



Remarks by Minister of Tourism, Mmamoloko Kubayi-Ngubane at World Tourism Day

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Programme director

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Ladies and Gentlemen

Good Morning

Thank you for joining us to celebrate this very important day on the annual tourism calendar. Every year, we come together on this day to celebrate World Tourism Day as a culmination of the many tourism events and celebrations that happen across the country in celebration of the Tourism Month, which is the month of September.

This year we celebrate World Tourism Day when the tourism sector has just achieved a key milestone on the tourism's road to recovery, the opening of international borders. Two months ago, as the COVID-19 pandemic was at its worst, I was agonising over what this day was going to look like had the pandemic situation remained as it was. Looking back at where tourism was two months ago, we have much to celebrate. Indeed, domestic tourism has now put tourism firmly on the road to recovery.

When it all seemed gloomy and lost in the midst of the pandemic, the tourism sector did not wallow in despondency and despair. The sector stakeholders came together and worked

collaboratively to develop innovative strategies so that the sector could operate in the new normal. Indeed, this approach paid off, as we saw tourism subsectors moving from level 3 to level 1 on the risk-adjusted strategy, and thus, began tourism's road to recovery.

Ever since government opened inter-provincial travel, I have been travelling across the various provinces visiting establishments and meeting with travellers and establishment owners. I am happy to report that many of the establishments are ready to reopen if not already opened and South Africans are very keen to travel their own country.

Across the country South Africans are sending me messages and pictures of their tourism experiences. South Africans are taking their families and friends to adventures, for game drives, hiking and other kinds of memorable tourism experiences that our country has to offer. After six months of lockdown, South Africans are going all out to rediscover their country.

The vibrancy of the domestic tourism we have witnessed is in line with what our recovery plan had envisaged which is that the recovery will happen in phases. In this regard, we predicted that the recovery will start with domestic tourism, then regional land and air markets, and lastly, resumption of world-wide international travel.

We would like to convey our sincere thanks to the many South Africans who have heeded the call get out there and travel their country helping to save businesses and jobs. In other parts of the world, domestic tourism is the main pillar of the sector and international tourism is secondary, however, in our country it is the opposite. I am quite confident that at the rate at which South Africans are travelling we are well on our way to make domestic tourism the main pillar of the tourism sector.

We are mindful that a significant portion of the supply market is geared for international tourism so that the pricing is unaffordable for segments of domestic travellers. We are appealing to this market to be innovative and adapt their products for the needs of the local market. Incentives such as affordable rates, discounts, upgrades and enticing packages will go a long way in getting South Africans to explore the country of their birth thus giving them a proper sense of belonging. I am again calling on all sector players in the private sector to collaborate with us in creating a conducive environment to entice South Africans to travel their country.

I was encouraged by how establishments have embraced the new normal which they have shown through the strict adherence to health and safety protocols. They all have taken steps to protect their employees and tourists and I was quite convinced that our country is ready to receive international guests.

Thus, Cabinet's decision to open the country's borders on 1 October 2020 to most countries is a significant milestone in placing the sector on the irreversible path towards full recovery. We expect that travellers will prefer to travel to countries that offer greater diversity of attractions so that they don't have to travel multiple countries to enjoy different activities. Despite being a long-haul travel destination, South Africa will be a preferred destination because it offers diverse tourism products in addition to the great weather and the warmth of its people.

As I was travelling around our country, I was also struck by how breathtakingly beautiful our country is and by the seemingly infinite diversity of tourism attractions our country is endowed with. The geographical spread of these attractions across every corner of the country attests to the overall beauty of the country, urban and rural. Thus, I am quite confident that as the tourism sector recovers the rural part of our country will get a fair of the benefits.

It is for this reason that we have adopted the United Nations World Tourism Organization theme for 2020 which is "Tourism and Rural Development". It is theme that celebrates the sector's unique ability to drive economic development and provide opportunities outside of big cities, including in those communities that would otherwise be left behind.

Moreover, we believe that tourism will be the key driver of the overall recovery of the South African economy. The recovery that we envisage has to be inclusive, not only by bringing rural communities into the mainstream economy but by also ensuring that vulnerable groups such youth, women and people with disability are given the opportunity to be actively involved in rebuilding their country.

Characterised by low barriers to entry for entrepreneurs, tourism for vulnerable groups is a huge business opportunity and creation of jobs.

World Tourism Day 2020 also highlights the important role tourism plays in preserving and promoting culture and heritage all around the world. South Africa is a country that is rich in diversity in terms race, culture, languages and heritage.

The Tourism Month in our country which coincides with the celebration of Heritage month. This means that the month of September in our country we celebrate all the things that make us who we are as South Africans, our diverse cultures that are buttressed the heritage sites that are part of our diverse tourism destinations our country has to offer.

Our heritage sites are a good driver for both domestic and international tourism. The Cradle of Humankind tells a universal story of the origin of humanity and human evolution both in scientific and social and cultural terms thus making this site a heritage site of the human species as a whole. It is an attraction for traveller, domestic and international, who are interested in

understanding the origin of humanity. Along with other attractions around the country, the Cradle of Humankind is ready to receive visitors.

Indeed, as part of the recovery, it will be critical for us to focus on protecting and rejuvenating the supply side of the market. The public and private sector will have to find ways of working together to ensure business continuity, aligning the value-chain to new biosecurity standards, as well as investment facilitation and market access. The rising domestic demand which will soon be augmented by the international market when we open the borders will have to be met by sufficient supply side infrastructure. This is a very critical element of our road to recovery.

With the risk of the virus spread on a downward trend, South Africa is arguably amongst the safest tourist destinations in the world. We are hopeful that South Africans will continue to social distance, wear masks and take all the necessary precautions to protect themselves so that we can continue to reduce the spread of the virus.

Before and during these times of the pandemic, there are South Africans who, through their exceptional talents, continue to take to the world what is good about our country. Accordingly, I would like to pay a special tribute to the men and women of this country who have distinguished themselves in sports; entertainment; science, technology and innovation and other spheres of life, who have been raising the country's flag high. These are our country's ambassadors who make Brand South Africa soar to greater heights every time they do what they do best.

In conclusion, music has a unique ability to connect people. It has the ability to transcend, borders, cultures, languages and any other barrier that artificially divides people. It is for this reason Black coffee, Master KG and Busiswa have brought their melodious sounds today to help us celebrate World Tourism Day. This is our way of sending a message to the rest of the world in the language they best understand that South Africa is ready to welcome travellers from the rest of the world to its shores. Who better to send this message than the country's biggest musical ambassadors?

Let's protect ourselves, let's wear masks, let's wash our hands and let's continue to practice social distancing.

I wish you all a great World Tourism Day.

I thank you.

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