

**SPEECH BY DEPUTY MINISTER OF TOURISM
TOKOZILE XASA
WELCOME AWARDS, INDABA 2011
08 MAY 2011**

Honourable Minister of Tourism Marthinus Van Schalkwyk
The DG of the Department of Tourism Amb Kingsley Makhubela
The CEO of SAT Thandiwe January-McLean and her team
Company Executives from Tourism Stakeholder companies
Senior Government Officials
Members of the Media
Ladies and Gentlemen

It is an honour to be here tonight to commend our industry's leaders in service excellence and to recognise shining examples of tourism businesses in South Africa that are raising the bar in terms of enhancing visitor experiences.

Our long-term goal is to establish South Africa as a globally competitive service economy and the world's destination of choice in terms of excellent customer service. In the short term, the strategy encourages the tourism industry to deliver positive and unforgettable service experience to all visitors by embracing the highest standards of service excellence.

The National Department of Tourism, in collaboration with the Tourism Business Council of South Africa, has developed the National Tourism Service Excellence Strategy to support an integrated approach to service excellence in the tourism industry - and to create an environment which is conducive to a positive culture of service excellence.

The annual Welcome Awards ceremony, recognises the best service providers in each of their service domains, narrows the margin to achieving our strategic objectives. The value of recognising and rewarding champions of exceptional service is intended to set - and consistently raise - the standards of what is attainable and

desirable in the competitive global tourism market, thereby helping to raise overall standards in the industry over time.

The theme for this year's INDABA is "***Playing Globally, Winning Locally***". At the heart of this theme is the celebration of our tourism success in 2010, which saw a 15% increase on the tourism figures recorded in 2009 and more than eight million tourist arrivals to the country.

We are now determined to increase the number of foreign tourist arrivals to 15 million by 2020. It is important to translate those arrivals into broader economic benefits for all of our people. The aim is to increase tourism's contribution to South Africa's economy from R89-billion in 2009 to close to R499 billion by 2020. This growth in tourism activity has a concurrent positive impact in terms of job opportunities and thus, it is our goal as a sector to create some 225 000 additional job opportunities by 2020 as set out in the National Growth Plan and given life in the NTSS.

While the sector continues progressive growth and development, it is essential to remain true to the core values of providing consistent, exceptional service to our valued travellers, both local and international. The Welcome Awards will prove to be an invaluable tool in ensuring that the sector is not only encouraged, but recognised to deliver on-the-ground, as we work collectively towards mutual objectives.

Emerging markets in particular are poised to be global growth vehicles, it is therefore critical that we re-emphasise our commitment to fulfilling the travelling expectations of people from these markets. In 1980, emerging economies contributed less than 30% of international tourist arrivals, compared to the more than 70% from advanced economies. Today, this gap is closing to such an extent that almost half of international arrivals are from emerging markets.

Our priority remains to protect and develop our existing market share in traditional markets whilst recognising that the long-term growth opportunities lie in developing additional markets. In the domestic market, the challenge of growing tourism in

emerging local tourism segments relates in many respects to the availability of new and innovative offerings.

There are also opportunities in extending access to less-developed provinces. This can in part be addressed by developing products to encourage international tourists to increase the average number of provinces visited on a trip and also to encourage new and existing domestic travellers to explore destinations outside of their traditional patterns. However, for this to be successful, it's not a simple case of "build it, and they will come." New offerings must meet the desired experience and service expectations of these consumers.

South Africa's wildlife and adventure tourism activities are consistent draw-cards for both local and international visitors. There are several wildlife lodges and adventure tourism operators' representatives here this evening that operate in these segments. These tourism businesses are typically located in or close to rural communities, drawing many of their employees from these communities.

Government, particularly the NDT, applauds you for taking the lead in service excellence, inadvertently attracting tourism potential to provinces with historically lower visitor flows. We urge you to set the bar high in terms of employing, training and nurturing our people from these areas, many of them located in poverty nodes characterised by unemployment, abject poverty and severe underdevelopment. From the side of government, we are working to ensure that tourism becomes rooted at local government levels to promote ownership by local communities, with a particular emphasis on rural community development.

We have very ambitious tourism targets set for the future, both for the domestic and the international travel markets. What we can measure, we can manage. The Welcome Award winners in their endeavour to achieve exceptional service, have etched their names this evening in tourism journals celebrating the unique unforgettable experiences our destination offers, as designers of those special moments building South Africa's service excellence signature in tourism.

On behalf of the National Department of Tourism, I wish to congratulate all the entrants to this competition for striving and committing their enterprises to exceptional service and innovation. This evening salute the winners and celebrate their achievement which will contribute towards our 2020 vision as a tourism destination.

I am pleased to also announce that the Welcome Awards will be expanded into a bigger platform from next year, focusing on all stakeholders within the tourism value chain. This will assist greatly with expanding our goals of realising a fully coordinated awards system to recognise the valuable and integral role played by stakeholders and partners in our industry.

In conclusion, I am delighted to see that these awards are drawing more and more interest each year from such diverse sectors of the tourism industry. It means we, as an industry, are creating a service ethos of International acclaim, with benchmark standards against which we can all measure ourselves. I encourage the private sector and businesses such as FNB to continue partnering with the National Department of Tourism on such initiatives going forward – and I am sure these collaborative efforts fast-track results on the ground. We look forward to even greater successes in the coming years.

Thank you once again for the opportunity to celebrate with you tonight.

Enkosi!!