



**MINISTRY OF TOURISM
REPUBLIC OF SOUTH AFRICA**

Remarks by the Minister of Tourism, Mmamoloko Kubayi-Ngubane, at the SUV Challenge, online

03 March 2021

**Programme director
Honourable members
Good evening**

It is an honour for me to join you through this virtual platform this evening for this year's SUV challenge. It is a very fortunate coincidence that this year's SUV coincided with the easing of restrictions as we have moved from level 3 to level 1 of the lockdown. This is a very timely celebration because it is important that our country starts stimulating economic activities, especially through demand stimulation so that we can place our economy on a path to a sustainable recovery.

I would also like to congratulate Deep Sky Blue for successfully hosting of this year's SUV challenge, noting that the event is being held under the dark cloud of a pandemic. I would have liked to participate in this event physically but the situation does not allow. I also welcome the fact that this initiative seeks to promote road safety, tourism, social cohesion and development. All these objectives that you have chosen to focus on are of all equal importance however my area of interest would be tourism which I will focus on in my remarks.

As you are aware, the tourism sector has been the worst affected by the pandemic. To the extent that during the hard lockdown and the subsequent imposition of different levels of restrictions, the demand and supply market ceased to function properly, the tourism sector was tremendously impacted.

As the pandemic evolved, many businesses were forced to close on a temporary basis, often escalating into permanent closures, especially in the restaurant sector. Those businesses that continued to operate, only saw limited activity. All this while thousands of Travel & Tourism jobs were getting lost daily and the risk of further job losses remains.

Throughout this period, the tourism sector has shown great resilience and great capacity for rapid recovery. This was demonstrated in the intervening period between the first and the second wave of the pandemic. Between September and December last year, South Africans had resumed travelling their country in response to our aggressive domestic tourism marketing campaign in which we encouraged people to travel.

I was excited to learn that amongst other things, the SUV challenge aims to promote Tourism in Eastern Cape. This objective is in line with the tourism recovery plan that we have developed together with the private sector. This is to assist the sector to recover from the devastation of the pandemic. The plan is a roadmap that will help us to put the sector on a growth trajectory.

The plan is anchored on three pillars which include:

- Protecting and Rejuvenating Supply – focusing on business continuity risks, aligning the value-chain to new biosecurity standards, preserving air access, as well as investment facilitation and market access.

- Reigniting demand – this will require a robust domestic marketing strategy, the agility to respond decisively to an uncertain global environment and responsiveness to changes in consumer preference.
- Strengthening Enabling Capability – implementing mechanisms to increase ease of travel through activities such as piloting and roll-out of the proposed e-visa system to simplify the visa and entry process.

We believe that activities centred on these three pillars are what will put the tourism sector on the road to recovery and get many South Africans to get back to work.

To stimulate tourism in the Eastern Cape Province, your initiative also includes the SUV convoy following the routes to some of the provincial tourism attractions. This activity will also focus on some of the unknown attractions and give them a national profile.

Coincidentally, the Department of Tourism runs a programme called Hidden Gems (Domestic Market Access Support). The Hidden Gems programme is a collaborative initiative between the Department and SAT to support domestic trade show participation of new and emerging small tourism enterprises that are not sufficiently experienced or market-ready to exhibit and participate meaningfully at international trade platforms.

Since inception of the programme in 2016, approximately 453 new and small emerging enterprises were supported under the Hidden Gems banner at the annual Meetings Africa and Africa Travel Indaba platforms. The total expenditure over the past three years has been reported at R35 million. Currently, this programme is on hold because of the pandemic.

As part of the rejuvenation of supply, it will be important for this hidden attractions that you are going to visit, to apply for our programmes when they resume.

Developments around the global deployment of the COVID-19 vaccines are likely to boost tourism consumer and business confidence. However, the deployment of the vaccines is likely to be uneven between developing countries and developed countries.

It will also take time to achieve herd or population immunity in many parts of the world. Expectations are that with growing vaccine availability, improved therapies, testing, and tracing, local transmission of the virus is expected to be brought to low levels across the world only by the end of 2022. The situation is further compounded by the uncertainties around the efficacy of the vaccines against new variants.

The emergence of the new strain late last year in South Africa, demonstrated to us that as the virus mutates it has the potential to render vaccines ineffective. Our country had to abandon the AstraZeneca vaccine because its effectiveness against the new strain had been drastically reduced.

However, our scientists have just informed us that those who were affected by the new variant are now immune to reinfection by the same variant. Furthermore, they say that as the virus evolves, it is mutating all the time but these mutations are silent because many people have built immunity because of the variant that drove the second wave.

If we are fortunate for the next year or two, the tourism sector will, have to exist alongside the virus. It also suggests that the sector is potentially facing numerous stop/start cycles as restrictions are changed and adjusted in line with the evolution of the virus. These stop/start cycles will continue to affect traveller confidence and place jobs and the survival of tourism firms at risk. They will further make the recovery highly uncertain. Policy flexibility as well as the adaptability of firms across the value chain will be critical in responding to the stop/start cycles.

I am also encouraged by the fact that you have also positioned the SUV challenge as a platform for facilitating stakeholder relation. By mobilizing communities, civic organizations inclusive of traditional leadership structures, donor organizations, and private sector together with government through the Eastern Cape Parks and Tourism Agency to partner behind the objectives that you have outlined, creates a platform for working towards an inclusive economy.

This is in line with the call made by President Cyril Ramaphosa in his SONA speech when he said, "People of South Africa, it is your country that calls on you to rise. Let us march forward together to equality, to dignity and to recovery".

I call on all of you who have joined for this event call to join hands and work together to reconstruct and recover lost capacity of our economy. We all have a role to play. Whether as workers doing your part to ensure increased productivity, or as businesses protecting the jobs and investing in our economy or as communities being the eyes and ears on the ground to stop crime and corruption, we all have a role to play.

The objectives that the SUV challenge seeks to promote namely road safety, tourism, social cohesion and development, can only be achieved if all stakeholders join hands and work together.

I wish you well for the rest of your programme in the coming days. Thank you again for inviting me to join you this evening.

Let's get South African to rise again!

I thank you