



tourism

Department:
Tourism
REPUBLIC OF SOUTH AFRICA

DEPUTY MINISTER FISH MAHLALELA'S ADDRESS ON THE OCCASION OF THE BEST PRACTICES WORKSHOP HELD ON THE 02 MARCH 2021 VIA ZOOM PLATFORM

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The CEO-Tourism Business Council of South Africa
Representatives from the African Continent, delegates in India, Singapore, Vietnam, Brazil, Venezuela and Mexico

Good morning

It gives me pleasure to welcome all of you from different corners of our beloved Africa, Asia and Americas. The South African Government places tourism high on its agenda for sustainable growth and job creation which is one of the 8 interventions in the economic Reconstruction Recovery Plan. You might be beware that our President, in his 2019 State of Nations Address set a target of 21 million tourist arrivals by 2030 for the tourism sector. It is through initiatives and platforms such as the Best Practices Workshop that will make meaningful contributions in achieving such targets.

It is my pleasure to be addressing you today on this special occasion especially at this time when the whole world is collectively focused on the Covid-19 pandemic that impacted on lives socially, economically and physically so. Seven years back, when the Department of Tourism started interacting with counterparts on the sharing of best practices within the tourism space, it was a matter of choosing topics of interest to countries at the time. Today we stand here without choice of what we need to address, as the Covid-19 has devastated the whole world and forced all of us to change the way we used to do things, interact with each other, regulations changed, imposed restrictions on travel patterns, including total lock downs.

The global outbreak of the Coronavirus (COVID-19) in late 2019 illustrated the vulnerability of travel and tourism to the effects of public health emergencies. The economic impact of the Coronavirus was felt in every corner of the world and almost every sector of the economy. Air, land and sea ports in most countries were closed. Most airlines had to ground planes except those that carry cargo. Restrictions had to be placed on the movement of people. As a result, tourism activity had come to an abrupt halt, thus affecting the tourism sector negatively. The impact of the virus has led to the closure of businesses, tourism establishment and severe job losses. It is therefore expected that the impact of the pandemic on the tourism sector and strategies to deal with it would be relevant as the theme/topic for the 2021 Best Practices Workshop.

The UNWTO forecasts international tourist arrivals to be down by 20% to 30% in 2020 when compared with 2019 figures, equivalent to a loss of 300 to 450 US\$ billion in international tourism receipts (exports), which is almost one third of the US\$ 1.5 trillion generated globally. Some countries were predicted to face more substantial blows than others due to their high reliance on the tourism sector. Out of the top 10 destinations by international tourists' arrivals (France, Spain, United States, China, Italy, Turkey, Mexico, Germany, UK and Thailand), 8 were hardest hit by COVID-19.

I am delighted to note that in this workshop you are going to robustly engage on the discussions and sharing information and the best practices on tourism recovery plans in addressing the challenges posed by the Covid-19 pandemic. I also take note that this workshop further seeks to align tourism's contribution to Agenda 2063 through improving the standards, systems and policies in regulating the tourism industry while creating jobs and alleviating poverty.

Programme Director, I wish to express my appreciation and recognise the Regional Director Department for Africa from the UNWTO offices in Spain whom I believe will provide a global tourism perspective as far as tourism recovery is concerned, also recognising the Chief Executive Officer of the South African Tourism in presenting SA's Tourism Recovery Plan as well as the Chief Executive Officer of Tourism Business Council South Africa who will share with you the Industry perspectives and the protocols for tourism industry operation during Covid-19 as developed in South Africa.

I therefore urge all of you to use this platform to share your country experiences in combatting the COVID-19 pandemic to assist in identifying strategies that will bring solutions for the recovery of the tourism sector post the Covid-19 pandemic challenges, especially for those strategies aimed at strengthening regional integration and cooperation.

Though a total of 1 million cases may not sound like a lot for a continent representing 17% of the world's population, the challenge is that many African countries have weak health systems and testing is significantly insufficient overall. The data on confirmed cases is only meaningful in combination with a country testing policy, and the vaccine roll out programme, much and who they are testing, and how many tests return a positive

While it's encouraging that most countries offer some form of testing, there is limited data on the actual numbers of tests performed, the number of tests per population, and the rate of positive tests for African countries. Many health policy experts on the continent are expressing concern that testing is simply too low to have an accurate picture of the spread of the virus. All those places serious challenges for the tourism sector on the visiting tourist's safety and the workers in the industry. The available data for a few African countries suggests that many positive cases are simply being missed, which allows the virus to spread even further.

Less than a year since the COVID-19 pandemic started, John and Johnson, AstraZeneca, Pfizer/BioNTech, and Moderna have created safe and effective vaccines against the virus, as we witness that in some of the nations that have begun vaccinating their citizens including South Africa. Although this is great news and a major scientific achievement, the work isn't done, and we're seeing some signs that this accomplishment could be undermined by a failure to get the vaccine everywhere.

The pandemic won't end with just a vaccine, but when there is global access to it and the people who need it the most get it first, regardless of where they live. Fair global distribution of the vaccines will save lives, help economies recover, and end the pandemic faster for everyone.

The COVID-19 pandemic has led to a dramatic loss of human lives worldwide and presents an unprecedented challenge to public health, food systems and the world of work. The economic and social disruption caused by the pandemic is devastating: tens of millions of people are at risk of falling into extreme poverty, while the number of undernourished people, currently estimated at nearly 690 million, could increase by up to 132 million by the end of the year.

Millions of enterprises face an existential threat. Nearly half of the world's 3.3 billion global workforce are at risk of losing their livelihoods. Informal economy workers are particularly vulnerable because the majority lack social protection and access to quality health care and have lost access to productive assets. Without the means to earn an income during lockdowns, many are unable to feed themselves and their families. For most, no income means no food, or, at best, less food and less nutritious food. The potential of economic growth and development related to the tourism sector are fully recognized at both the continental and international levels. In the African context, the tourism sector is confronted with a number of issues, not only in its long-term development and prosperity, but also in the strategic orientation including dealing with issues such as safety and security as well as health challenges, e.g. current Corona virus.

Now more than ever and in the coming days, tourism academics need to step up and contribute research-based, data-driven ideas and solutions to support what will be left of the tourism industry. Data will have to be collected and tracked to help stakeholders make informed decisions. Academics will need to support new creativity and new opportunities that will be created in the recovery stages. Tourism education will have to be changed entirely to reflect new realities.

Ultimately, tourism depends on the environment and people. If there is anything the novel coronavirus has taught us, it is that the earth will fight back if we do not protect it. Communities of people are important, without that, there can be no travel and tourism. Tourism futures must take cognizance of the fact that the earth has enough to support everyone's need if we are sustainable, but enough to support corporate greed.

While the borders as the main ports of entry between countries were and are still being closed, our interest as tourism sector are the eligible travelers who should be screened or prove to have been screened within the prescribed hours as required by the country of destination. From 4 September 2020, for South Africa, returning residents and nationals who have a positive COVID-19 certificate valid within 48 hours of arrival are allowed to self-quarantine for 21 days. As of 19 January 2021, Africa had recorded 3,3 million COVID-19 infections, 80,939 deaths and well over 2,7 million recoveries. The well received news from The World Health Organization was the announcement aiming to avail the vaccine for the new coronavirus to Africa by February 2021, targeting to vaccinate more than two billion people this year.

Having noted that few African countries have now started administering the vaccination, it gives us hope as the tourism and hospitality sector and the value chain that we are on the road to recovery, and therefore our polices and regulations should be shaped to suit the new norms and standards in addressing the traveller's health and safety measures.

The three pillars of the Africa Joint Continental Strategy for COVID-19 are limiting transmission, preventing deaths, and laying the foundation for socio-economic recovery to get the integration agenda back on track following the disruptions caused by the pandemic, which include the funding gaps, weak health systems, poor supply chain infrastructure and undefined eligibility and prioritization criteria.

Our experts pointed out that vaccinating 60 percent of Africa's population would require an outlay of anything between US\$8 billion and US\$16 billion, and thereby calling for solid plans on who would administer vaccines, which were the priority populations and how would they be reached, and record-keeping and reporting systems. They further indicated that governments and health authorities should not let the COVID-19 emergency detract from regular immunization drives, particularly those targeting child killer diseases.

Ladies and Gentlemen, I trust that you will spend the rest of the day sharing information frankly about your own experiences in this regard as you learn from each other while sharing the best ways of dealing with the challenges of the Covid-19 pandemic.

In conclusion I wish you the best in your deliberations and sharing of information, best practices and strategies that will contribute towards tourism recovery in all our countries. We know that our situation will no longer be the same as yesterday, but the new normal is the way to go now.

Thank You