

**DEPUTY MINISTER TOKOZILE XASA'S ADDRESS
AT THE WORLD TOURISM DAY EVENT IN LIMPOPO
27 SEPTMBER 2010 AT CHUENE'S RESORT**

Programme Director, Ms Maylene Brodericks

MEC for Economic Development, Environment and Tourism, Mr. Pitsi Moloto,

Mayors from Polokwane and the Capricorn Municipalities,

CEO from the South African Tourism,

CEO from the Tourism Enterprise Partnership,

CEO from the Tourism Business Council of South Africa,

Members of the media,

Ladies and Gentleman.

The World Cup has left a lasting legacy for South Africa and our sector. The successful hosting of the 2010 FIFA World Cup Soccer Tournament has helped position our country as both a tourist and investment destination and has exposed us to new markets. The tournament was also catalyst for infrastructure development in our country.

Domestic tourism is becoming popular in South Africa, 75 percent of all tourist volume in South Africa last year was derived from domestic tourists. About 14.6 million adult South Africans undertook about 30 million

domestic trips in 2009, with a total annual spend of more than R22 billion. However the challenge is that while the numbers of travelers have increased the number of trips per traveler has decreased. Holiday trips account only for 12% of travel in the country. We need to continue to entrench a culture of travel amongst South Africans as well as to address the issue of geographical, rural and seasonal spread.

Amongst others, the National Tourism Sector Strategy requires us to develop domestic holiday **travel across all markets** which is still lacking as well as to ensure the supply of rural tourism products with acceptable patronage and revenue levels. We should also continue to promote our less visited provinces and ensure that South Africans visit and experience their tourism and cultural products like we are doing today in Limpopo.

Ladies and gentlemen, South Africa is rich in biodiversity. Amongst others we have we have a 2 500 km coastline, two deserts, the Kalahari and Richtersveld; we are one of the richest floral kingdom in the world and are home to eleven mountain ranges.

However we need to seriously note that globally, our biodiversity is under threat. Demographic pressure and unsustainable human activities are causing an irreversible biodiversity loss.

Under the **UNITED NATIONS WORLD TOURISM ORGANISATION (UNWTO) World Tourism Day** theme **Tourism and Biodiversity**, we have the unique opportunity to explore tourism's crucial role and responsibility in safeguarding our country's rich biodiversity. All around the world, ***South Africa is recognized as one of the most biodiverse destinations in the world.*** It is important that every South African understands the value of the country's natural assets and the direct impact that this biodiversity has on tourism and the benefits to the country.

South Africa's biodiversity is a key tourism asset and fundamental to its sustained growth. Intact and healthy ecosystems form the cornerstone of the many of tourist enterprises and products in our country, attracting many thousands of tourists each year. As a leading economic activity, sustainable tourism has an important role and responsibility in managing and conserving biological natural resources. As a key source of income and employment in South Africa, tourism often provides strong incentives to protect biodiversity. Sustainable tourism can furthermore generate significant revenues for conservation and community development and help to raise awareness of biodiversity issues.

Tourism and biodiversity are mutually dependent. We call upon all the tourism stakeholders and travelers themselves to contribute their part of

the global responsibility to safeguard the intricate web of unique species and ecosystems that make us to be proud South Africans. South Africa's natural diversity in ecosystems provides essential economic benefits and services to human society - such as food, clothing, shelter, fuel and medicines - as well as ecological, recreational, cultural and aesthetic values, and thus plays an important role in sustainable development. Our biodiversity is under threat in many areas and tourism will play a significant role in developing sustainable destinations.

South Africans are encouraged to join in celebrating the biodiversity that makes South Africa one of the top biodiverse destinations in the world. **South Africa is recognised as the third most mega-biodiverse country in the world.** This year we focus on the Limpopo Province, with its ancient histories, myths, cultures and the unique flora, fauna and geography that bring tourists to this fascinating province.

In response to this year's World Tourism Day theme, which is ***Tourism and Biodiversity***, we need to work together as a sector to protect our biodiversity and maximize its potential towards poverty alleviation and people development. People development and poverty alleviation, forms part of our mandate as the Tourism sector and it is aligned to the broader government outcomes.

One of the major priorities for the current term of government is development of our rural areas. Government sees this as an opportunity to diversify the country's product base and focus on the country's natural assets in rural areas. Rural areas, particularly those in South Africa, offer a unique experience that cannot be found anywhere else in world. It is also our view that tourism development can serve as a catalyst for infrastructure development in rural areas.

It is also a fact that the majority of poor South African live in these areas and most of them are women who often are bread winners in their respective households. The lives in these households must change for the better and in this regard tourism has a contribution to make. In line with the available resources, government together with all partners is prioritizing development of five rural based products during the financial year. This will take into account the culture and heritage of these areas.

By packaging and promoting existing rural based products across the country. The custodians of our culture and heritage particularly in the rural villages are an indispensable stakeholder in

the development of cultural heritage tourism in particular and rural tourism in general.

In line with our vision, ***to be globally celebrated as a leader in tourism excellence***, responsible tourism remains a major aspect of the destination's competitiveness. As a long haul destination, it is imperative that we manage the sector's carbon footprint effectively. Government in consultation with industry also developed minimum standards for responsible tourism to encourage and certify tourism establishments as being responsible. These will, very soon, be published for public comments.

South Africa delivers experiences that equal or surpass the expectations of our visitors. As a sector we need to shift a gear to increase the share of tourist bed nights spent in the least visited provinces of the total tourist bed nights spent in South Africa. Indeed as a sector we need to collectively work towards increasing the number of visitors and bed nights spend by tourists in rural areas as well as increasing the supply of rural tourism products achieving acceptable patronage and revenue.

The levels of domestic and bed nights in rural areas will form a significant part of the collective efforts to grow the sector. These efforts could be linked to growth in niche market segments e.g. bird watching, backpackers...

As the sector, we need to continuously ensure that our customer service standards are equal to world standards and also at the same time address transformation which is moving at a slow pace. One such platform is the **ETEYA Awards, whose objective is to create jobs and expose our visitors to the wealth of our diverse tourism products.** I would like to congratulate all our winners today, because **your** businesses play a major role in driving our robust industry. I would like to wish you the best of luck in future.

Lastly, Ladies and gentlemen, the tourism sector requires people with appropriate skills and we are facing huge skills shortages. Some students do not see tourism as an ideal career of choice but am pleased to note that there are those who have taken interest in this discipline. I would like to applaud and commend the role played by the Global Travel and Tourism Partnership South Africa, which provides support, resources and training for hospitality, travel and tourism courses in South African Schools

and colleges. Your initiatives (which include the Schools Competition) are helping to create awareness of our sector.

I would like to applaud those students who participated in the Schools Competition whose theme was **Green Tourism**. This theme also speaks to the WTD theme because we need to ensure and encourage environmentally friendly activities in our sector. The winning school (that is the two learners and educator) will travel to Munich to attend the Global Travel and Tourism Learner Conference in November.

Congratulations and Good Luck to our winning school.

I thank you.