



**SPEECH BY MR FISH MAHLALELA, RSA DEPUTY MINISTER OF TOURISM AT THE 2024 AFRICA'S TRAVEL INDABA BUSINESS OPPORTUNITY NETWORKING DAY (BONDAY) IN DURBAN, KWAZULU-NATAL ON 13 MAY 2024.**

- Programme Director
- Ministers and Deputy Ministers from various African countries present here today.
- Ambassadors and High Commissioners present here with us
- Industry Associations, business owners, partners and our Tourism Stakeholders
- Valued Media representatives,
- Ladies and Gentlemen.
- All protocol observed

Programme Director it gives me an immense pleasure to stand before you today and be part of the 2024 Africa's Travel Indaba Business Opportunity Networking Day, commonly known as BONDAY, as this is Africa's Travel and Tourism prestigious platform where industry professionals, exhibitors, and media from around the world showcase the best of Africa's tourism offerings.

In true pioneering spirit of our country, we say leave no one behind as we fully stretch our hands of warm embrace to all of you and welcome everyone to the Republic of South Africa, precisely to the tourism bustling city of Durban and are looking forward to sharing the beauty and magic of our land with you.

I hope you will join us as we celebrate our 30 years of democracy and freedom this year, as well wish and pray for our country for a peaceful, free and fair polls later this month.

This event provides a platform for African countries to promote their destinations, products, and services while offering networking opportunities, educational seminars, and insights into the latest trends in the travel industry.

It is significant because it is not just a talk shop but rather an action-driven occasion.

### **The Power of Tourism in Strengthening Our Collective Efforts:**

There is no better way to demonstrate an “Unlimited Africa” than to start off our all-important strategic event, Africa’s Travel Indaba, with an impactful action-oriented platform, to drive success.

It is up to us as Africans to open the world’s eyes to what we have to offer as a continent and take charge of the narrative because only when we are proactive, will we control our destiny.

There is no opportune time to do that than at Africa’s Travel Indaba, which takes place during May, which significantly, is also **Africa month**.

I am so glad that gathered in this room are business minds and captains of industry from various parts of the tourism value chain. No doubt, you are often in meetings and conferences.

Today, we gather not merely as representatives of businesses, but as catalysts of change, and architects of a future defined by cooperation and collective success.

I therefore, invite you to explore our sector’s challenges with an open mind as we also celebrate the many successes we have been able to achieve over the last 30 years of South Africa’s democracy.

In this room are people who represent an endless choice and variety of tourism and travel-sector related experiences on offer.

This instils the confidence in me that in this room lies the power of an “unlimited Africa.” We are all here because we play an incredible part in growing our sector both for South Africa and indeed the rest of the continent.

### **Africa’s Travel Indaba a platform for dynamic synergy:**

Over the next few days of Africa’s Travel Indaba, we will not only be engaging in dialogue and making commitments and declarations that seek to advance the African continent, but we will also be celebrating the incredible journey that we have come through as a sector.

Our collective efforts here at BONDAY and beyond serve as a platform for a dynamic synergy that endeavours to propel tourism into a sphere of tremendous influence, highlighting its capacity to contribute to job creation and to our economy.

We are here because Indaba plays a pivotal role as it is a powerful thread that weaves us together and transforms our sector into interconnected destinations that inspire and captivate travellers and impact the economy.

### **The Road Ahead: A Future of Promise:**

As South Africa celebrates 30 years of freedom and democracy and the many achievements that came with that, I would like to thank you in advance for carving out an even more flourishing future.

As we cast out eyes to the future, we do so equipped with a canvas to paint a collaborative and vibrant future.

As government we are cognisant of the inequalities that still exist in our country, and therefore I would like to thank organisations such as the South African Township and Village Tourism Association, SATOVITO, as well Women in Tourism and all the associations that have been developed to not only advance innovation but to foster transformation.

Let us remain steadfast and unwavering in our commitment to mutual growth and prosperity for all the people in our country and the rest of the African continent.

To all the established businesses and associations, thank you for recognising that as you expand your network and net worth, you ought to empower and grow others as well.

### **Nothing “limited’ About Africa**

Fellow Africans, we have what it takes to succeed, and Africa’s Travel Indaba is among a plethora of reasons we should step out to the world confidently to demonstrate that the “Dark Continent” narrative is not only outdated but that it is detrimental too.

One fact that everyone agrees on about Africa is that it is a young continent.

A World Bank article, titled “Realising a Brighter Future for a Young, Energised and Connected Africa”, states: “Today, Africa is the only continent where 70% of its people are under the age of 30. By 2035, over 400 million young people will enter working age.”

It is only befitting that one of the sessions here at BONDAY will touch on the “Future of Travel Through the Eyes of the Youth.”

Key to the tourism industry is a seamless aviation network, therefore the “Airlift Advancements in Africa” session, is a critical one as we continue to expand our continent’s network and connection.

Ladies and gentlemen, in 2024, an “Unlimited Africa” is one that adapts and advances along with technology, therefore as a progressive sector, let us not miss out on the opportunity to leverage artificial intelligence.

The two sessions “Exploring Accessible Tourism and the Role of AI in Advancing Inclusion” and “Harnessing the Power of AI to Optimise the Travellers’ Experiences” are not-to-be missed.

Equally true, is that there is no meaningful growth without the participation of small businesses. For the past 30 years of democracy, we, as the national government and its implementing local government arms have prioritised small businesses.

I am therefore so pleased that today there is also the discussion titled “The Ties That Bind and a Culture That Unites: SMMEs - The Heartbeat of Tourism”.

Without working together, we will not get anywhere and so ladies and gentlemen, be sure to also attend and participate at the “Stimulating **Local Economies Through the Tourism Value Chain**” discussion so that we can also collectively create and mould a conducive environment to further bolster our growth so that we can create a sustainable flourishing tourism sector that positively impacts our **people, our planet, and our prosperity**.

As you can hear, there is plenty to look forward to and so, I urge everyone to fully engage today and for the rest of the week.

**In conclusion:**

Let me extend my heartfelt gratitude to each of you who have taken time out of your busy schedules and attend to Africa’s Travel Indaba to lend your voice and time.

Distinguished guests, ladies and gentlemen, may everyone from today begin to experience “Unlimited Africa.”

Thank you, *siyabonga, siyathokoza, asante*.