



**Speaking notes for Mr Fish Mahlalela, Deputy Minister of Tourism at the outreach programme to Diplomatic Community, Virtual  
07 December 2022**

Your Excellencies Ambassadors and High Commissioners;  
Mr Tshifhiwa Tshivhengwa, Chief Executive Officer of the Tourism Business Council of South Africa;  
The Acting Chief Executive Officer of the South African Tourism;  
Senior Officials from the South African Government;  
Members of the Diplomatic Corp;  
Ladies and gentlemen.

It is indeed my pleasure to welcome you all and also express my gratitude for taking your precious time to participate in this special event that is a milestone since in 2020 when we started the journey in fighting the Covid-19 pandemic.

We are grateful to see the positive response from our Missions within the East and Central African regions. We started these engagements with the diplomatic community last year and have already covered the Southern African Development Community (SADC), North Africa, Middle East, Asia, Europe, the Americas, West Africa and some few countries in Central Africa.

I take note with appreciation the presence of the Ambassadors or High Commissioners and the Representatives from the following Missions in the East and Central African regions.

<b>Location of SA Mission</b>	<b>Names</b>	<b>Designation</b>
<b>Burundi</b>	H E Ms K N Jolobe	Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary-
<b>Cameroon</b>	H.E Ms KR Magau	High Commissioner
<b>Central African Republic</b>	H E Mr B P Ramalebana	Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary
<b>CHAD</b>	Mr ACP September	Chargé d'Affaires
<b>Congo</b>	H E J Sexwale	Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary
<b>Ethiopia</b>	H.E X Makhaya	Ambassador
<b>Eretria</b>	H.E T. L Kumsha	Ambassador

	Mr Thembani Maluleke,	First Secretary Political
<b>Kenya</b>	H E Mr M J Mahlangu	High Commissioner
<b>Rwanda</b>	H E Mr M B M Mpahlwa	High Commissioner Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary -
<b>South Sudan</b>	H E Mr G M Yekelo	Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary
<b>Sudan</b>	H.E Ms C Mbuyane-Mokone	Ambassador
<b>Uganda</b>	H.E Ms L Xingwana	High Commissioner

Your Excellencies, most countries of the world, including developed and developing countries promote and support the development of tourism to transform and diversify their economies from mainly traditional agricultural economies to the services sector.

As such, tourism plays a very important role to enhance macro-economic goals through positive contribution to economic growth, creation of employment opportunities, and supporting sustainable livelihoods.

Tourism is largely seen as an export industry due to its ability to generate foreign exchange earnings. Furthermore, income from tourism indirectly increases the demand for factors of production and consequently its contribution to the Gross Domestic Product (GDP).

Excellencies, the COVID-19 pandemic has profoundly impacted the global tourism economy including South Africa.

## **TOURISM PERFORMANCE**

- Most of the top ten overseas key markets for South Africa during 2020 were in the top 50 list of countries with regards to the number of COVID-19 cases (August 2021 WHO data).
- Passenger movement (Arrivals and Departures) went down during the period January – July 2021 compared to the same period in 2020.
- Income from accommodation was down by -20,8% during the period January to June 2021 compared to the same period in 2020.
- Slight improvement in occupancy rates for accommodation establishments during Jan-June 2021 (23,7%) compared to Jan-June 2020 (20,1%).
- Food and beverages industry recorded a decline in income of 41,6% during the period Jan-June 2021 compared to the same period in 2020.

- Employment in tourism industries decreased by -9,8% during Jan-Mar 2021 compared to the same period last year.

The Stats SA recently issued the report that reflects that income from accommodation increased by 89,5% in the three months ended August 2022 compared with the three months ended August 2021. The main contributors to this increase were hotels (157,7% and contributing 56,5 percentage points); and 'other' accommodation (53,2% and contributing 28,6 percentage points).

The Tourist accommodation survey is a monthly survey covering a sample of public and private enterprises involved in the short-stay accommodation industry in South Africa. The results of such surveys are used to compile estimates of the tourism satellite accounts (TSA) and the gross domestic product (GDP) and its components, which are used to develop and monitor government policy.

These statistics are also used in the analysis of comparative business and industry performance.

The scope of the survey covers the following tax registered private and public enterprises that are mainly engaged in providing short-stay commercial accommodation, and those are:

- Hotels, motels, hostels and inns;
- Caravan parks and camping sites;
- Guest-houses and guest-farms; and
- "Other" accommodation.

In response to the unprecedented disaster, Government has initiated drastic measures to combat the spread of the virus and implemented initiatives to address the country's socio-economic challenges.

The Department of Tourism has initiated the development of the Tourism Recovery Plan, to facilitate the recovery of the sector and set the country on a sustainable path to tourism development.

In addition to tourism having been identified as one of the priority areas of intervention in the ERRP, the tourism sector has a contribution to make on the following priorities of the ERRP:

- Infrastructure
- Mass public employment
- Green economy interventions;
- Gender equality and the inclusion of women and youth; and
- Skills development
- The TSRP anchored on three strategic themes namely: Re-Igniting Demand, Rejuvenating Supply and Strengthening Enabling Capability;
- It has seven strategic interventions with specific actions, timeframes and accountabilities.
- In addition, key enablers were identified to ensure that recovery is supported.

The Tourism Sector Recovery Plan is a collaborative effort between key stakeholders from government, the private sector as well as other social partners.

The plan amongst other things aims to reposition South Africa as a destination of choice post the Covid-19 pandemic.

To set the country on a sustainable path to recovery, different components within the Department have embarked on engagements with various stakeholders, to present some of our plans but also to gather insights.

This initiative therefore intends to showcase South Africa as a destination of choice to selected countries within the diplomatic community, by so doing contributing to South Africa's Tourism Recovery Plan. We hope to obtain market insights and intelligence relevant to the tourism sector.

Ladies and Gentleman, we therefore require your assistance. The mandate of the Department of International Relations and Cooperation (DIRCO) is to work for the realisation of SA's foreign policy objectives through coordinating and aligning SA's international relations abroad;

In line with the Economic Diplomacy Strategic Framework (EDSF). South African Diplomatic Missions are critical players in marketing and country branding, in order to reinvigorate the South African brand for investment attraction, export marketing and tourism promotion globally.

The EDSF identifies the role of Diplomatic Missions and how they could support SA's business sector in exploring new market opportunities. Economic initiatives in this context consist of, but not limited to, the contribution to the fields of economic growth, trade relations, national investment, tourism, skills development and cultural exchange.

Your Excellencies, I am aware that Missions did provide the Department with information that contributed to the developed analysis reports focusing on the economic impact per country and policy response per country, and I would like to thank you for your support.

All countries within the East and Central African region were negatively impacted by the Covid-19 pandemic resulting in massive job losses. Tourism businesses closed their doors and some may never recover bringing unemployment drastically high.

Though some of the countries did not have high numbers of infections, they still suffered losses economically as they could not generate income due to restrictions by tourism source markets such as Europe, the Americas and Asia including from Africa and Middle East.

The Outreach Programmes initiative to the diplomatic community is conducted with a specific focus on tourism recovery. The aim is to discuss pertinent issues surrounding challenges experienced within the current SA tourism environment with special attention afforded to issues around SA as a safe and desirable destination for international visitors.

- A platform to further reassure the diplomatic community of the readiness of South Africa as a destination and dispel negative perception about the country.

- Facilitate South Africa's reintegration into the Tourism value chain and seek to remove all travel bans/advisories imposed on SA passport holders in selected countries.
- Build trust and relationships through interactions/engagements with stakeholders; and
- Use tourism as a tool for economic diplomacy by attracting visitors to South Africa.

The Missions are a pillar for the department to strengthen tourism bilateral relations between South Africa and these countries. To date the Department has signed MoUs with Ethiopia and Kenya and have concluded negotiations with Uganda on the MoU that is ready for signature.

As there are still few countries that are showing interest to enter into formal cooperation in the field of tourism with South Africa in these two regions, Missions are therefore critical in supporting such collaborations that will strengthen our bilateral relations and regional integration.

## **TOURISTS ARRIVALS**

As the department, we see the need to review what and how South Africa should prioritise in the East and Central African region markets as some of them are transit hubs and expat markets. Noting that the East African region has some strategic air hubs such as Addis Ababa in Ethiopia and Nairobi in Kenya.

We recognise that DIRCO and the Missions play a critical role in charting a course to overcome the challenges arising from conflicts in the region to support efforts by SA Tourism to market to all travellers.

The diplomatic support is required in providing an organised seamless service and specific effort to align our products and experiences in such a way that it is easily accessible to the East and Central African market. This is possible because the country has the majority of products and experiences required that are appealing to the travellers in Africa.

**FIGURE 1.** Arrivals from East and Central African region 2017 to 2021

<b>COUNTRY</b>	<b>2017</b>	<b>2018</b>	<b>2019</b>	<b>2020</b>	<b>2021</b>
Burundi	878	816	936	229	51
Cameroon	5 094	5 099	5 103	1 332	2 009
Chad	343	328	376	103	164
Central African Republic	147	167	165	71	62
Congo	8099	9087	8981	332	2 009
Ethiopia	8 598	9 031	6 705	2 076	2 844
Eretria					
Kenya	28944	29193	30327	633	2299
Rwanda	16099	19090	17092	212	511
South Sudan	7892	8922	9088	542	908
Sudan	2 107	2 206	1 800	542	648
Uganda	14 097	13 686	14 795	3 510	4 302

*Source: Stats SA: Tourism and Migration*

The top six countries from East and Central Africa with the highest tourist arrivals to South Africa are: Kenya, Uganda, Ethiopia, Rwanda, Congo and South Sudan. Though in 2021, we notice that Cameroon is amongst the top five Kenya, Uganda, Ethiopia and Congo that have increased tourist arrivals to South Africa.

## **CONCLUSION**

This outreach engagement to the diplomatic community should be viewed as the platform to share the strategies, policies developed and plans to address the challenges and risks posed by the Covid-19 pandemic.

Even though we started experiencing the fourth wave, due to the Omicron variant, late in 2021, majority of countries have now opened their borders for the travellers by lifting the restrictions on international flights into and out of their countries, however, we are still seeing some strict control measures by some of airlines and countries to ensure that the spread of covid-19 is under control.

Your Excellencies, this session will allow us to engage each other robustly so that we can jointly re-ignite the demand for travel and tourism positioning South Africa as the destination of choice within the region through your support.

The Chief Executive Officer: TBCSA and South African Tourism will in their presentations focus on the specific recovery mechanisms, programmes and plans as well as sharing the challenges that the tourism industry has gone through and what the way forward is now.

**I THANK YOU**