



**REMARKS BY MR FISH MAHLALELA, DEPUTY MINISTER OF TOURISM AT THE
MORNING MEMO BY SAACI IN SANDTON ON 28 FEBRUARY 2024**

Programme Director

Mr Glenton De Kock - CEO SAACI

Mr Senthil Goliath - CEO ICCA

Mr Alex Alles – from JMIA

Ms Nombulelo Guliwe – Acting CEO SAT

Mr Tshifhiwa Tshivhengwa – CEO TBCSA

Esteemed guests

Ladies and gentlemen

It is my singular honour to be part of this exquisite Morning Memo by Southern Africa Association of the Conference Industry (SAACI), Tourism Business Council of South Africa (TBCSA) and your international business event partner, the International Congress and Convention Association (ICCA).

I am delighted to participate in this Morning Memo event where we gather to interact, network, and share ideas. This event takes place during Meetings Africa, which has evolved over the years to become one of the continent leading business events trade show.

We meet at the time when our country is on tenterhooks not only that we are about to move towards the end of our 6th Administration and participate in free and fair elections

on the 29th May 2024, but also celebrating 30 years of democracy, which demonstrate the maturity of our democracy.

It is also my privilege to warmly welcome Mr Senthil Goliath and Mr Alex Alles all the way from Amsterdam in Holland to grace our shores and share with us their valuable expertise and experiences in the business events sector.

Meetings Africa creates critical networks between buyers and exhibitors, leading to solid leads and millions of rand are injected into the economy through various touchpoints in the tourism value chain.

Our President Cyril Matamela Ramaphosa is always at pains to emphasize the importance of these networks as they are not only bringing much-needed economic activity to localities, but they also support our government overall national development goals

Knowledge exchange is at the core of the business events sector. People gather mainly for conferences, business meetings and exhibitions to learn or impart knowledge. In a globally connected world, this has become even more important for industries, organisations and governments.

Programme Director, our Continental challenges present a new and evolving landscape for doing business. They present an opportunity for Africa to reset its development trajectory and focus on efforts to improve its competitiveness.

Therefore, businesses operating across the Continent need to respond to these challenges and seek opportunities arising from every sphere of business platform.

Knowledge exchange is essential to foster innovation and creativity by exposing us to new ideas, technologies, perspectives, and best practices. Increased innovation

undoubtedly contributes to problem-solving and greater productivity as it sparks new approaches.

It promotes collaboration and partnership opportunities among various stakeholders. These collaborations, in turn, breed new ideas and breathe life into industries and organizations.

It also facilitates skills enhancement and development. This is critical in fast-evolving industries such as tourism. Learning, unlearning, and re-learning is the only way to keep up with the changes and stay ahead and competitive.

Furthermore, it facilitates the exploration of trends and insights, enabling industry operators to stay ahead and gain market intelligence. This empowers them to tailor their products in alignment with emerging trends.

What impressed me yesterday during the BONday is the gradual embrace of developing science like stargazing in tourism and medical tourism by the tourism sector.

As we drive the need for a South African destination and events industry, we need to make an appeal for more engagements with the private sector and perform more data to examine gaps in our skills and suppliers needs as we build to deliver sustainability in both human and environmental.

With Meetings Africa 2024 attracting exhibitors representing a diverse array of industries from 21 African countries and buyers from as many as 63 countries worldwide, abundant insights and information are waiting to be shared.

This breakfast session should present a unique opportunity for us to be part of the efforts to advance the business events sector on the continent. By being here, all of us are practically saying we want to be part of the growth of this industry.

Let us immerse ourselves in this transformative experience, forging invaluable industry connections, accessing top-tier educational content, gaining insights from seasoned professionals, and engaging in collaborative learning with peers.

The business events industry is a multi-billion-dollar global sector with the potential to significantly boost economies and create jobs. Business travellers, known for high-end spending, contribute substantially to national.

Indeed, Meetings Africa 2023 injected R388.5 million into the South African economy and supported 753 jobs. Africa is embracing the sector's growth with countries making significant investments in MICE infrastructure, simplifying their visa regimes.

The 2022 International Congress and Convention Association (ICCA) rankings showcase Africa's presence, with South Africa securing the 41st spot, Rwanda at 62, and Kenya at 80 based on the number of in-person meetings hosted in 2022.

Central to our strategy of uplifting the business events sector in Africa should be a concerted effort to rewrite the narrative about the continent and amplify our unique story. We must convey to the world that, far from being uncivilised, Africa has made significant contributions to world civilisation.

At every opportunity, we must dispel the myth of Africa as a continent of savages and instead highlight our role as the cradle of humankind, as evidenced by the fossils discovered at sites like Sterkfontein.

The recent experiences unequivocally demonstrate that knowledge is the currency of the future. As we progress, let us continue prioritising acquiring, sharing, and applying knowledge to drive sustainable growth and development across the continent.

In conclusion, our efforts towards uplifting the MICE sector on the continent should, therefore, be viewed within the context of our aspiration to be at the centre of these critical knowledge exchanges.

Let us embrace the idea that our learning, understanding and knowledge are developed in participation with others. Social learning occurs through conversations and through grounded interactions and engagement with others.

I wish you productive exchanges and networking.

I thank you.
