

SPEECH PRESENTED BY THE MEC FOR ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT, ENVIRONMENT AND TOURISM, MR J.L (JABU) MAHLANGU, MPL, DURING THE LAUNCH OF THE COMAIR ROUTE TO MPUMALANGA AT THE KMIA, MBOMBELA LOCAL MUNICIPALITY.

Tuesday, 04 May 2010

Programme Director;

Executive Mayor of the Ehlanzeni District, Her Worship Councillor Khosi Mkhonto;

Executive Mayor of the Host City, His Worship Councillor Lassy Chiwayo;

Speaker of the Mpumalanga Legislature, Mr Siphso Lubisi;

MEC for Finance, Mrs Pinkie Phosa;

Chief Whip of the Majority Party in the Legislature, Mr Siphosezwe Masango;

Chairperson for the Portfolio Committee responsible for our Department, Ms Refiloe Mahlobogoane;

Chairperson of the Portfolio Committee for Public Participation and Petition, Mr Thabelang Mabalane;

Member of the Provincial Legislature present;

Representative of the Executive Mayor of Nkangala District Municipality, Councillor Mothibi;

Former MEC for Economic Development and Planning, Mr Craig Padayachee;

Chairperson of the MTPA Board, Mr Sabelo Mahlalela, and his Deputy, Mr Jansen Davies;

Members of the MTPA Board

CEO of MTPA, Mr Charles Ndabeni;

CEO of Comair, Mr Gideon Norvick;

Managing Director of the KMIA, Mr Marius Nel;

CEO of the Kruger Lowveld Tourism, Mr Nico Oosthuizen;

CEO of the Highveld Tourism, Mr Athol Stark;

Distinguished guests;

Members of the Media;

Ladies and gentlemen;

Buenos Tardes e' bienvenidos a Mpumalanga! I believe quite a number of you did not understand what I just said, except for the 'Mpumalanga'. I was actually greeting you in Spanish by saying '**Good Afternoon and Welcome to Mpumalanga.**' To those who joined us in the inaugural Comair flight from the O.R Tambo International Airport to the KMIA, *eu espero que você aprecie o vôo*, Portuguese for '**I hope you enjoyed the flight**'.

Ladies and gentlemen, that is just one of the confirmations that we are more than ready to welcome the people of the world, who will decent in our province for the 2010 FIFA World Cup games in 42 days from today. The first game at the new Mbombela Stadium between Honduras and Chile takes place on June, 16. As one of the host cities for the soccer spectacular, we must be ready to welcome our visitors in their own languages. This is because Psychology has proven that people feel more welcomed and accepted, when they are greeted and spoken to in their own languages. They feel that their host actually cares about them; hence they took pains to research and learn about them.

It might sound insignificant, but this is the first and critical step towards becoming an excellent host. And when that happens, people are likely to remember you always, thus increasing the possibility of them coming back to visit us.

As the host base of the Chilean soccer team during the soccer spectacular, we must know that they speak mainly Spanish; we must understand a bit of their culture – how to interact with them, since some gestures are not acceptable or would be taken to be rude in other cultures. Given that the front-line staff in the hospitality industry are the first point of contact, we are therefore appealing to them to always remember that it is in the human nature never to forget bad experiences. As they say, first impressions last. They must remember that they play a significant role as Ambassadors of the Mpumalanga and South African brand.

It is therefore imperative for our front-line staff **not** to assume that a person with the same skin colour like theirs, speaks their language. The golden rule is, if you are not sure, rather ask than risk losing the person forever! When approached by someone you never met before, rather ask this question: **'In which language would you like to be addressed?'** Since we remain committed to develop world-class front-line cadres and Ambassadors of our brand, we will therefore from 13-19 May 2010, embark on a provincial-wide **Service Excellence training** for over 12 000 front-line staff. This continuing training is part of the national initiative to improve overall customer service in line with the Tourism Service Excellence Strategy adopted in 2008. We have in the past, successfully trained quite a number of front-line staff and tour guides on good customer relations, and also on speaking foreign languages like French and Portuguese.

Mesdames et Messieurs, air access is, has, and will always be a critical issue for Mpumalanga as a destination. Aviation is not only critical to the tourism industry, but is fundamental for the provision of essential services, and an important industry to the ongoing economic and social development of any destination. South Africa's Global Competitiveness according to the 2005 study commissioned jointly by SA Tourism and the then Department of Environmental Affairs and Tourism, indicated that the South African brand was performing poorly due to issues of transportation, especially on aviation matters.

This was supported by a decline in airlines serving South Africa from a record 75 airlines in 1997, to 45 airlines in 2005. As a result, the situation prompted the country to develop a **5-year National Airlift Strategy**, whose aim was to put in place effectively structured regulatory measures in order to increase tourism growth for South Africa. With the UN World Tourism Organisation predicting that over 47 million trips will be undertaken in Africa this year, it is opportune time that our province should re-claim its position in the tourism sector.

This we will do by making it more convenient and affordable, to take a *Sho't left to Mpumalanga*, given the number of people who will visit our country for the 2010 FIFA World Cup games. The upcoming **Tourism Indaba** from 06-10 May 2010 also provides a platform for our province to market itself as a destination of choice, given the number of local and international visitors who converge in Durban annually, for the event.

The launch of the **Provincial Airlift contract** today, therefore signifies our continuing appreciation of the impact being made by the tourism sector to our economy. We applaud the commitment of our public entity, the MTPA, towards creating sufficient tourism supply capacity for the Province, and to grow the demand for air travel through the introduction of new, affordable and sustainable players within the provincial aviation economy.

Ladies and gentlemen, in gearing up towards implementing the Tourism Airlift Strategy we are launching today, the MTPA has in the past financial year successfully delivered two very critical interventions, namely, the **2010 Tourism Organising Plan** and the **Tourism Products and Infrastructure Audit**. The 2010 Tourism Organising Plan was centred on amongst others, tourism infrastructure and spatial development; tourism product development and investment; destination and events marketing.

The **Tourism Products and Infrastructure Audit** was intended to amongst others, review relevant and related work already undertaken including existing tourism product databases, in order to achieve cohesion and direction; and to identify existing gaps in tourism infrastructure provision in Mpumalanga and to make recommendations on how such gaps can be bridged to facilitate growth. What followed after, was the realisation of a need for **the tourism airlift strategy; co-operative agreements** with the KMIA; the charter expansion strategy; regional integration and the need to influence integrated regional transport plans.

It was also evident thereafter that route packaging continues to be a distinguishing factor in sustaining aviation efforts. The Provincial Airlift Strategy therefore sets the strategic direction for the aviation industry in Mpumalanga from 2009 through to 2016. It is our belief that the project we are launching today, will in a long run have ripple spin-offs to our provincial tourism sector. I am therefore humbled and honoured, to be part of this - **the launch of the tourism airlift contract**, with the sole purpose of increasing leisure tourism airlift capacity through the provision of cost-competitive and sustainable flights to and from KMIA.

For the first time in the history of aviation in our province, customers would be able to fly business class, thus filling the vacuum not occupied by the current carriers servicing our route. This affords us an opportunity to increase the number of business tourists to the province, and will go a long way towards increasing the number of people visiting our province by air.

Ladies and gentlemen, growing our tourism industry remains our main challenge. We must do everything in our power; craft strategies to enable us to claim a bigger stake within the industry. It is our belief therefore, that the partnership we are announcing here today, will provide a solution intended to make flying to Mpumalanga more affordable and convenient. We however going forward, still have the challenge of extending the length of stay of tourists; facilitating geographic spread of visitation throughout the province; and maximising tourist spend in our province.

As I close, I take this opportunity to congratulate the MTPA Board under the Chairpersonship of Mr Sabelo Mahlalela; and the CEO, Mr Charles Ndabeni for continuing to live our dream; a dream towards sustainable livelihood for our people. We acknowledge and appreciate your continuing efforts to contribute towards economic growth in our province.

We applaud that you have been able to carry-out all your mandates as promised when we tabled our Departmental Policy and Budget Speech last August. We believe that the implementation of the Tourism Airlift Strategy through the contract that you have signed with Comair, will deliver a huge chunk of tourists to our province, thus improving South Africa's global competitiveness. Our ultimate goal is to occupy the number one spot from the current position three (3) in terms of international arrivals, and at least number two (2) spot on the domestic front.

May I also extend our gratitude to Comair, for partnering with us and agreeing to make flying to our province affordable. We appreciate that this contract will see your airline flying at least six (6) times per week to the province, and hope that this will extend to seven (7) times in the near future. We hope that the daily frequency of flights to the province will also increase, and that other destinations like Cape Town and Durban will be included going forward.

Working together with the private sector, **we can do more** to grow our tourism sector for the benefit of our people.

Estrimados Senôras and Senôres, Africa- *Ke Nako!* The time for Africa is finally around the corner. We have proved the pessimists wrong – we are more than ready to host the world during the 2010 FIFA World Cup games. We believe that Africa's children will benefit from the proceeds of the biggest sporting code in the world.

In the words of British archaeological scholar, Thomas Edward Lawrence, and I quote:

“All men (and women) dream but not equally. Those who dream by night in the dusty recesses of their minds, wake in the day to find that it was vanity;but the dreamers of the day are dangerous men and (women), for they may act their dream with open eyes to make it possible.”

Messrs Mahlalela and Ndabeni, you are dangerous day dreamers. You've dreamt with your eyes wide open and made it possible. Congratulations for delivering on this commitment, to make flying to Mpumalanga affordable.

Merci beaucoup!