

SPEECH PRESENTED BY THE MEC FOR ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT, ENVIRONMENT AND TOURISM, MR J.L MAHLANGU, MPL, DURING THE OFFICIAL OPENING OF THE CASTERBRIDGE HOLLOW HOTEL IN WHITE RIVER, MBOMBELA LOCAL MUNICIPALITY.

Tuesday, 23 March 2010

Programme Director;

Messrs Louis van der Merwe and Patrick Siebel of Seasons in Africa group;

Chairperson of the MTPA Board, Mr Sabelo Mahlalela;

Head of Department of Economic Development, Environment and Tourism, Mr Rabeng Tshukudu;

CEO of MTPA, Mr Charles Ndabeni;

Members of the Media;

Distinguished guests;

Ladies and gentlemen;

We meet just a day after we celebrated *Human Rights Day*; a day to remember all those who perished under apartheid rule, for believing and exercising their human rights. It was on that fateful day 50 years ago, when 69 people were killed by the enemy for exercising their rights – a right of free movement within their country of birth. That fateful day, become a defining moment for our liberation struggle, hence as South Africans we enjoy the protection of our human rights today. Therefore as much as being able to live freely and exercise your constitutional rights is a human right, so is living in a clean environment.

As a Department we have a mandate to ensure that the environment is protected and preserved for the benefit of future generations. It is therefore, our collective responsibility to fulfil this mandate despite the changing climate conditions we are experiencing.

Working together we must ensure that we change the way we have been doing things, for the sake of our endangered environment, lest we will be blamed by future generations for having failed South Africa.

Ladies and gentlemen, the country and the world over are already experiencing the effects of climate change. When addressing the 15th Congress of Parties at the UN Climate Change Conference in Copenhagen, Denmark in December last year, President Jacob Zuma said and I quote:

“Climate change is a practical matter for the developing world, especially Africa. For countries such as South Africa, weather patterns in coastal provinces are already wreaking havoc on the lives of our people, which makes this challenge a reality that we are already confronting.....We need an agreement that recognises the common responsibility of all nations to reduce emissions, while not retarding the development of developing countries.....Developing countries are ready to play their part in reducing global emissions, but obviously rich countries have to take the lead..... We owe it to current and future generations”.

I am therefore humbled to be part of this green destination initiative this morning, which is a sign of our commitment towards saving our environment. The launch of the Casterbridge Hollow Hotel gives us hope that the people of this province agree that green energy is the future. We all agree that when it comes to green destinations and innovative designs within South Africa, the Casterbridge Lifestyle Centre sets the tone for future development.

In less than 80 days, we will play host to the world during the 2010 FIFA World Cup games, and what opportune time to introduce this green destination to the world.

Let us show the world that we are already doing our bit to put the brakes on climate change.

We are proud that within each new Casterbridge project, greater advances are being made in making products greener and more sustainable. One such applauded initiative, is the art gallery of the Lifestyle Centre which was architecturally designed to maximise available light and to minimise dependency on artificial lights. The Casterbridge Hollow Hotel itself is the newest development which supports our initiatives as government, to reduce dependence on coal-generated energy and promoting the use sustainable and green energy. I am proud to announce that the hotel is the current leader in using green energy.

This is because:

- Every room in the hotel has a solar geyser;
- Every drop of water used in the operations of the hotel is recycled;
- The hotel makes use of bio-mite septic tanks that do not release harmful waste into the environment;
- The hotel is built from locally obtained material and excludes the use of hardwoods.

We are further encouraged that the hotel management has promised to continue to look out for other ways which could save our environment, such as waste recycling and painting of all their rooms and roof with ceramic bead additive to minimise cooling and heating costs. The tone has been set and we have been promised that the adjacent loft apartment development in the hotel complex will be even greener.

Ladies and gentlemen, our efforts and commitment as a country towards addressing the issues of global change are being recognised the world over. As a result, we have been afforded the opportunity to serve at the United Nations on matters of climate change. The Minister of Tourism, Mr Marthinus van Schalkwyk has been nominated to succeed Mr Yvo de Boer as Head of the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change; whilst the Minister in the Presidency responsible for National Planning, Mr Trevor Manuel has been appointed to serve on the UN's Advisory Group on Climate Change Financing. We believe that this international platform would enable us to influence world nations, especially the developed countries, to agree on a legally binding agreement on the reduction of greenhouse gas emissions by at least 40% below 1990 levels in order to restrict the global temperature rise to a maximum of 2 degrees Celsius by 2020.

Since the Copenhagen Conference did not deliver on our expectations, we hope that moving forward, the 16th Congress of Parties on Climate Change to be hosted by Mexico in December this year, will live up to our expectations. Our ultimate stand-point as a country is that there is a need to agree with the rest of the world on the equitable sharing of the little remaining carbon development space. We also pin our hopes on COP17 which South Africa will host in 2011.

Once more, we congratulate the management of Casterbridge on their green destination initiatives. Like President Zuma said, we owe it to current and future generations to preserve the environment.

I leave you with an inspiring quote from one of our liberation stalwart, Chief Albert Luthuli, who once said and I quote:

“The difficulties may be great, but nothing has beaten man if he has striven.There is a challenge which you and I must meet. We cannot dodge it. I believe we all will do our best - whatever the difficulties are”.

Working together we can do more to mitigate the effects of climate change and preserve our environment for future generations. Green energy is the future.

Ladies and gentlemen, I now have the honour to officially launch the Casterbridge Hollow Hotel as Mpumalanga's first green destination.

I thank you!