



**MINISTRY OF TOURISM
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Minister of Tourism participates in UNWTO Executive Council in Uzbekistan

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Minister Derek Hanekom represented South Africa at the meeting of the Executive Council of the United Nations World Tourism Organisation (UNWTO) in Samarkand, Uzbekistan this week. South Africa is one of 32 members of the Executive Council of the UNWTO, the specialised UN agency for tourism.

During the meeting, ministers and heads of delegation discussed current global trends in international tourism, including the importance of travel facilitation, improved air connectivity and dealing with unexpected and unfortunate travel disruptions such as those related to Ebola.

In respect of the global response to Ebola, the Minister's message was clear: "Africa is open for business! It is unfair to paint all destinations with the same brush. Geographically, many European countries were in fact much closer to the epicenter of Ebola than southern African countries." All member states as well as the UNWTO were called upon to enhance their communication efforts in order to correct any misconceptions. Countries having to deal with the Ebola outbreak are already facing difficult circumstances. Containing the problem and then ensuring that travel and tourism recovered rapidly to pre-Ebola levels, were important and shared imperatives.

In reporting on global tourism trends, the UNWTO highlighted that international tourist arrivals have thus far grown at approximately 5% in 2014, despite tough economic conditions that prevail in some parts of the world. The UNWTO's long-term projections for growth in international arrivals remain unchanged at between 4% and 4.5%.

The Minister also chaired the UNWTO's working group on Official Development Assistance (ODA). He noted the discrepancy between tourism's share of global development funding flows (only 0.13% of all ODA) and the sector's total contribution to the global economy (9% of GDP). In order to unlock more development funding for tourism (for example for tourism infrastructure, tourism human resource development, poverty reduction through tourism and the greening of tourism), it was decided to intensify the UNWTO's advocacy work and investigate new mechanisms to scale-up funding flows from international development banks and development assistance agencies. The advocacy programme will be aimed at raising global awareness about the economic and developmental contribution of tourism. It will also be aimed at establishing the UNWTO as a development agency capable of mobilising new resources for sustainable and socially-inclusive tourism.

During a roundtable discussion on culture and tourism, it was observed that cultural and heritage tourism are amongst the largest and fastest-growing global tourism markets. It has become a key differentiator that enhances destinations' global competitiveness. Minister Hanekom stressed the potential of the eight World Heritage Sites in South Africa to enhance the country's tourism offering. "Our cultural diversity and natural heritage offerings in South Africa distinguish us from all other destinations. Our natural and cultural heritage sites are the differentiators that make us truly unique. The cultural component is not only a magnet for

tourists, but it also tells us about ourselves, where we come from, who we are. South Africa has a unique story to tell about the evolution of humankind. We have a common humanity, and the Cradle of Humankind underscores our common human origins. You are all invited to visit our common ancestral graves at this World Heritage site. But then we also have a rich political history. Robben Island is the former high security prison and today World Heritage site where Nelson Mandela and many others fighting for freedom were imprisoned. Robben Island symbolises people standing up against what was wrong, standing up for freedom, and creating a society that is just. It also symbolises reconciliation and the greatness of spirit of people committed to building a better country" he added.

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