



**DEPUTY MINISTRY OF TOURISM
REPUBLIC OF SOUTH AFRICA**

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Speech by the Deputy Minister Fish Mahlalela on the occasion of the launch of Etihad Boeing 787 Dreamliner, Hyde park, Johannesburg

21 October 2019

His Excellency. Mahash Saeed Salem Mahash Alhameli, Ambassador of the United Arab Emirates
His Excellency Ibrahim Awawdeh – Ambassador of the Hashmite Kingdom of Jordan
His Excellency. Mr. Shabbir Ahmad Chowdhury - Bangladesh High Commission
His Excellency Mr Faisal Albeghaili – First Secretary Kuwait Embassy
Mr Brajesh Kumar: General Manager Africa Etihad Airways
Ms Karlene Barkley: Country Manager South Africa Etihad Airways
Senior Executives from the South African Airports Company,
Trade partners, Corporate clients, Etihad guests, Media friends and our Alliance & Cargo partners.

Good Evening

I am truly honoured and grateful to be with you this evening to witness the launch Boeing 787 Dreamliner on Etihad's daily service from Abu Dhabi to OR Tambo international Airport. On a lighter note, Etihad will now bring much more competition to our own South African Airways, in addition to the Emirates and Qatar Airways for the middle East markets. However, from tourism point of view to economic benefits, we are excited and pleased with this new initiative, as it enhances our efforts to realise our mission of 21 million arrivals by 2030.

Your Excellency and distinguished guests, this year marks 25 years of the fruitful relations between South Africa and the United Arab Emirates. It has been 25 years of mutual respect, economic benefits and solidarity. We celebrate this milestone looking forward to even more prosperous years of solidarity between our people of the two countries.

Your Excellencies,

We will do well to remember that the solid relationship between UAE and South Africa we enjoy today, was laid by the close ties of friendship and trust enjoyed by the founding fathers of our two nations, the late President Nelson Mandela and His Highness Sheikh Zayed Bin Sultan Al Nahyan. The two Statesmen were both born in 1918, shared a special bond of friendship, and also a remarkable generosity and determination in their countries and abroad, which brought about the spirit of solidarity among their people

South Africa and the UAE have maintained a good political and commercial bilateral relationship since formal diplomatic ties were established in 1995. The relationship has a strong economic focus and the UAE is one of South Africa's largest trading partners.

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Since the visit to the UAE by former President Jacob Zuma in 2011 and President Cyril Ramaphosa in 2018, many South African companies are benefitting from opportunities in the UAE in a variety of sectors. Trade between South Africa and UAE is supported by the growing Air connectivity between the two countries. The addition of this Boeing aircraft by Etihad has therefore come at the right time.

Tourism has a share of a contribution to total trade between our two countries, which currently stood at about 38% of inbound tourist's arrivals, with the launch of Boeing 787 to South Africa, we look forward to breaking any existing barriers and tremendously increase the number of arrivals from UAE visiting our country.

UAE nationals are among the world's largest travel spenders. We are confident that we will be able to tap on this spending patterns, particularly from tourism point of view, as we have begun to reposition South African brand.

We must therefore continue to work together, even more on the tourism side, to ensure that the bottlenecks that could otherwise frustrate our cooperation and partnerships in tourism are swiftly identified and addressed accordingly.

To this effect, my department and the Ministry of Economy in the UAE are currently negotiating a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) on cooperation in the field of tourism. South Africa received the proposed draft from UAE, made comments and shared its views through a diplomatic note to the Ministry of Economy in the UAE for consideration.

Your Excellencies,

In November last year, our country's tourism urgency, the South African Tourism embarked on a tourism roadshow in the Middle East, across five cities including Dubai and Abu Dhabi. The Middle East was chosen for the Roadshows precisely because it is a valuable region for us to achieve our strategic goal of four million international tourist arrivals by 2021.

South Africa's key travel opportunities, hospitality, business and leisure experiences were presented to different markets, in addition, valuable platforms for strategic connections and engagements were created, showcasing South Africa's diverse tourism offerings to the Middle East.

We are continuously looking for ways to position South Africa as a destination brand, and make it recognisable and attractive to all markets. With excellent business and leisure tourism opportunities, we are confident that we will increase inbound tourists' arrival numbers from Middle East, particularly from UAE. With a similar time zone, a Halaal friendly places and now the addition of Boeing 787, we are indeed well destined to achieve our mission.

The presence and growth of UAE companies, and the latest Etihad addition in our country is reflective of the positive growth trajectory and South Africa looks forward to continue to invest in UAE tourism markets to position South African Brand, and equally attract investments in tourism from UAE.

South African Minister of Home Affairs Dr Aaron Motsoaledi, on July 10 2019 in his budget vote, announced the new list of visa-free countries. The United Arab Emirates was among seven countries to be issued this waiver, making it one of the first Gulf countries to be exempted

Government's decision to introduce a visa waiver for ordinary passport holders from the UAE is evidence of our commitment to promote tourism. We remain committed to engaging further on how to develop a program of action targeted at enhancing people-to-people exchanges as well as tourism marketing between our two countries.

There's no doubt that the waiver will open new horizons for South Africa; particularly in areas of tourism, trade and investment, science and technology. Visa-free access for UAE citizens travelling to South Africa will provide significant opportunities for the expansion of UAE investments in the country and contribute to an increase in the number of UAE tourists travelling to South Africa.

We are pleased that UAE nationals have realised that South Africa has many business and leisure tourism opportunities. The exemption from Visa requirements to enter South Africa will certainly impact on

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expanding investments and increasing the number of tourists – which will ultimately strengthen the interaction and encourage the links between our two countries

I look forward to one day be in the Boeing 787 Dreamliner, to enjoy its hospitality, advanced modern technology and the freedom of the skies.

I Thank You.