



**MINISTRY OF TOURISM
REPUBLIC OF SOUTH AFRICA**

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Remarks by the Minister of Tourism, Mmamoloko Kubayi-Ngubane, at Meetings Africa, Sandton Convention Centre - Gauteng

25 February 2020

Good morning

Let me take this opportunity to welcome you all to the 15th edition of Meetings Africa. This event was created in response to the growing global recognition of Africa, as a sought-after premier business events destination.

I am certain you will agree with me that 15 years is a tremendous milestone; a great many years of advancing Africa together. Over the years, this platform has assisted in creating and cementing partnerships and collaborations, both continentally and globally. Undoubtedly, this platform is poised for growth going forward.

Reflecting on the changing fortunes of the African continent, in particular sub-Saharan Africa, in October last year, the World Bank in its Africa overview said the following: Sub-Saharan Africa's opportunities are vast, and its challenges persistent. Home to the world's largest free trade area and a 1.2 billion-person market, the continent is poised to create an entirely new development path harnessing the potential of its resources and people.

Touted as the next frontier for economic growth and development, Africa will have to harness the growth potential of the tourism sector to make this prediction a reality. This sector can help the continent continue its inevitable march towards sustainable growth. Inevitably, this growth trend for a 1.2 billion-person market is irreversible.

Despite the challenges, the World Bank further noted that four of the fastest growing economies in the world in 2019 are in Africa.

Fifteen years ago, when we hosted the first Meetings Africa, Africa was a different continent. Although Africa showed great promise, it still faced challenges ranging from democratisation, violent conflict to huge infrastructure investment gap.

Africa has changed and continues to change for the better. Today, Africa brims with promise. Africa is a wonderful continent of diverse people and vibrant cultures. With many African countries making remarkable economic strides in the past few years, the global meetings industry has come to regard the continent as a dynamic, sought-after destination. Hence, Africa is the second fastest growing tourism region in the world.

Africa has also made great strides in infrastructure development in areas where it traditionally has trailed, including ICT readiness, international openness and price competitiveness, according to the World Economic Forum's Travel & Tourism Competitiveness Report 2019. This is because unparalleled growth of African markets has been undergirded by increasing foreign direct investment in key areas such as energy, infrastructure and finance.

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This is in line with the thinking of the African Union Specialised Technical Committee on Transport, Transcontinental Infrastructure, Energy and Tourism (STC-TTIET) which has encouraged the AU Commission to support the strengthening of tourism infrastructure with adequate resources and to effectively link it with the transport and energy sector considerations. This tells the story of a continent that is on the rise.

It stands to reason that this year we are hosting the largest Meetings Africa, to date. In this regard, we have sold 100% floor space, with 321 exhibitors from 20 Africa countries. A special welcome to the Democratic Republic of Congo, who are first time exhibitors at Meetings Africa.

I would also like to welcome the 313 buyers from across the globe, who have come to explore and buy what Africa has to offer.

Walking around earlier, I could already sense a buzz of excitement surrounding the many possibilities that Africa has to offer the international business travel industry.

Africa comprises of countries at varying degrees of development, the majority of which now form part of the virtuous growth cycle. Therefore, collaboration, rather than competition, is crucial to assist all African countries to realise their potential. For this reason, Meetings Africa showcases Africa's diverse offering of services and products, in which African associations and African meetings industry professionals can partner to help transform our continent's fortune.

Tourism is a crucial sector, and high on the list of our government's priorities. As a country, we already have a vibrant tourism industry and both leisure tourism and business events industry hold massive potential to play an even more meaningful role in the economic transformation of our country and the upliftment of our people and the rest of the continent.

Our government is committed to forging partnerships with the private sector to enable new entrants to come in and contribute to the tourism industry's diversity and sustainability. In particular, we have placed great focus on upskilling small tourism enterprises that create jobs, offer authentic experiences and empower communities.

I am pleased to say that this year we are also joined by 20 SMMEs on the trade floor. Please be sure to visit them at the development zone so you can see the vast variety of business events offerings that South Africa offers.

Government is committed to growing South Africa's business events industry and continues to pledge financial support to the industry.

The support enables us to bid more aggressively when bidding for international association conferences, meetings, incentives and exhibitions. This means that our national convention bureau, and our provincial and city convention bureaus, can provide intensive support across the bidding process.

The time for Africa to show its immense value to the rest of the world as a business events destination is now. It is truly an exciting and invigorating space to be in.

To all buyers from across the world, we can assure you that you have come to the right place. Africa is a capable, globally competitive business events destination and with warm people coupled with authentic and unique experiences, and any event you host here is set to be a memorable one.

To all exhibitors, thank you once again for exhibiting at Meetings Africa, thank you for believing in this platform and for putting your best foot forward and presenting compelling tourism products and services to the world.

To members of the media, thank you for your continued support in sharing the African story and helping showcase Meetings Africa as the premium business events platform that it is.

I trust this year's Meetings Africa trade show will be a fruitful experience for exhibitors, buyers, media and visitors alike, with ample networking opportunities and robust exchanges of ideas. I wish you all a very productive exchange over the next two days.

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We are certain that Meetings Africa 2020 will result in more business events being held on the African continent.

Before I conclude, I would also like to invite you to stay a day or more to enjoy the warm South African hospitality before you head back to your countries of origin.

It now gives me great pleasure to declare Meetings Africa 2020 officially open.

I thank you.

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