declaration underlined the importance of good governance in managing park tourism, calling for collaborative action among the relevant stakeholders, particularly between public authorities and the private sector. The declaration further stressed “the need to directly involve local communities in the management of parks and protected areas to ensure they gain concrete benefits in terms of employment and income generation.”

Tourism is one of the most effective ways to preserve Africa’s national parks and protected areas while creating jobs and income for local communities. This was one of the main conclusions of the First Pan-African Conference.