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## **FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

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### **SPEECH BY MINISTER OF TOURISM, PATRICIA DE LILLE, MP**

#### **THE AFRICAN BUSINESS EVENTS SECTOR – A SIGNIFICANT CONTRIBUTOR TO THE ECONOMY.**

***NOTE TO EDITORS: The following speech was delivered by Minister of Tourism, Patricia de Lille at the Media Launch of the Meetings Africa 2024 event.***

***Meetings Africa Meetings Africa 2024 will see the 18th edition of this Business Events Trade Show, owned by South African Tourism, with the specific objective of creating a market access platform, for African Business Events Products. It serves as the primary platform to enable the growth of the business events industry on the continent and ultimately contributes towards its economic growth.***

***Meetings Africa is a 2-day trade show taking place at the Sandton Convention Centre in Johannesburg between 27 and 28 February 2024 with a dedicated Educational Day which is executed in conjunction with the key global, continental and national industry associations. Meetings Africa aims to provide a platform for exhibitors to showcase their offerings to International and local buyers, African associations and corporate planners. Read more below...***

Cllr Nomoya Mnisi, Mayoral Committee Member for Economic Development in the City of Johannesburg

The Board of South African Tourism

The Acting CEO of South African Tourism, Ms Nombulelo Guliwe

The Executive of South African Tourism

Gauteng Tourism Authority CEO, Ms. Sthembiso Dlamini

The CEO of the Southern African Association for the Conference Industry (SAACI), Glenton de Kock

CEO of Proudly South African, Eustace Mashimbye

CEO of the Johannesburg Tourism Company, Thandubuhle Mgudlwa

Members of the media

Ladies and gentlemen,

It is my pleasure to be with you all today as we launch Meetings Africa 2024, an event poised to be one of the most significant business events we will host this year. Let me take this time to wish you all a happy, healthy and prosperous 2024.

I hope we all energized to take on the new year and take tourism to the next level.

This launch coincides with an air of optimism sweeping the tourism sector following the sector's robust recovery and stellar performance last year.

Indeed, there is a collective anticipation within our sector as we eagerly aim to finally surpass all the pre-pandemic figures, especially concerning the number of international visitors who come to our shores.

This year represents a defining moment, and I am hopeful that it is the year in which we will be able to proudly declare our full recovery from the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic and stride confidently towards a more sustainable tourism sector.

Information released by the United Nations World Tourism Organisation (UNWTO) this week gives all the indication that we will indeed reach pre pandemic arrivals this year.

The unleashing of remaining pent-up demand, increased air connectivity, and a stronger recovery of Asian markets and destinations, are expected to underpin a full recovery by the end of 2024.

The report from the UNWTO also singled out the Middle East, Europe and Africa as the strongest performers for arrivals in 2023.

The latest UNWTO World Tourism Barometer shows that Africa recovered 96% of pre-pandemic visitors.

These latest figures are extremely encouraging and are supported by our latest figures where we recorded 7.6 million international arrivals between January and November 2023. This was a remarkable 51.8% increase when compared with same period in 2022.

The numbers show that the tourism sector is successfully driving travel to South Africa while shaping cultural exchanges and contributing to inclusive economic growth.

Africa continued to lead the way during the first eleven months of 2023 as South Africa welcomed 5.8 million visitors from the rest of the African continent marking a significant 75.5% of all arrivals, compared to the same period in 2022.

We expect the international arrival figures for January to December 2023 to be released by StatsSA next week and I look forward to seeing how the sector performed during December, one of our key tourism months.

Thus, the hosting of the 2024 edition of Meetings Africa could not have come at a more opportune time.

Building from successes recorded in previous years, Meetings Africa 2024 will no doubt enhance the already upward trajectory of our sector's performance.

At this year's event at the Sandton Convention Centre, from the 26th to 28th of February 2024.

We anticipate the attendance and participation of more than 350 exhibitors, 350 buyers, multiple members of local and international media and a gathering of over 3000 delegates.

The international buyers are drawn from 51 countries including some key source markets such as USA, India, Kenya, the UK, Germany, Brazil, Poland, Russia and Singapore.

These figures will surely translate into tangible economic benefits. Allow me to pause now and reflect on the substantial economic impact that Meetings Africa 2023 had.

Last year's edition of Meetings Africa was a notable success as it attracted 273 hosted buyers and 355 exhibitors from 22 African countries and welcomed more than 2 900 attendees.

According to an economic impact study conducted by SA Tourism, the 2023 Meetings Africa event's total contribution to the South African economy was R388.5 million.

This comprised of a direct economic contribution of R133.9 million and a further R254.5 million generated through indirect and induced impacts.

In addition, the verified figures show that Meetings Africa 2023 contributed to creating or maintaining 753 jobs within the South African economy. These included 451 direct jobs, 61 indirect jobs, and 241 induced jobs.

The 2024 instalment of the trade show promises to surpass these impressive figures. Meetings and business events are an integral part of our tourism sector's success and for its contribution to the economy.

Since the beginning of the 2023/24 fiscal year, the SA National Convention Bureau(SANCB), in conjunction with South Africa's Business event industry, have sourced and submitted 63 bids to host international meetings, incentives, conventions and exhibitions in South Africa between 2024 and 2029.

These 63 bids have a combined estimated economic value of over R1.2billion and the potential to attract more than 46 000 international and regional delegates to South Africa during the same period.

South Africa has been successful in securing 16 bids (meetings, incentives and conferences) for the 2023/24 financial year, which is great news for the economy.

These Successful bids will bring in a total of R71million between 2024 and 2025, as well as attract 2,505 international and regional delegates.

The SANCB invested R5.7 million for the current financial year in bid submissions through its bid support programme to attract business events that align with the National Government's development priorities.

The conferences will also help to spread business events across the region, and they will take place in various locations, including Johannesburg, Tshwane, Ekurhuleni, Cape Town, Sun City, Parys, Skukuza and Potchefstroom.

When it comes to Meetings Africa, this event extends beyond mere macroeconomic advantages; it encompasses the microeconomic benefits that stem from its hosting. Meetings Africa extends its reach beyond established businesses in the business events value chain by providing ample opportunities for small businesses within the ecosystem.

As an inclusive platform, the event fosters growth, enabling a diverse array of enterprises to thrive and contribute to the vibrancy of the industry.

Over the years, Meetings Africa has become a vehicle for advancing SMMEs within the sector.

This year is no different. In addition to networking opportunities for SMMEs and emerging entrants, Meetings Africa 2024 will also provide opportunities for market access, business, skills development, and capacity building through targeted seminars and workshops.

An integral component of Meetings Africa is the dedicated Business Opportunity Networking Day (BONDay) preceding the event.

BONDay comprises educational sessions fostering thought leadership, knowledge sharing, and insights into global trends and local perspectives, proving particularly advantageous for SMMEs.

This year's BONDay will host speakers from across the continent, with breakaway sessions delving into barriers and opportunities, innovation and technology trends, as well as sustainability and transformation.

Additionally, a specialised Speed Marketing Session during BONDay will cast the spotlight on diverse product categories, serving as a business linkage platform for global buyers and media.

Through initiatives like the Sustainability Village, the event will also foster market access.

The Sustainability Village is a lively mini marketplace that showcases high-quality local products made by craftspeople and entrepreneurs. But the economic and other benefits of hosting the event will reverberate even outside the walls of the Sandton Convention Centre and beyond the three days dedicated to the event.

Through pre- and post-event tours, selected buyers and media personnel will get a chance to experience the authentic taste of our beautiful country by visiting other parts of South Africa outside Gauteng.

This will allow us to profile our unknown gems, especially in the small towns and dorps across the country, ensuring that those communities are not left behind.

I must emphasise that this is not only a win for the host city, Johannesburg, the host province, Gauteng or even our country, South Africa alone. Meetings Africa is a Pan-African trade show; thus, the entire continent benefits from its successes.

This is an essential platform for us as Africans to collaborate and present the continent's compelling narrative to global buyers and audiences.

The event serves as a rallying call for us to champion the African continent as a coveted destination for business events and as a tourist destination. We must leverage this platform to narrate our compelling story as Africans.

Working as a united bloc, we should approach Meetings Africa with a shared commitment to foster inclusive growth.

This growth resonates from Cape Town to Cairo and from Morocco to Madagascar, benefiting every community and the myriad small players within our diverse industry. In our joint efforts, we must also prioritize promoting intra-continental travel, a pivotal factor in our recovery.

Simplified visa rules and expanded airline routes, courtesy of carriers like Kenya Airways and RwandAir, have enhanced accessibility to these destinations for business travellers. This collaboration sets the stage for mutual learning and progress.

I passionately believe that a thriving business events industry in Africa will not only generate substantial social and economic impacts for our people but also drive the overall development of our continent.

In conclusion, with more than 19 African countries set to participate, we anticipate a significant boost for the continent's tourism sector.

In the inspiring words of the African Union anthem: "Let us all unite and toil together, to give the best we have to Africa, the cradle of mankind and fount of culture, our pride and hope at break of dawn. O Sons and Daughters of Africa, Flesh of the Sun and Flesh of the Sky let us make Africa the Tree of Life."

With these poignant lyrics, I earnestly believe that Meetings Africa will play a crucial role as Africa's tourism sector emerges from the shadows of the COVID-19 pandemic.

This event is poised to be the tree breathing much-needed life and rejuvenation into our tourism sector. For us as Africans, collaboration is key.

We eagerly anticipate welcoming you to the Sandton Convention Centre in precisely a month.

Thank you and we look forward to seeing you all at Meetings Africa and collaborating for our shared success. God Bless.

ENDS

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