



tourism

Department:
Tourism
REPUBLIC OF SOUTH AFRICA

Remarks by Deputy Minister of Tourism, Fish Mahlalela at the Africa's Travel and Tourism Summit - SMME Development Day, Johannesburg

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Honourable Minister – Lindiwe Sisulu
South African Tourism Acting CEO – Ms Sthembiso Dlamini
South African Tourism Board Chair – Mr Siyabonga Dube
Director General, Department of Tourism, Mr Victor Tharage
Delegates from the tourism industry, media and business,
Ladies and gentlemen

The beating of the African drum reverberates deep within our souls. With its lush landscapes, majestic mountains and melting pot of cultures, the spirit of Africa and the cradle of humankind reverberate in all of us.

It draws us closer with its hypnotic pulse of people, splendid in its likeness as well as its diversity. Africa beats for you today and the mighty giant that is Africa is rising! Welcome to Africa's Travel and Tourism Summit

Ladies and gentlemen,

Tourism is an inexhaustible resource. It is also a common resource, an instrument of social cohesion and a unifier on the African continent. It is the golden thread that weaves and knits together the fabric of our African society. It serves as the warp and the weft that is woven through the patchworks of our diverse communities. Indeed, it resonates with the very essence of Ubuntu.

The COVID-19 pandemic has had a profound effect on the global tourism sector. Governments across the world had to implement measures to contain the spread of the virus. This pandemic affected the entire tourism value chain negatively due to a decline in the demand for tourism services.

A direct impact of this pandemic was a restriction of movement globally. The tourism and travel industry remain one of the most affected sectors by the COVID-19 pandemic. The nature of this pandemic and economic downturn has made it necessary for government to work together closely with all role-players to mobilise one of the largest economic response packages in the developing world.

Indeed, the pandemic might have crippled us but it did not break us. As sturdy as the branch of the baobab tree, tourism is resilient and will rebound.

This Summit comes at a turning point in our industry, when every decision we make will determine the future of tourism in Africa. It is, therefore, crucial that we work together and

devise solutions for the betterment of tourism and the economy as a whole. An anonymous Swahili proverb states: “Where there is many, nothing goes wrong.”

The United Nations World Tourism Organisation has declared the year 2021-2022 as a year of inclusive growth. We too, can play our part, in supporting this theme through Africa’s Travel & Tourism Summit.

This is why we are having this day, dedicated to our SMMEs. It is therefore important that we understand what they mean by inclusive growth, and perhaps unpack it.

Inclusive growth, to our sector, means reassessing what we have and improving upon it, not for the betterment of tourism only, but for the betterment of all Africans. This also means that we have the opportunity to build self-reliant economies.

Due to its crosscutting economic nature and deep social footprint, tourism is uniquely positioned to help society and affected communities return to growth and stability.

For this to happen, local economic development and tourism enterprise support and recovery strategies need to be included in the wider recovery plans and actions of affected economic sectors.

SMMEs are the backbone of the tourism economy. Attesting to this, I recently took part in a parliamentary debate on how a self-reliant township and rural economies can bode well for tourism.

Township and rural economies are made up of small and medium sized businesses that are vital to the development of our tourist economy. SMMEs can aid in the sector’s return to pre-COVID performance levels and its long-term sustainable growth trajectory that fully realises Africa’s vast and diverse tourism potential.

Government will also look to roll out a national training programme targeting SMMEs in rural, township and small towns to facilitate implementation of the aforementioned norms and standards.

The plan also makes provision for the establishment of a support hub to provide non-financial support to tourism businesses so as to increase the resilience of SMMEs during the pandemic and beyond.

We can view this COVID-era in two ways — that it spells the end of tourism as we knew it and that it ushers in an opportunity to create a new identity for our sector. For all of us to succeed, we can no longer do business in silos. This calls for greater collaboration between government and the private sector, as well as between all the governments on the continent.

I would like to conclude with the words of our beloved late and former president, Nelson Mandela who said: **“I dream of the realisation of the unity of Africa, whereby its leaders combine in their efforts to solve the problems of this continent. I dream of our vast deserts, of our forests, of all our great wildernesses”** Let us lend impetus to his great legacy.

We continue to give expression to the African Union Agenda 2063 which is the masterplan for transforming Africa into the global powerhouse of the future.

Let us work together to strengthen Brand Africa and together, we will make Africa rise. Halala Africa, halala!

I bid you a very warm African welcome to this Summit and wish you fruitful engagements!

I thank you.