



SPEECH BY MR FISH MAHLALELA, DEPUTY MINISTER OF TOURISM ON THE CLOSING CEREMONY OF THE MANDARIN LANGUAGE TRAINING PROGRAMME ON 18 AUGUST 2022 AT BOKSBURG.

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Programme Director, it is quite a great pleasure to be part of this memorable moments where we celebrate and recognize outstanding hard work and sheer resilience of human spirit.

Our government's collaboration with the Chinese government comes a long way, including at the height of the Apartheid oppressive regime where it supported our efforts during the liberation struggle.

The South African government was one of the first in Africa to integrate Mandarin Chinese into its public schools curriculum and subsequently others like Uganda and Kenya follow suit.

In view of the shifting of the global economy, our government saw it fit to introduce another foreign language as part of learning in 2015.

It flows therefore that in the tourism space as tourists' numbers increase, tourist guides would need to be able to speak foreign languages, have a range of specialities, be able to guide across regions/borders and provide exceptional and authentic customer experiences.

In South Africa, tourist guiding is a regulated profession as per the Tourism Act, no. 3 of 2014. Based on the trends in the guiding sector, government found that the demand for quality services and more skilled tourist guides was increasing and remaining highly competitive to ensure sustainable employment or business opportunities.

Taking the above into consideration, government then identified Mandarin language training as an important opportunity for existing tourist guides. Coupled with South Africa's diverse offerings, having local tourist guides proficient in the Mandarin language would act as drawcard when marketing South Africa as a preferred destination to the Chinese.

Our department had to double its efforts in this programme backed by empirical evidence which showed just how important the Chinese market was to the global tourism market.

According to the SAT Annual Report for 2017, tourist arrivals to South Africa reached 10.3 million in 2017 with China featuring in the top ten (10) destinations in terms of international arrivals to South Africa.

Again, according to the UNWTO World Tourism Barometer of October 2018, China was also the leading outbound market in terms of tourism expenditure followed by the United States of America and Germany.

Owing to their incredible spending power, the Chinese market presented a huge opportunity to South Africa. The spending power of the Chinese market was recorded at 250 billion in 2016 followed by 258 billion in 2017, almost double the tourism expenditure of the USA for both periods.

As result the department developed a concept document for the implementation of the Mandarin language programme for tourist guides after a number of consultations were

held with various key stakeholders such as the Department of International Relations and Cooperation (DIRCO), the Chinese Embassy and various other internal stakeholders including the Provincial Registrars of Tourist Guides.

The whole focus was on rolling out a training programme that would be sustainable and result in South African guides becoming proficient adequately to conduct tours in Mandarin.

Therefore, a phased approach was adopted where tourist guide learners from all nine provinces would be required to go through the three phases of the programme, where:

Phase one of the Mandarin language training programme which the Department rolled out between the 2019/2020 to 2021/2022 financial years saw a total of 55 tourist guides trained across all nine provinces in Hanyu Shuiping Kaoshi (HSK).

The Hanyu Shuiping Kaoshi (HSK) is regarded as an international standardized (writing, reading and listening) examination that has six levels. Out of the 55 guides that were trained, a total of 45 learners successfully passed their formal HSK1 exam which is administered at various times of the year through the Chinese Test Centre based in China and taken by Mandarin learners across the world.

Accordingly, those who passed HSK 1 were then eligible to participate in the second phase of the training programme.

The tourism guide sector is a highly competitive one with over 10 000 registered guides across the country. It is therefore expected of our Guides to work hard and offer unique experiences, be multi-skilled and never stop learning and gaining further knowledge as these are the areas that will set them apart from the rest.

There is a greater need for Guides to be passionate about their profession and remember that they have so many responsibilities to fulfil whilst they have tourists in their care.

The Guides must be encouraged to tap into new trends such as digitization and look at how they can work alongside technology to deliver an enhanced experience.

The devastating negative impact of the Covid-19 pandemic especially on the guiding sector, made it impossible for all learners who passed the HSK 1 exam to commit to phase two of the Mandarin programme. Many of them secured employment and other opportunities and therefore could not participate in phase 2. Subsequently only 34 tourist guides were enrolled for phase two.

The phase two of the training programme currently underway entails the attainment of HSK 2 which is the next proficiency level for Mandarin. The training commenced on 11 July and will conclude on 22 August 2022.

The Implementation of this training is on a continuous and extensive basis from Monday to Saturday over a six-week period. I am reliably told that learners are being accommodated here at Kopanong Hotel and Conference Centre in Gauteng for the duration of the programme and also the venue where all training sessions are being held.

The Chinese Culture and International Exchange Centre (CCIEC) has been appointed as the training provider to implement phase two of the training.

Even though the phase three has not yet been planned, it will entail the sustainable use of the language skills that have been acquired as well as the completion of a cultural immersion programme.

The phase three will focus on exposure to platforms where guides can have the opportunity to practice their Mandarin skills and, in the process, gain more confidence and experience. Only those who have passed both HSK 1 and 2 will be eligible to be considered for this phase.

It is envisaged that the immersion phase of the programme will take place in China. The planning of this phase was hampered by the Covid 19 pandemic, however with the lifting of restrictions worldwide, the planning is now underway.

Immersion is an effective way of exposing learners to a new language and to the cultural practices and way of life of the country where the target language is the

primary language. Further engagements will take place with various stakeholders to unpack phase three.

Programme Director, our government and China established full diplomatic relations since 1 January 1998. As a result, in 2018, both countries reached a historic milestone of celebrating the 20th Anniversary of the establishment of diplomatic relations.

Both countries enjoy a cordial relation in the area of tourism as underpinned by two Memoranda of Understanding (MoUs). The first MoU was signed in 2002 on the Approved Destination Status (ADS) which conferred to South Africa, the right to receive tourist groups from China and to open the destination marketing office in Beijing.

While the second MoU on cooperation in the field of tourism was signed on 28 October 2013 in Beijing, China. This MoU serves as an institutional mechanism to strengthen bilateral relations on cooperation in the field of tourism.

Areas of cooperation in the MoU includes the encouragement of information sharing, tourism investment, marketing and promotion, skills development and training and tourism safety and service standards.

Since then, joint efforts between China and South Africa bilateral relations have progressed to a comprehensive strategic relationship that has become mutually beneficial.

It is also important to note and express our gratitude that the Embassy of the Peoples Republic of China (PRC) also donated 20 000 masks to the Department to provide support to the tourism sector during the pandemic. These masks were distributed to tourist guides over the course of the year.

In conclusion, Programme Director, the Department is once again grateful for the ongoing support and the training institution for the dedication and commitment to go above and beyond the expectations that were set, as well as the team in the

Department under the leadership the National Registrar for working together to make this programme a success

I take this opportunity to also congratulate all those among us whose hard work, dedication and determination will be certificated today.

I thank you all.