



**SPEECH BY MR FISH MAHLALELA, DEPUTY MINISTER OF TOURISM DURING
MEETINGS OF AFRICA, BONDAY IN JOHANNESBURG ON 27 FEBRUARY 2023**

Programme Director

Themba Khumalo – Acting CEO South African Tourism

Mama Gcina Mhlophe in our midst

Dr Geoffrey Manyara – UNECA Rwanda

Joanne Mwangi – CEO PMS Group Kenya

Didier Scaillet – CEO SITE Foundation Belgium

Distinguished guests

Ladies and gentlemen

It is indeed a great honour and privilege for me to be part of this memorable event which seeks to advance our continent's tourism business events sector by contributing significantly to the economies of many nations in Africa.

From the onset, let me extend my warmest welcome to you all and on behalf of all our people, express my sincere gratitude to the organizers of this magnificent gathering of African nations.

The tourism sector is gradually making serious recovery to restore its former glory before the pandemic, the World Travel and Tourism Council (WTTC) indicates that prior to the onset of the Covid-19 pandemic travel and tourism, including its direct, indirect and induced impacts, accounted for 10,3% of global GDP, amounting to some US\$9,6 trillion.

The socio-economic contribution of tourism to the South African economy is also similarly significant. Before Covid-19 the sector's direct contribution to the country's GDP was estimated at 2,9%, with indirect contribution as high as 8,6%.

The sector supported over 725,000 jobs directly and almost double that figure indirectly. Its contribution to the domestic economy's total investment activity was estimated at 8,2% in 2018.

The good news of this recovery is that all the people who have travelled long distances from different parts of the continent to attend this Meetings Africa, recalling that not so long ago this was not possible due to the restrictions on travel around the world. It is indeed a true testament.

Therefore, Meetings Africa is the one trade show that not only brings the African continent's business events products and offerings under a single roof, it further places a specific focus on SMMEs and their value chain to the entire tourism sector.

Despite all our challenges such as energy crises, dilapidation of the public infrastructure which hamper tourism advancements our government together with our partners are working around the clock to restore our country back to a sustainable path.

From the dawn of our constitutional democracy in 1994 the ANC-led government has placed particular emphasis on the stimulation and promotion of small and medium-sized businesses, particularly among the historically disadvantaged sections of our society, as a means to address historical apartheid-induced economic exclusion, creating jobs, ensuring equitable wealth distribution, and generally making the South African economy more globally competitive and dynamic.

Quite extraordinarily it will be for the first time in the history of Meetings Africa, that access for SMMEs to participate in the trade show be so improved through the "plug and meet" pavilion which allows full access to Meetings Africa to businesses who would otherwise have

not been able to access the show. About 20 SMMEs will be given free access to showcase at Meetings Africa.

Over and above on the Plug and Meet Pavilion, 45 SMMEs will also have a platform to showcase at Meetings Africa.

These SMMEs are coming from various provinces, others are part of a National Department of Tourism Programme and they are here with us over the duration of this all-important iconic trade show.

Excitingly this year, we have also developed and designed a new logo which clearly signifies an injection of new energy into our sector by truly making the show even more accessible to all.

All the exhibitors at Meetings Africa are made up of unique countries with unique business events experiences and products which makes the whole collective show an absolute experience through diversified products, better positioned to contribute immensely to the socio-economy growth of our country.

Our exhibition pavilion has 352 exhibitors from 22 different African countries, providing an excellent wide range of products and experiences to choose from.

Both individuals and buyers in our midst, will be spoilt for choice as they will have to traverse between unique offers and authentic experiences and this is what this event is about.

Throughout the whole day, more information will be provided to create immense value to your respective businesses so you could partner with government in addressing triple challenges of poverty, unemployment and inequality.

At the heart of it, we are all engendering and fostering the purpose-driven public-private cooperation in the MICE sector, as we believe in a “whole-country” approach in scaling-up the financial impact of Business Tourism and MICE in Africa

As a country we have already hosted big events both from a domestic and an international perspective and we believe with your contribution we can continue to host more.

For the 2022/23 financial year, the SANCB together with its partners, have already managed to secure 34 of the 79 bids for international meetings, incentives, conventions and exhibitions.

The secured bids are estimated to contribute R288-million to the South African economy between 2022 and 2025, a great return on investment on the 17.3-million the SANCB had invested in the bid support programme and this showcases the value of business events.

I trust that this platform will provide all of you with the opportunity to interact, network and share great ideas as part of knowledge economy to leave behind the legacy of Meetings.

Moreover, we are hosting the AIPC Summit for the first time at this year's Meetings Africa and this is a real testament of how competitive Meetings Africa is.

With this summit we are intending to bring together the African community of convention centres, exhibition venues and their key suppliers to discuss the challenges and opportunities for the African landscape and in turn ensure that our continent is better poised to hosting only the best of business events.

We will also during the summit explore possible areas of collaboration and partnerships by ensuring that the African convention and exhibition venue industry and its value chain are of a globally benchmarked standard.

Therefore, the AIPC Africa Summit is a critical collaboration between the SANCB and the AIPC to share global best practices and fast-track the improvement of the standards of the venue landscape on the continent.

Against this background, it is hoped that this Meeting, by bringing together key tourism role players and the private sector including SMEs from around this continent will engage in robust dialogue and come up with practical and actionable proposals on how best to advance the business sector events.

In South Africa's context, it is hoped that the deliberations at this meeting will result in proposals on how tourism businesses can be harnessed to help drive several tourism-related socioeconomic objectives and to enable the achievement of key National Development Plan outcomes such as:

- Creating better opportunities for and spreading the benefits of tourism to rural areas
- Stimulating the growth of small businesses and the inclusion of under-represented groups such as women and youth
- Enhancing livelihoods, particularly in less economically active areas
- Generally enhancing the South African tourism sector's international competitiveness and export earning capacity

Such contributions will help our government and the tourism sector at large in our efforts to drive the sector's overall recovery and growth, as guided by our Tourism Sector Recovery Plan, while at the same time responding to the crucial questions of driving sustainability, inclusion and shared benefits.

As I conclude, I count on you, the continental community and our partners in driving this type of interactions, based on the adoption and positive deployment of business models.

I thank you all and wish you well in your further interactions.

