

**SPEAKING NOTES FOR LN SISULU, MP, MINISTER OF TOURISM  
ON THE OCCASION OF THE OFFICIAL OPENING OF MEETINGS  
AFRICA 2022  
SANDTON CONVENTION CENTRE, 10H00 1<sup>ST</sup> MARCH 2022**

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*“Shared Minds, Shared economies : Advancing Africa Together”*

Honourable Deputy Minister, Mr Amos Fish Mahlalela,  
MEC of Economic Development, Mr Parks Tau,  
City of Johannesburg Executive Mayor, Councillor Mpho Phalatse,  
Director General, Department of Tourism, Mr Victor Tharage,  
South African Tourism Interim Board Chair – Advocate Mojanku Gumbi  
and Board Members,  
South African Tourism Acting Chief Executive Officer – Mr Themba  
Khumalo and South African Tourism Executive Committee Members,  
Board members and Chief Executive Officers of the various Provincial  
Tourism Authorities,  
My Tourism Colleagues, Meetings Africa Delegates, officials,  
Media Representatives and Ladies and Gentlemen

You will all agree that it feels good to be an African!

Welcome to our Meeting Advancing the African Agenda Together. And I am glad that we are finally meeting for the first time in two years to usher in a new period of hope after one of the saddest epochs of our time.

It is an honour for me as South Africa’s Minister of Tourism to host this platform to showcase what Africa has on offer to the world. I am excited and proud to see so many exhibitors and buyers who are ready to do business.

To our buyers, I would like to thank each one of you for your confidence in Destination Africa. Thank you for travelling from your various countries across the world to be with us here today.

We have 13 countries exhibiting from the African Continent and just under 200 buyers, representing 40 countries. I am pleased to report that as many as 54 of our youth are participating in a programme designed to build future leaders and contribute to the transformation of our industry. On the floor you will also meet with 24 of South Africa's leading entrepreneurs and SMMEs in the sector. We also have a Sustainability Village which showcases the work of some of our best crafters. These entrepreneurs, like all of you, had to endure these difficult times, and today with the support of Meetings Africa, they are here to showcase their resilience to the world.

Let me take this time to recognise the South Africa National Convention Bureau (SANCB) in celebration of their 10<sup>th</sup> year anniversary. The SANCB, a business unit of South African Tourism, was launched at Meetings Africa in 2012. The SANCB has over the last ten years achieved a great deal and contributed to the country's hosting of some of the biggest events that have brought in billions of Rands to the South African economy.

Through the SANCB, South Africa has been represented on various stages at different trade shows across the world.

For the past ten years the team at the SANCB has flown the South African flag with pride.. I have no doubt that going forward, they will continue passionately advocating for the African business events industry's growth through continued collaboration.

Meetings Africa, now in its 16<sup>th</sup> year – we had to skip last year’s one as we were in lockdown - was created in response to the global meeting industry’s growing recognition of Africa as a sought-after premier Business Events destination. A lot has changed in the business events sector over the past two years, but your presence here today demonstrates that we are all ready to step into this new world as we learn to live with the Covid-19 virus and restore our business events sector while doing so.

There is no doubt, the Covid-19 pandemic and consequent border restrictions announced by governments worldwide resulted in significant disruption of the business events industry (meetings, incentives, conferences and exhibitions). With people unable to travel, corporate activities came to a grinding halt. This resulted in severe loss of the global industry value from \$945.6 billion in 2019 down to \$215.1 billion in 2020.

The Business Events Industry is a key driver for economic development. It allows growth for businesses and entrepreneurs and has the potential to create jobs and subsequently, income. Two years ago, the industry was directly and indirectly sustaining more than 250 000 jobs and contributed an estimated R115 billion to South Africa’s economy, underlining an incontestable fact, that business tourists spend more than leisure tourists.

Events help accelerate progress because events promote information sharing and collective engagement. This in turn results in innovation and re-invention which are key for economic and professional development and advancement. This is why I am so pleased that this year we continue with our strategic positioning of *Advancing Africa Together*. At Meetings Africa, we are enhancing and forming new partnerships grounded on what we have learnt in the past two years and in so doing we stay true to our theme of **Shared Minds, Shared economies**.

After the Covid-19 pandemic hit the world, it became very important for the African business events industry to ensure that we adapt and put in place best health and safety protocols for us to continue hosting safe events on the Continent. Protocols have been developed, globally, for the Business Events industry and will help everyone to be better equipped as we begin to re-vision our industry.

Ladies and gentlemen, Meetings Africa is our continental opportunity, to collectively review and realign our African business events industry. Opening trade corridors across the continent must also open pathways for intra-African tourism to thrive, and vice versa. It is us – the African business events sector - that have to be intentional and strategic in ensuring that we leverage this mutual benefit between trade and tourism.

The South Africa National Convention Bureau (SANCB), has invested R23-million in bid (2020/21) submissions through its bid support programme to attract business events linked to government's economic development priorities, contributing to the recovery of our sector.

Last night, during our Global Brand campaign launch, we shared with you how we have risen time and time again, from many episodes of destruction and devastation of the Continent's history. We shared our proficiency in always being able to rise with pride and resilience - that is the essence of Africanism. It is our ability to 'live again' and 'build, back, better' that sets us apart.

In this spirit, of the 66 bids for international events submitted for the period 2022–2027, the SANCB has won 20 so far. These secured meetings are expected to contribute approximately R269 million to South Africa's economy between 2022 and 2027 and will attract 8775 international and regional delegates. All this comes after a tumultuous two years, where 36 events were postponed. Well done to the SANCB team!

With open hearts and in all our diversity, and our humanity, I officially welcome you to this 16th edition of Meetings Africa. I am confident that, over the next two days, there will be plenty beneficial business exchanges on the trade show floor.

I know that South Africa and the Continent are avenues of many possibilities. Today I invite you to explore all these avenues and wish you a productive trade show.

I declare Meetings Africa 2022 open!