

**KEYNOTE ADDRESS BY THE MEC FOR ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT AND PLANNING, HON CNM  
PADAYACHEE, AT THE COMMEMORATION OF THE INTERNATIONAL TOURIST GUIDE DAY  
CELEBRATION  
6 MARCH 2009**

**Programme Director**

**Chairperson of the Board of MTPA, Mr S Mahlalela**

**Members of the Board of MTPA**

**HOD for the Department of Economic Development and Planning, Mr M Mazibuko**

**Chief Executive Officer of MTPA, Mr C Ndabeni**

**Stakeholders in the tourism industry**

**Provincial Tourist Guides**

**Ladies and Gentlemen**

I would first of all like to thank the Mpumalanga Tourism and Parks Agency (MTPA) for organising this event and for inviting me to spend this time with men and women who lead and participate in this important sector-tourism.

Programme Director I am informed that in 1989 during the Third International Convention of World Federation of Tourists Guide Association (WFTGA), members of the Association pondered on ideas to promote the awareness of professional guides among the public. A number of ideas were put forward and these eventually laid the basis for the formation of the International Tourist Guide Day which takes place on the 21st of February each year.

The hosting of this event clearly demonstrates our assertion that through partnership and collaboration between ourselves and the private sector we can elevate tourism in Mpumalanga to greater heights. As we all know that tourism thrives on person-to person encounters that make a tourist's journey of discovery more meaningful, tourist guides play a pivotal role in that regard.

Tourist guides are truly ambassadors for our cities, provinces and ultimately our country. Other than tour operators and the internet, tour guides are very often the only persons from an area that a visitor speaks to and the impression they give can make or break a visitor's experience.

Research has shown that tourist guides have the power to influence visitor behaviour with regard to conservation and preservation of sites. Through our interpretation of national treasures both natural and man made, we can encourage our visitors to appreciate what they are looking at and respect the environment they are visiting. It is therefore not so much the information that we impart but the way we do so that makes the greatest difference to our visitors.

Programme Director, being a tourist guide is a great responsibility since tour guides are the touch points for a visitor's experience in Mpumalanga. Consequently, it is important for the tour guiding community to enhance their professional skills constantly, so that they remain relevant to deliver first-class services to our visitors. As part of maintaining the professional image and continuous upgrading of tourist guides' skills and knowledge, we have during the last quarter of 2008 invited members of the tour guiding community to forward their names at MTPA for up-skilling purposes. Pursuant to this invitation, I am happy to announce that in collaboration with the National Department of Environmental Affairs and Tourism we will be facilitating training for 20 provincial tourist guides on Customer Care and Communication English during the course of this month through Tourism Hospitality and Education Training Authority (THETA) accredited institution.

Programme Director, it is through such initiatives that as the public sector we pledge our support in ensuring that our provincial tourist guides deliver high quality service to their clients, both domestic and international.

Programme Director, tourism is people-oriented industry, which serves the people by the people themselves.

The Second Tourism Amendment Act dealing with tourist guides issues was promulgated in the year 2000. This piece of legislation provides, among others, for provincial registrars, who register and keep records of tourist guides in their respective provinces, and are in charge of promoting and developing tourist guiding sector as well as ensuring that this Act is complied with. In this spirit, we make a clarion call to all the tourist

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Program Director, I must indicate that particular attention in the Act was given to the developmental approach rather than prescriptive approach. This is mainly because this sector faces a serious challenge of transformation. We have 1547 tourist guides in our database of which 269 are females; 75 black and 195 whites, 1277 are males of which 526 are black; 744 are white; 2 Asians and 5 coloureds.

Ladies and gentlemen, taking a closer look at this statistics it is clear that we need to put more effort in strengthening our resolve of ensuring the transformation of the tour guiding sector. Further, I am confident that through strategic partnerships we will succeed in achieving this goal and many others that we have set for ourselves.

Programme Director, our province is endowed with scenic beauty, abundant wildlife, diverse culture and hospitality to name but a few. How we market the province as a value for money destination, remains a challenge to all of us in the tourism industry. However, the quality of tourist guide sector will undoubtedly add value to our efforts of positioning Mpumalanga as a preferred destination of choice in line with our vision "Mpumalanga, your world class tourism destination".

As we prepare to host the world during the 2010 FIFA Soccer World Cup here in the province , the challenge that confronts our efforts is that of ensuring tourism quality for all our visitors.

This means we must all play our roles to ensure that every tourist, local and foreign, who travels to our province discovers the very best that we have to offer. We can and must engage our visitors and leave them moved and inspired and wanting to come back again. That is our role as tourist guides.

Ladies and Gentlemen, what will set us apart and ensure the success of tourism in our province are, among others, best products, exceptional service, world class facilities and real value-for-money.

in conclusion, I call upon the mainstream tourism product owners to assist government efforts to extend their skills and opportunities to members of the previously disadvantaged communities so as to bridge the huge gap of disparities. To our tour guides, not only are you true ambassadors for our province but also you are instrumental to our provincial economy and that of our whole country through tourism. I applaud you for the wonderful work you do. Continue to lead our visitors and serve them with professionalism, pride and passion in the land of the rising sun, Mpumalanga.

I thank you