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Tourism cooperation between South Africa and Palestine to increase

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The Minister of Tourism, Derek Hanekom together with his Palestinian counterpart, HE Rula Ma'Ayah Minister of Tourism and Antiquities of the State of Palestine today signed a land mark tourism cooperation agreement between the countries at Constitutional Hill in Johannesburg.

The cooperation agreement was preceded by a bilateral discussion between the two countries on the occasion of Minister Ma' Ayah official visit to South Africa.

"We encourage South Africans to visit Palestine. We know that there are obstacles, but we are confident that just like us, the people of Palestine will find peace soon. We stand in solidarity with the world in finding lasting solutions on the Palestinian question," said Minister Hanekom in his welcoming remarks to the State of Palestine delegation.

In her response to Minister Hanekom's remarks, Minister Ma'Ayah expressed her gratitude on behalf of the people of Palestine for the continued support from South Africa including multilateral efforts in finding lasting peace.

"Palestine is a holy place with a number of different religious sites. We have 2.7 million tourists visiting Palestine each year, despite the fact that we do not have a single airport. This agreement is therefore very important milestone towards increasing South African visits to Palestine," said Minister Ma'Ayah.

"We are happy to visit on the centenary year of Madiba, because we regard him as a symbol of justice for the world, and justice is important to our people", concluded Minister Ma'Ayah, before the signing ceremony commenced.

The areas of cooperation as stipulated in the MoU are:

- The exchange of tourism information;
- Private sector cooperation, including mutual participation in tourism festivals, fairs, seminars, conferences and other tourism events held in the two countries;
- Tourism investments, including public sector investments into the development and implementation of tourism; and
- Capacity building.

Following the signing, both ministers undertook a tour of the iconic Constitutional Hill precinct, including its erstwhile Women's Jail section and the Constitutional Court Chamber before proceeding for a working lunch and a tour of Vilakazi Street in Soweto.

Full diplomatic relations between South Africa and the State of Palestine were established in 1995, and this led to the opening of a Palestinian Embassy in South Africa in the same year. This gave expression to the strong and long standing ties of friendship and mutual support between the people of South Africa and Palestine.

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