



SPEECH BY THE DEPUTY MINISTER OF TOURISM, MR FISH MAHLALELA, DELIVERED ON THE OCCASION OF THE 2024 MEETINGS AFRICA BOND DAY AT SANDTON

26 FEBRUARY 2024

Premier of the Gauteng Province, Mr Panyaza Lesufi
MEC of Economic Development in the Gauteng Province, Ms Tasneem Motara
MMC of Economic Development in the City of Johannesburg, Councillor Nomoya
Mnisi
South African Tourism Board Chair and Board Members;
Director General, Mr Victor Tharage;
South African Tourism Acting Chief Executive Officer, Nombulelo Guliwe,
DDGs of the Department of Tourism;
Executive Management of South African Tourism
Board members of the various Provincial Tourism Authorities
CEOs and Executive Management of Provincial Tourism Authorities
All our hosted delegates
All our continent-wide Industry Associations, and Tourism Stakeholders & partners,
All media representatives,
Ladies and Gentlemen.

Programme Director, I am truly delighted to participate in another BONday event where we gather to interact, network, and share ideas. This day precedes the beginning of Meetings Africa, which has evolved over the years to become one of the continent leading business events trade show.

You are exactly where you supposed to be today. You are here to not only showcase your knowledge and expertise through presentations or participating in discussions, but you are here to enhance your professional reputation, increase visibility of your business.

Let me hasten to emphasise the significance of your full participation over the next three days as this will provide real opportunity for career advancements that could lead to new and better opportunities.

Programme Director, the global geopolitics and African 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 socio economic platform on the continent.

Knowledge exchange at the core of Meetings Africa

Meetings Africa generates critical linkages 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.

President Ramaphosa had indicated that a number of these linkages are not only bringing much-needed economic activity to localities, but they also supporting our overall national development goals.

However, we should not underplay one of the critical objectives of Meetings Africa, which is to serve as a platform for knowledge exchange to advance the business events industry on the continent.

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.

Knowledge exchange is essential mainly for the following reasons:

- It is crucial in fostering 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.
- Secondly, knowledge exchange promotes collaboration and partnership opportunities among various stakeholders. These collaborations, in turn, breed new ideas and breathe life into industries and organisations.
- Additionally, knowledge exchange 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.
- Lastly, knowledge exchange 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.

I am thrilled that today, during this BONday, esteemed industry leaders and experts will join us to impart their wealth of experiences, insights, and knowledge.

Moreover, I am equally enthusiastic about the opportunity for exhibitors and buyers alike to exchange their valuable insights with one another. This collaborative knowledge exchange will undoubtedly enrich our understanding and foster growth within the business events sector.

Diversity at Meetings Africa – a breeding ground of knowledge exchange

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 gathering also presents 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.

Future Leaders Forum

We are expecting to hear from our Future Leaders Forum, where young university students will be participating with high hopes for the future.

The students pursuing qualifications in Tourism and Hospitality at NQF levels 7 and 8, also have a keen interest in the business events industry. During today's events, we will hear their presentations on various sector-related issues.

With a steadfast commitment to youth empowerment across the tourism and business events industry, the Future Leaders Forum presents a meticulously curated programme with ambitious objectives aimed at inspiring and guiding students towards successful careers in the dynamic business events arena.

Participants will immerse themselves in a transformative experience, forging invaluable industry connections, accessing top-tier educational content, gaining insights from seasoned professionals, and engaging in collaborative learning with peers.

Allow me to pause here and congratulate and express my good wishes to our finalists who are James Kgabo from Tshwane North College, Hloohelo Zwane from Tshwane North College, and Anaïs Saayman from North-West University.

I wish each and everyone of them all the best as they go head-to-head with their presentation in pursuit of that coveted prize of winning a sponsored trip to Frankfurt to compete with students from across the globe for the International Future

The Future Leaders Forum is a unique and free opportunity for students to gain expert insight into the meetings industry, learning from and connecting with inspirational industry experts and fellow students.

Over the two-day program, they will gain valuable industry contacts, benefit from high-quality education and visit the heart of the meetings industry, IMEX. The Forum is run in partnership with MPI (Meeting Professionals International) and global meetings and events company MCI.

The importance of the Business events industry

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.

Meetings Africa 2023 has 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 by 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.

Rewriting the narrative on Africa

Central to the 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. Our narrative should celebrate the proud lineage of great and upright leaders such as Nelson Mandela, Kwame Nkrumah, and Thomas Sankara and showcasing the rich tapestry of African history and resilience.

Moreover, our story should emphasise Africa's promise, prosperity, collaboration, and competitiveness. Many countries on the continent, including South Africa, boast top-notch infrastructure, favourable climates, hospitable populations, and competitive rates, positioning them as ideal destinations for MICE events.

We believe that Meetings Africa serves as a tangible manifestation of this narrative and our readiness and showcases the continent's vibrancy, potential, and readiness to lead in the global business events industry.

Conclusion

In conclusion, 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.

The 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.

That said, I am confident that this BONday and the entire trade event will serve as a platform to advance those efforts. As we come together to propel the business events sector in our continent forward, I anticipate a fruitful exchange of insights and a collective drive towards unlocking Africa's opportunities through meaningful connections.

At Meetings Africa, we 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. So, I invite all of you to take full advantage of this opportunity here at BONDAY.

In the timeless words of Chairman Mao Zedong: "Let a hundred flowers bloom, let a hundred schools of thought contend."

I wish you productive exchanges and networking.

I thank you.