

REMARKS BY THE MEC FOR FINANCE, ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT AND TOURISM, MR PV MKHATSHWA, MPL, DURING THE OCCASION OF THE TOURISM SAFETY STAKEHOLDER ENGAGEMENT SESSION HELD AT HAZYVIEW SUN HOTEL, CITY OF MBOMBELA LOCAL MUNICIPALITY

Friday, 02 September 2022

Programme Director, Mr Mduduzi Vilakazi, who is the acting CEO of the MTPA;

Deputy Minister of Tourism, Mr Fish Mahlalela;

MECs present;

Executive Mayors present;

Traditional Leadership present;

Other councillors present;

Director General of the Department of Tourism, Mr Victor Tharage;

Provincial Commissioner of the South African Police Service, General Semakaleng Manamela;

Acting Head of the Department of Economic Development and Tourism, Mr Nathaniel Sebitso;

Other Heads of Departments present;

CEO of Tourism Business Council of South Africa;

Acting CEO of SANParks;

Chairperson of the MTPA Board, Mr Victor Mashego;

Other MTPA Board members present;

Our partners in the tourism sector;

Members of the media present;

Distinguished guests;

Ladies and gentlemen;

Good Morning/ San'bonani!

1. Thank you very much Programme Director, for affording me this ample opportunity, to express my remarks during this all-important **Tourism Safety Stakeholder Engagement event**. This is undoubtedly a significant interactive session, aimed at reflecting on the tourism safety issues in the Province, and its strategic hotspots to find an enduring solution to safety-oriented issues affecting our tourists and the whole tourism value chain.
2. Tourism is one of the significant sectors which contribute a lot into our provincial economy, and in *Mpumalanga – the Province of the Rising Sun*, we regard this sector as the *goose which lays golden eggs* for our economy.
3. The sector has been gradually picking up, after it was fundamentally destructed by the **Black Swan events** of the COVID-19 pandemic in the last two (2) years, which led to the shutdown of many tourism operations, and the disproportionate shedding of jobs.
4. Programme Director; many small businesses in the **tourism value chain** are still struggling, and are in dire need of an economic injection due to the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic, whose negative effects have largely been felt by the tourism industry and many other sectors of our economy.
5. However, as a caring and interventionist government, we have unleashed key initiatives and relief schemes aimed at helping

businesses operating in the tourism and hospitality sector, to recalibrate and bring their businesses into full operation since the easing of lockdown restrictions.

6. Growing tourism in this region is very significant towards growing our own tourism industry. In this regard, we have, during Africa's Travel Indaba held earlier this year in Durban, through our Entity the MTPA, signed a Memorandum of Understanding with Tourism Authorities of the Kingdom of Eswatini and the People's Republic of Mozambique to reactivate the ***TRiLand Regional Brand Initiative***, which seeks to enhance the marketing of our tourism products and ensure access to our markets in the tourism value chain.
7. Programme Director; notwithstanding the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic to the tourism sector, the statistics released by **South African Tourism** indicate that our Province did well domestically in 2021, by recording a total of **one-million, 263-thousand, 293 domestic visitors, compared to two-million, 485-thousand, 326 domestic visitors** received in 2019.
8. And this was further accentuated by the Minister of Tourism, Ms. Lindiwe Sisulu, when she addressed the media on the '**Tourism Performance Post COVID-19**' yesterday; and I am quite certain the Deputy Minister will abreast this stakeholder engagement session with further details in that regard. What is pleasing is that the picture painted by the Minister, undoubtedly depicts South Africa as being the preferred tourism destination of choice, for both the **domestic and inbound tourists**.

9. And as the Minister posited yesterday, the tourism and hospitality industry in South Africa looks brighter, and we must put all hands-on deck to ensure we insulate the sector from any **endogenous and exogenous** harm, in order to guarantee its brighter future as imagined.
10. Programme Director; the **Mpumalanga tourism ecosystem** is characterised by beautiful **fauna and flora**, which deserves our collective efforts to be protected and preserved from any existential threats, including the poaching of our rhinos, which is a very devastating phenomenon.
11. The safety of our tourists is also the big elephant in the room which must be addressed immediately. Without tourists, our tourism industry would be doomed; its destinations depend on its ability to provide a safe and secure environment for visitors, both domestic and international.
12. Notably, international tourism trends indicate that safety and security of tourists are of high importance in potential tourist's choice of a destination, and the disturbing incidents of crime and violence unleashed against tourists create a negative perception about **brand – tourism**. We must, thus, urgently arrest this social timber which is threatening to catch fire.
13. Several incidents of attacks on tourists in areas we have come to characterise as **'Hotspots'**, have been consistently reported to the

authorities, especially in the Numbi Gate corridor, Sabie-Hazyview and the Graskop area.

14. We have just two (2) days ago, hosted the **Provincial Tourism Lekgotla**, and part of our resolutions, we agreed to enhance our tourism safety strategies, to ensure there is an additional deployment of **Tourism Safety Monitors** in the notorious hotspots, and strengthen relations with the private security companies to create a safe and secure environment for tourists.
15. Programme Director; working with our sister Department of Community Safety, Security and Liaison (DCSSL), the SAPS, National Department of Tourism and private security companies, we have a well-coordinated response strategy in relation to the safety and security of tourists visiting our destinations. And to this end, government has deployed additional **Tourism Safety Monitors** to the strategic tourist areas to address the scourge.
16. Notably, in some areas, the private security companies have deployed surveillance cameras, as part of their efforts to prevent the attack on tourists and the public in general. In June this year, the Kruger Lowveld Chamber of Business and Tourism, hired securities to assist the police in patrolling the Numbi Road leading to the Kruger National Park, and these are commendable efforts of the private-public partnership, working collectively to address the tourism safety concerns.

17. Our Entity, the MTPA, is leading a well-organised **institutional tourism safety forums**, that meet on regular basis to deliberate on the issues of safety, directly affecting tourists in the Province. We are, however, optimistic that this Tourism Stakeholder Engagement session, will assist in drawing in members of the public who reside adjacent to these destinations, so that they are part of the solution. This is because if tourists and foreign direct investments pull out, it is these communities which will find it difficult to derive value out of these destinations and tourism products, in terms of jobs and entrepreneurial activity.
18. Interestingly, the Hazyview area, which is one of the notorious hotspots, is the most visited by domestic and international tourists, who religiously visit the Kruger National Park, through the Paul Kruger Gate, Numbi Gate and Phambeni Gate.
19. The sooner the communities residing around this area join hands with the law enforcement agencies, through the **Community Policing Forum (CPF)** initiatives, the better for us, as this will ensure the offering of sustainable job and business opportunities in the area.
20. And lastly Programme Director, despite a number of the isolated incidents of crime meted against tourists, I must indicate that Mpumalanga remains a tourism destination of choice. As we are about to enter the festive season, we invite tourists to visit the Province to experience the beautiful and captivating scenery of plants and animals alike; the waterfalls and the hospitality fitting for weddings, honeymoons and other relaxations activities.

21. I am quite optimistic that this Stakeholder Engagement session, will surely produce positive results, for the sake of our tourism industry.

22. ***Let's grow Mpumalanga together by protecting our visitors and tourists!***

Ngiyabonga!