

**SPEECH BY THE MEC FOR ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT, ENVIRONMENT AND TOURISM, MR J.L (JABU) MAHLANGU, MPL, DURING THE LAUNCH OF THE 2010 TOURISM MONTH AT THE MTPA OFFICES IN SANDTON, GAUTENG PROVINCE.**

**Monday, 06 September 2010**

Programme Director, Ms Nomsa Mlobela;

Honourable Justice Mojapelo;

Executive Mayor of Ehlanzeni District Municipality, Cllr Mkhonto;

Chairperson of the MTPA Board, Mr Sabelo Mahlalela;

Board members;

Deputy Director General of the National Department of Tourism, Ms Sindiswa Nhlumayo;

CEO of MTPA, Mr Charles Ndabeni;

Chairperson of the MTPA Audit Committee, Ms Gaylene Deiner;

Chairperson of the Highveld Regional Tourism Organisation, Mr Athol Stark;

Members of the Media;

Distinguished guests;

Ladies and gentlemen

**Good Evening!**

In the words of British primatologist and anthropologist, Jane Goodall, *"The greatest danger to our future is apathy."* Like any other country of the world, we should all be interested in preserving our bio-diversity for the sake of our lives and the future of generations to come. It is through our bio-diversity that our lives are sustained, and failure to preserve it, will threaten even our own existence. In supporting the United Nations' declaration of 2010 as the **International Year of Bio-diversity**, our government has therefore decided to celebrate this year's tourism month by focusing on **tourism and bio-diversity**.

This is our commitment towards celebrating life on earth, and the value of bio-diversity on our lives. Our activities on this planet are continuing to cause irreversible damage to our bio-diversity at an alarming rate, thus resulting in climate change and global warming.

The effects of this unfortunate self-inflicted phenomena, continues to wreck havoc the world over, hence countries of the world have now awoken to collectively take action to mitigate the effects of climate. As a country, we are a signatory to the Kyoto Protocol which binds all those interested and caring countries to significantly reduce the emission of greenhouse gases by 2012. During December 2009, we attended the United Nations' 15<sup>th</sup> Congress of Parties (COP15) Conference on Climate Change held in Copenhagen, Denmark from 7-18 December 2009. Though the parties did not agree on a legally binding protocol on greenhouse gas emissions at the end of the conference, our standpoint as South Africa, continues to be very clear.

We continue to push for a strengthened international climate change regime that will ensure global reductions in greenhouse gas emissions to make sure that the impacts of climate change do not undermine development in our own country as well as in the rest of the African continent. South Africa will have an opportunity to host the 17<sup>th</sup> Congress of Parties Conference on Climate Change around November-December 2011 following the endorsement by the national Cabinet on September 1. If a legally binding agreement is not reached at the end of this year's 16<sup>th</sup> Congress of Parties Conference to be hosted by Mexico in December this year, we believe the conference will then pave the way for the agreement to be reached in our country next year.

Ladies and gentlemen, like the Indian saying says, *"we do not inherit this land from our ancestors; (but) we borrow it from our children."* We borrow it from our children hence we have a collective responsibility to ensure the preservation of our

bio-diversity. As we enjoy our environment, we must do that responsibly bearing in mind that we owe it to future generations to protect our bio-diversity.

It is my pleasure therefore, that the celebration of the tourism month this year, will focus on the protection of bio-diversity and also promote South Africa as one of the most bio-diverse destinations in the world. During this month, we aim to launch awareness programmes focusing on career opportunities, especially for the youth in the tourism sector. We have a responsibility as government, to create the conditions for tourism growth and development by promoting and developing tourism, thereby increasing job and entrepreneurial opportunities and encouraging the meaningful participation of previously disadvantaged individuals. The White Paper on Tourism amongst others, mandates us to ensure:

- Empowerment and capacity-building;
- Investment on tourism-infrastructure;
- Aggressive marketing of South Africa as a tourism destination to international markets;
- Implementation of a domestic tourism and travel campaign.

Top of our priority during this tourism month, should continue to be general awareness about the opportunities for domestic travel. This is to encourage South Africans to travel within their country. This we must do by ensuring that tourism products are accessible to all South Africans, which will in turn harness the development of a culture of tourism. We must continue to build on the legacy left by the 2010 FIFA World Cup by continuing to ensure a safer and welcoming environment for our visitors.

As we celebrate the tourism month, we must encourage responsible tourism as proposed by the White Paper on Tourism. Responsible tourism implies a pro-active approach by tourism industry partners to develop, market and manage the tourism industry in a responsible manner, so as to create a competitive advantage. This puts responsibility on the tourism industry to conserve the environment through the promotion of balanced and sustainable tourism and focus on the development of environmentally based tourism activities. Responsible tourism means responsibility of government and business to involve the local communities that are in proximity to the tourism plant and attractions, through the development of meaningful economic linkages such as the supply of agricultural produce to the lodges, outsourcing of laundry amongst others.

It also give us the responsibility to respect, invest in and develop local cultures and protect them from over-commercialisation and over-exploitation. We have a responsibility to ensure that local communities become actively involved in the tourism industry and become sustainable, and to further ensure the safety and security of the visitors. Responsible tourism further implies that both employers and employees in the tourism industry should both be taught how to treat customers in order to ensure that they come back to visit. It further puts an overall responsibility on all of us to ensure that our environment is protected from extinction.

Ladies and gentlemen, a well-managed tourism industry has the potential to improve, rather than contribute to South Africa's environmental problems. However, to achieve this, a number of actions are necessary.

- We should promote and encourage sustainable and responsible tourism development by means of incentives to private enterprises and communities;

- We should make mandatory the conduct of Integrated Environmental Management procedures for all new tourism projects;
- We should encourage ongoing social and environmental audits of tourism projects conducted in an inexpensive, rapid and participatory way;
- We should encourage tourism development in areas where tourism offers a competitive form of land-use and ensure that tourism is integrated into land-use plans for such areas;
- We should explore creative means of ensuring that neighbouring communities participate in and benefit from economic activities generated in and around conservation areas;
- We should encourage the creation of successful pilot tourism programmes which demonstrate, in tangible ways, the benefits that ecologically sensitive tourism schemes can have over other more damaging forms of land use;
- We should promote sustainable and responsible consumption of water and energy in tourism plants, using readily available technology and encouraging sustainable waste disposal, green packaging and recycling;
- We should support mandatory environmental management practices in ecologically sensitive areas such as wetlands.

If we are to achieve our objectives as government in relation to tourism development, the private sector should continue to play a critically role in the further development and promotion of the tourism sector.

They bear major risks of tourism investment as well as a large part of the responsibility for satisfying the visitor. They have a responsibility to deliver quality tourism services and provide the customer with value for money. Furthermore, the private sector is in a position to promote the involvement of local communities in tourism ventures by, inter alia, establishing partnership tourism ventures with communities.

**Working together** with the private sector, we commit to continue to provide a climate conducive for growth, development and profitability of the tourism sector.

As I close, we must continue to acknowledge the importance of our bio-diversity for our own continuing existence. We must remember that we continue to enjoy our environment which we have borrowed from future generations. I believe we all want to be counted as responsible citizens, lest we would be blamed by future generations for having failed them.

In the words of Scottish author and writer, Nelson Henderson, *“The true meaning of life is to plant trees, under whose shade you do not expect to sit”*.

As caring individuals, we must plant trees for the benefit of future generations rather than ours, hence we must all pledge to protect our environment.

**Working together we can do more** to protect and enhance our environmental assets and natural resources.

*I thank you!*