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MEDIA STATEMENT

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NOTE TO EDITORS: The following speech was delivered by Minister of Tourism, Patricia de Lille at the Southern Africa Tourism Services Association (SATSA) Conference held in at the Durban International Convention Centre today, 7 May 2023.

- Mr. Sboniso Duma, MEC for Economic Development, Tourism and Environmental Affairs and Leader of Government Business in the Province of KwaZulu-Natal
- Tshifhiwa Tshivhengwa, Tourism Business Council of South Africa CEO and other TBCSA Directors
- Oupa Pilane, SATSA Chairperson and other SATSA Directors in attendance
- SATSA CEO, David Frost
- Representatives from National Department of Tourism, Provincial and local Tourism Authorities
- And most importantly, private sector SATSA members both small and large who keep tourism alive, company Directors, Owners, CEO's, General Managers, and senior staff

Good afternoon, goeie middag, sawubona

It is my great pleasure to be with you all today at this gathering of important partners for the tourism sector.

There are many issues we need to tackle and act on and over the past few weeks I have engaged a number of stakeholders in the sector and everywhere there are the same concerns.

We have to confront and deal with these issues and we must do it fast because we all want to go back to pre-COVID visitor numbers and push those numbers even higher. I am looking for ideas and action.

As the sector, you know best what the issues are and what and how we can grow tourism and jobs in this sector.

My priority is clear, let's get to over 21 million tourist arrivals before 2030, let's speak with one clear voice, let's have one clear message on destination marketing, let's make South Africa safer for tourists and let's get to truly opening our country for visitors with the e-visas and improving air access.

East Africa has already surpassed pre-COVID visitor numbers, we need to get there too. Let's act and make it happen.

PRIORITY AREAS

I have been given four priority areas by the President for this portfolio and I am determined to achieve it. We have less than 400 days in this term of office so time is of the essence.

TOURISM SECTOR MASTER PLAN

Priority 1: Expedite the conversion of the Tourism Sector Recovery Plan as into a Master Plan.

This is being finalised.

We need to increase the volume and value of domestic and international tourism through the Tourism Recovery Plan so we are expediting the conversion of the Tourism Sector Recovery Plan as the basis for the Tourism Sector Master Plan.

The Master Plan needs to focus on what the needs of the world are, and what role the South African Government needs to play holistically in driving tourism forward.

E-VISAS

Priority 2: Improve e-Visa turnaround time for tourists.

I met with Minister of Home Affairs, Dr Aaron Motsolaedi in my first few days in this role and he shared a map with me showing that most of the world is green - meaning - we have visa waivers in place for them or they are part of the 14 countries where the e-visa system has been rolled out.

These countries include Algeria, Cameroon, Croatia, Cuba, China, Kenya and Nigeria.

At the SA Investment Conference, the President also announced that we are expanding the e-visa system to 20 more countries and I will be working closely with Minister Motsoaledi on fast tracking the application and approval processes.

TOUR OPERATOR LICENCES

Priority number 3: Improve turnaround time for Tourism Operator Licences.

The Tourism Business Council of South Africa (IBCSA) and SATSA have worked with the Department of Transport on this.

A few days ago, I met with Minister of Transport, Sindisiwe Chikunga where she shared the Department of Tourism's work in this regard. We both agreed to push this work even harder to eradicate barriers and backlogs.

The Department of Transport understands that tourism is an important sector that makes a meaningful contribution to the economy and the brand South Africa.

We have representatives, assigned by the Minister of Transport, to tend to your concerns here today.

The Department of Transport shared their own challenges related to this work and stated that the challenges contributed to a backlog of 1 014 Operating licenses by June 2022.

Since July 2022, the National Public Transport Regulator (NPTA) dedicated 3 days per week to deal with the backlog until it was cleared.

I was briefed that SATSA has been closely involved in this work and the initial backlog of operating licences was cleared by the September 2022 deadline.

We must work together to resolve the matter of the tour operators who have not collected their licences. There is now a backlog of 418 current applications.

There are a few remaining priorities in this area remaining such as the Department of Transport investigating and conducting a legal assessment of the possibility to implement moratorium/amnesty on law enforcement.

According to the Minister of Transport, this has been done and the minister issued an instruction to provincial authorities to halt the harassment of tour operators.

And finally, we must continue to reform and simplify the Standard Operating Procedure for tour operator licence applications.

TOURISM EQUITY FUND

Priority 4: My fourth and final priority from the President is to implement mechanisms to unlock the implementation of the Tourism Equity Fund (TEF) to ensure black ownership within the confines of the law.

I have already started working on this and I have intervened by settling the court case and this was finalised on 26 April 2023.

I am now finalising the concept and criteria for applications to the Tourism Equity Fund and will keep the industry informed on any updates.

TOURISM INFRASTRUCTURE

Another key priority for me is that of Tourism Infrastructure Development because we have a number of state-owned tourist attractions and national parks and we must invest and improve infrastructure to crowd in investment by the private sector.

I am a firm believer in government investing in infrastructure development to create the environment conducive for investment by the private sector.

I have started working with Infrastructure South Africa (ISA) in this regard and look forward to working with all of you on actions we can take to grow tourism infrastructure and investment.

AIR ACCESS

Air access is another key priority for me and I will be working closely with stakeholders to bring more direct flights to South Africa and ensure that the planes also leave the country with travellers so that we grow reciprocal relationships with the world.

The present state of airlift in Africa is improving, but much work still needs to be done in South Africa.

On the global stage, Africa is the strongest performer currently; international air connectivity in Africa has exceeded its 2019 level and was at 104% in March 2023.

However, this growth has been uneven, with some African regions and countries having better airlift connectivity than others.

The African Union (AU) has also launched the Single African Air Transport Market (SAATM), which aims to liberalise air transport on the continent and promote greater competition and connectivity.

I am looking forward to working with various partners in reducing the high cost of air travel in Africa as we know that this deters visitors and thereby limits tourism growth.

Ladies and gentlemen, there is a lot to do and so little time. Let's get to work.

I look forward to working with you all and seeing you at Africa's Travel Indaba tomorrow. Thank you for having me here and God Bless.

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Issued by:

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