

WELCOME REMARKS BY THE MEC FOR ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT, ENVIRONMENT AND TOURISM, MR M.N MOKOENA, MPL, DURING A BOARD MEETING OF THE MTPA BOARD AT HALLS GATEWAY, MATAFFIN, MBOMBELA LOCAL MUNICIPALITY.

..... 2012

- Chairperson of the MTPA Board,
- Deputy Chairperson of the Board,.....
- Other Boards members;
- Acting CEO of the MTPA, Dr Nthabiseng Motete;
- Ladies and gentlemen;

Good Morning!

POLITICAL INTRODUCTION BY JOHN SIKHOSANA

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Chairperson, ladies and gentlemen;

As you are aware, the main reason for the existence of the *MTPA* is to develop the tourism sector, and to preserve our environment for the benefit of future generations, thus further contribute to the economic growth of this Province. It is therefore critical to note the two main mandates of this institution, that is, **bio-diversity management and conservation** and **tourism growth**.

Your appointment therefore, as the Accounting Authority for this entity, is to put the *MTPA* back on high steam and ensure that it continues to carry-out its Constitutional and founding mandates.

The tourism sector remains one of the critical sectors of this Province, and remains one of the critical sectors that have been highlighted in the proposed *Mpumalanga Economic Growth and Development Path*, the *MEGDP*. This new growth path for the Province has identified this sector as being critical towards creating the much needed job opportunities, intended to contribute towards reducing the high levels of unemployment.

One could say the tourism sector is our 'gold mine,' and we need to exploit it fully – though responsibly, given our mandate on conservation.

Chairperson, ladies and gentlemen;

The slow pace of transformation within this sector also remains critical. We need to work hard and with speed to transform this industry, given that it is still dominated by one section of our communities – it is still dominated by white people despite available prescripts to let their black counterparts to enter the industry. I therefore require your utmost assistance in this regard, to turn the situation around. I believe that aspiring black entrepreneurs have a significant role to play, if afforded such an opportunity, to prove themselves.

We are also engulfed by the problem of tariffs being charged by the industry, which prohibits mostly the previously disadvantaged, to enjoy their bio-diversity.

Entrance fees and amounts charged at hotels and lodges continue to be a prohibiting factor for this group. It appears that amounts charged are aimed at international tourists – giving them an advantage over the people of the land; the people whose Constitution guarantees them enjoyment of their natural assets. This is where you come in as a Board – to speed up the level of transformation with this industry.

Having reminded you of the mandates of this entity, I believe it is now evident that your responsibilities going forward, will amongst others be:

- To ensure job creation within the tourism sector, in a large scale;
- To ensure rigorous growth of the tourism sector, given its potential;
- To ensure faster transformation of this sector for the benefit of more people;
- To capitalise on the strength of attractions, our rich culture and heritage;
- To developing new and additional tourism products.

The role of *MTPA* in the context of the proposed *MEGDP* should be to facilitate and support the development of an equitable tourism sector which creates jobs. This means that we should see jobs and inclusivity in the sector each time we look at *MTPA*. To be able to do this, *MTPA*, should demonstrate delivery in the following areas:

(1) **Manage product and enterprise development**, and ensure that SMMES and the historically disadvantage are brought into the mainstream of the tourism industry.

We need to be able to drive both our domestic and international tourism growth through the introduction of new products and further development of our traditional product offerings. I believe that we have not been able to maximise on our product development drive, and therefore a number of tourism opportunities remain under-exploited.

The national Department of Tourism has amongst others, begun a rural tourism action plan process, which I think should favour us.

We have late last year launched a Regional Brand in collaboration with the Swaziland Tourism Authority and Mozambique's *INATUR*. We believe that through this initiative, we will be able to maximise on the opportunities arising from on our proximity to the two (2) neighbouring SADEC countries. I implore on you as the Board, to nurture this initiative for it to bear fruit we are anticipating.

We need the *MTPA* to guide us and be foot-soldiers in our quest to create and build a sustained and efficient human capital, capable to grow a service oriented and world class tourism sector in the province.

We need to ask ourselves the extent to which we will be able to tap in the underutilised skills funds and the additional public expenditure allocation for MRTT.

One of our challenges remains the **availability of the appropriate, relevant and up to date information** for policy making.

Whilst we understand our statistical capacity challenges, the *MTPA* should therefore still is able to provide us with the intelligence that accords us the knowledge to provide strategic Tourism policy development. We can only do this with strong research, planning, monitoring and evaluation.

As the Accounting Authority, we expect the Board to exercise oversight over compliance with laws, regulations and internal controls. The Auditor General was previously not satisfied, indicating that the previous Board did not perform this responsibility, given the problems he uncovered. Going forward, we implore on you to concentrate on the issues he raised. We would also like to know how you are going to ensure that such issues do not recur.

On behalf of the Premier and the Executive Council of the Province, I welcome you onboard the *MTPA* ship, and wish you well in your new job. We believe given your vast experiences, you are the right and appropriate people to lead this ship and move it to better heights.

I thank you!