

Keynote Address on the occasion of the launch of the Travel Smart Campaign by Deputy Minister Reginah Mhaule, 03 July 2018

Programme Director

Senior Officials and DIRCO Staff

Government Representatives

Members of the Media

Ladies and Gentlemen

I am pleased to deliver this keynote address during this exceptional occasion of the "Travel Smart With DIRCO Campaign" of the Consular Services Launch. It is indeed heartening to be part of the launch of this campaign which will go a long way in improving the general understanding of the Consular Services we provide to our own populace here at home and abroad. The thematic focus which is ***"Travel Smart: How DIRCO Consular Services can assist you when travelling abroad"*** is therefore fitting considering our commitment to the provision of services with excellence.

I cannot miss this opportunity and as the Deputy Minister indicated during her opening, we have just arrived from the 31st African Union Summit that was held in Nouakchott, Mauritania. We all must be proud that South Africa has joined almost 50 other African states in signing the African Continental Free Trade Agreement (CFTA) which contribute towards a prosperous continent aspired by our people.

We have gathered here to launch an initiative which further express the values of Tata Madiba' s leadership of putting our people first and as such renewing our commitment to Batho Pele principles. I must therefore state from the onset that this event takes place in the beginning of the significant month of July,

which is the birth month of our founding father of our democracy former President Nelson Mandela.

As you are aware we will continue to celebrate his centenary through-out as directed by the decision by our Government to formerly commemorate Madiba's legacy in 2018. In essence, former President Mandela would have turned 100 years this year and to be precise in fifteen days we will commemorate his birthday on 18 July and also observe Nelson Mandela International Day, which calls on all of us to dedicate 67 minutes and demonstrate our commitment to social change.

In similar vein, this year also marks the centenary of another icon of the African liberation struggle, Mama Albertina Sisulu. Thus South Africa and the African continent can indeed be proud of the selfless service rendered by these Mama Sisulu and Tata Madiba to better the lives of all our people.

We must draw inspiration from his words delivered as part of the Freedom Day celebrations speech in 1999 when he said:-

"We must improve service delivery to the people. We must improve our attitudes towards citizens, as public servants".

Ladies and gentlemen

It is in this context that I am excited to preside over the launch of this Consular Services campaign by the Department of International Relations and Cooperation (DIRCO). This launch will be followed by the planned "travel smart" Provincial Roadshows which we will undertake during the course of the year to further enhance public comprehension of what DIRCO can offer in this regard.

We envisage to complete these planned "travel smart" roadshows to all provinces within the 2018/19 financial year. I must underscore that these

Provincial Roadshows are not lined-up in any order of priority as we believe for this campaign to be successful every sphere of society is equally important.

It is a true statement that most South Africans face the reality of being destitute in foreign countries and under these circumstances they seek our assistance without prior knowledge of what services we mandated to provide. This situation must be changed and I believe that the Consular Service campaign we are launching today will enable us to do so.

Colleagues,

Our Department, DIRCO, through the Chief Directorate: Consular Services is mandated with rendering assistance and support to the public, working closely in collaboration with our Diplomatic and Consular representatives abroad. As such the colleagues responsible in carrying out this mandate on daily bases are in the cold face of service delivery like any other line function department.

The only difference between DIRCO and other departments is that we function largely in the purview of foreign relations however our works is aimed at improving the living conditions of South Africans. I emphasise this point because the current uncertain and volatile security climate in which the world requires us to respond favourably to the needs while adhering to our international obligations.

Ladies and Gentlemen

In this regard we must render Consular services in accordance with Articles 5, 36 and 37 of the Vienna Convention on Consular Relations (VCCR) of 1963 and guided by our own legislative prescripts. The VCCR is therefore the first and to date the most important document in the consular field and provides the judicial basis and general framework for provision of consular services by member States.

It is worth noting that since the VCCR came into effect in 1963, Consular Services across the globe had to adapt and innovate, develop new practices

and responses to meet contemporary challenges of the “global citizen”. As such, the Global Consular Forum (GCF) was established for Member Countries to meet annually in order to collaborate, network, share ideas and also provide consular updates. Let me mention that as of January 2018 South Africa has been appointed as a Steering Committee member of the GCF.

Consular Diplomacy today requires an ongoing sharing of ideas, best practices and innovations, collaboration in areas such as crisis response, training and possibly some joint activities and research to advance the legal and policy framework that supports consular relations

Programme Director,

While our consular officials are required to treat and provide quality assistance whenever a crises or need, while working under constrained environment since the austerity measures have been put on place.

We continue, to work with our own sister departments like Home Affairs, South African Police service and Social Services to help us in their areas of expertise.

Furthermore, the Viena Convention grants our officials the right to access the citizens in distress, thus it is advisable for our people travelling abroad to make necessary arrangements with the department so that they can be of necessary assistance. Most importantly, is to urge our citizens to make necessary financial provisions for any eventuality that may occur, that is get in place the necessary travel insurance.

We urge our travelling agencies to assist us in this regard as they are the most important stakeholder in this regard.

Ladies and gentlemen

A week ago, we had to deal with the arrest of 51 of our citizens for violation of the visa laws in China. As I am addressing you, 49 of the 51 have returned

home safely and the remaining two (2) we have been informed by our mission that they remain in custody as they served as recruiters.

We are of the opinion that this situation could have been avoided had necessary information been readily available for our people. As such, we urge people when travelling to do due diligence on the country they are visiting.

Before boarding an aeroplane, South Africans should take time to learn about the financial, political, cultural and economic environment of their intended destination. We must of course encourage our people to learn at least a few key phrases in the host country's language. Even a modest command of the local language will go a long way. When travelling abroad the laws of the receiving country applies to everybody and South Africans must understand that they will not receive special treatment.

South Africans are encouraged to have the contact details of the nearest South African Representative office and to carry contact details of their next of kin at all times.

Programme Director,

We will be embarking on an elaborate Travel Safe campaign aimed at mitigating some of the past experiences we mentioned and are well aware of. We aim to extend this campaign in different mediums both traditional and non-traditional, so we can reach as many of our people as possible.

It is thus important, that those planning to travel familiarise themselves with the information that is readily available on the DIRCO website, www.dirco.gov.za to read more on what is needed when travelling and also on where the nearest South African Representative office is based at your intended destination.

Thank you.