

ADDRESS BY THE MEC FOR FINANCE, ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT AND TOURISM, MR SIKHUMBUZO ERIC KHOLWANE, MPL, DURING THE LAUNCH OF THE LIBERATION HERITAGE ROUTE ON THE SIDELINES OF THE 2016 TOURISM INDABA IN DURBAN, KWAZULU-NATAL

Sunday, 08 May 2016

- Programme Director, MMC for LED and Tourism at the Gert Sibande District Municipality in Mpumalanga, Councillor Fikile Nyembe;
- MEC for Culture, Sport and Recreation in Mpumalanga, Ms Norah Mahlangu-Mabena;
- MMCs for LED and Tourism from our District and Local Municipalities;
- Councillors present;
- Acting Head of the Department of Economic Development and Tourism in Mpumalanga, Mr JS Mgidi;
- Chairperson of the Mpumalanga Tourism and Parks Agency, Mr Thulani Nzima;
- Other Board Members of the Mpumalanga Tourism and Parks Agency present;
- Representatives from our Regional Tourism Organisations present;

- Hosted buyers and Tour Operators;
- Distinguished guests;
- Members of the media;
- Ladies and gentlemen;

Good Evening/San'bonani

Programme Director;

1. During most of the 20th century, **culture and heritage** were viewed as not being an integral part of the tourism industry. They were merely viewed as part of the physical fabric of destinations, largely underpinning local or national identities.
2. **Tourism**, on the other hand was viewed largely as a leisure-related activity, separate from everyday life, and the culture of the local communities.
3. It was only during the 1980s onwards, that there was a realisation that culture and heritage, have potential for economic spin-offs.

4. Consequently, **culture and heritage become the niche tourism products** that could be developed in order to grow the tourism industry.
5. To-date, tourism is recognised in the **National Development Plan**, as one of the main drivers of the country's economy and employment creation.
6. Statistics indicate that **every nine (9) tourists create one (1) job opportunity**.
7. According to the **World Travel and Tourism Council Report on South Africa**, it is estimated that in 2014 alone, the tourism sector contributed over 1.7 million jobs to the economy of the country.
8. Consequently, the sector contributed 10% of the country's Gross Domestic Product (GDP).
9. It therefore evident that **tourism is about creating opportunities, hope and a better life for all**.

10. It serves as a catalyst for rural development, underpinned by our quest to deal with the **triple challenges of poverty, unemployment and inequality**.

11. We must therefore **exploit and harness** this sector in order to propel our economy to better heights.

Programme Director;

12. Destination *Mpumalanga – the Place of the Rising Sun*, has always been known for its ‘safari type’ or ‘natural environment type’ tourism experiences.

13. Although we pride ourselves with such God-given natural treasures, we can confirm that we have more than that, to offer the potential tourists.

14. Our Province is an integral part of South Africa’s rich struggle and liberation history.

15. We were a refuge to many of our country’s liberation martyrs, including our own, who sacrificed their lives for us to realise and enjoy a free and democratic South Africa of today.

16. We must therefore continue to **celebrate the selfless contribution made by these martyrs**, by exposing and putting their **long and difficult walk to freedom**, on the world map for everybody to experience.
17. Our struggle to liberation is therefore part of our culture and heritage, which should be preserved for posterity.
18. It is said that tourism, culture and heritage bring people together and promote mutual understanding across communities.
19. If we do not do it ourselves, no one can do it for us, lest we will be blamed by future generations for failing to preserve our ***Long Walk to Freedom***.

Programme Director;

20. The rationale behind our **Liberation Heritage Route** is thus intended to preserve our country's struggle history for posterity.
21. **Mpumalanga's Liberation Heritage Route** highlights the sites that featured prominently during South Africa's

liberation struggle, as well as **paying tribute to the freedom fighters**, who selflessly fought for justice and freedom that we so, enjoy today.

22. The development of this Route will be done in phases, with the first phase concluded in the **Gert Sibande District** of Mpumalanga.
23. This Phase covers six towns, namely, **Bethal, Daggakraal, Ermelo, Saul Mkhizeville, Secunda and Volksrust**.
24. Bethal's cultural precinct and Nomoya Masilela Museum pay homage to many of South Africa's prominent liberation struggle heroes, such as Richard 'Gert' Sibande, Nokuthula Simelane, Ruth First and Henry 'Mr Drum' Nxumalo.
25. The humble settlement of Daggakraal that overlooks the stretching landscapes of the highveld is home to the Oxford-educated Dr Pixley Isaka Ka Seme, who established the precursor to the African National Congress (ANC).
26. Ermelo played a pivotal role in South Africa's liberation struggle as it was a stop-over for the ANC's Umkhonto weSizwe members who were travelling to Swaziland and

Mozambique, and it also experienced forced removals during the 1960s. In addition, the surrounding region is also brimming with cultural, natural and geographic attractions.

27. Most South Africans only know Secunda as an industrial and commercial centre, but the town has a liberation history that includes some of the country's bravest freedom fighters, who died for democracy and racial equality.
28. Set in the surrounds of pine forests and one of South Africa's largest dams is Saul Mkhizeville, which played an important role in South Africa's liberation struggle.
29. It was in Volksrust that human rights activist Mahatma Gandhi and his wife, Kasturba, were arrested on numerous occasions, alongside other Indian protestors, for peacefully marching against the Black Act and Immigration Law.
30. Gandhi's Satyagraha Campaign resulted in the Gandhi-Smuts agreement of 1914 and better living conditions for Indians.

31. Each of these sides provides tourism products and services that will encourage tourists to visit and experience the Route in its entirety.

32. We therefore implore on you, the Tour Operators, to partner with us, by including this Route in their packages of experiences in order to sell this product to domestic and international tourists.

Programme Director; Ladies and gentlemen;

33. It is therefore my honour, to launch the **Gert Sibande** phase of the **Mpumalanga Liberation Heritage Route**.

Together we move tourism in Mpumalanga forward.

I Thank You/Ngiyabonga/Obrigado