

**ADDRESS BY MEC FOR ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT, TOURISM AND
ENVIRONMENTAL AFFAIRS, MXOLISI DUKWANA ON THE OCCASION OF
TOURISM MONTH LAUNCH, GARIEP DAM**

4 September 2009

Programme director
Honourable mayor
Board members
Members of the media
Distinguished guests

Tourism has proven to be a critical ingredient for economic growth, job creation and meaningful participation of our people in mainstream economy. Historically, provinces like the Free State depended exclusively on mining and agriculture. With the decline in both these sector, we have to pay our attention to tourism as an economic driver. We have to seriously introduce measures to elevate tourism to a level where it should be. These among others should include the following:

- * Tourism should be used as a development tool for the empowerment of historically neglected communities and should particularly focus on the empowerment of women in such communities
- * Tourism development will take place in the context of close cooperation with other states within Southern Africa
- * Tourism development will support the economic, social and environmental goals and policies of government

It is for this particular reason that we have to jealously guard this special ingredient and ensure that the Free State is not left behind from the tourism boom experienced by the whole world. The latest indications are that the Free State is making a steady but commendable progress in respect of tourism in South Africa. Statistics show that the Free State has moved from position seven to five in respect of international arrivals.

The Free State is endowed with natural tourist attraction. It possesses natural beauty and majestic mountains. In the Free State we pride ourselves with:

- * open skies
- * sand stone mountains
- * green hills
- * golden fields
- * hiking trails
- * horse treks
- * mountain climbing
- * traditional villages
- * traditional music
- * dams for water sport and
- * special people.

Our big sky country is also rich in culture. There are several cultural activities including festivals which continue to build a united nation among the special people of this province and to promote tourism. The following activities remain at the centre of our tourism development and cultural diversity promotion in the Free State:

- * The Ficksburg Cherry Festival in Setsoto
- * The Gariep Water Sport Festival in Tokoloho
- * The Phillipolis Wit Blitz Festival in Letsemeng

- * The NAMPO Maize Festival in Bothaville
- * The Bloemfontein Show in Mangaung and
- * Die Reitz Bielie Mielie Fees in Nketoane
- * The Hot Air Balloon show in Dihlabeng and
- * The Air Shows in Dihlabeng and Mangaung.

We have just emerged from the FIFA Confederation Cup. As a host city, Mangaung performed very well. There is no doubt in our minds that we made an impressive showing to the people of the world on our hospitality, warmth, infrastructure and passion for the game. Encouraged by what we have seen, we now have to stand up and ensure that our people who hitherto were standing on the sideline when others benefited from the resources of this country are not left out.

There are few concerns that emerged from FIFA Confederations Cup though. As the host city we have to pay attention to what is perceived as shortage of beds in Bloemfontein. We are told that South African Airways (SAA) introduced what came to be known as Midnight Express. People were flown in to come and watch matches and flown out after the game because there was no accommodation for them in Bloemfontein. I think we still need more and accurate information about this report so that we can prepare better for the world cup.

It is for this very reason that we should use the biggest cultural and arts pilgrimage Mangaung Arts and Cultural Festival (MACUFE) to prepare for 2010. MACUFE has been a flagship tourism and cultural event that attracts multitudes to the Free State to come and witness and experience the centre. After few years of brand haemorrhage, we have restore MACUFE brand and we should all become ambassadors of MACUFE in and outside the province. This year MACUFE will be staged in collaboration with Amalgamated Banks of South Africa (ABSA) starting from 2 to 11 October. As usual, Bloemfontein will be bursting at its seams.

We therefore call upon the hospitality industry to raise their game and use this event as a trial run for masses that will descend on Bloemfontein. Of course we still have to wait until December the fourth to know which countries will be hosted in Bloemfontein. To marketers, tour operators, tour guides, product owners, this will be the biggest opportunity of our life time, make sure that we do not miss out.

Turning to Xhariep district, we are serious when we say it will never be the same in five years. It is imperative in developing tourism in the Xhariep district that there should be collaboration amongst local municipalities in the district including relevant municipalities on the Eastern Cape and Northern Cape side of the Gariep Dam to explore:

- * development of water based leisure tourism investment projects
- * create a draw card for visitors to the Xhariep district in the province
- * establish the Gariep Dam as a primary tourist destination as opposed to merely an en-route destination
- * attract new market segments to the province, particularly the emerging black market
- * create an opportunity for regional co-operation with the Eastern and Northern Cape
- * create employment and business opportunities in the local economy
- * development and linkages of Lake Xhariep Transfrontier Park with the Gariep Dam as a combination of nature tourism and water based activities.

I want to believe that tourism projects to be considered for this area could be:

- * Fishing and skiing
- * Expansion of the nature reserves around the dam

- * Tourism infrastructure development in towns surrounding the dam and in various towns in the district to ensure that the central theme for development in the district reinforce a destination development
- * Infrastructure development such roads
- * Development and support of the Griqua Heritage Route including product development in the routes
- * Training of water based activity guides and operators and securing seed funding for operators in respect of water based activity equipment
- * Development of conference facilities should be considered as part of resort development
- * Develop database of tourism products
- * Ensure installation of signage on the Diamond route and Trans-Karoo route

Indeed, we may not have the Table Mountain, the Sea, Kruger National Park, the big five, Sun City and International Conference Centre but equally what we have is not found elsewhere. The Free State should stand up and be counted as a tourism destination. There is no reason why we can not all be tourist in our beloved province. I believe we are brought here to cultivate the culture of tourism among ourselves so that we can encourage others to visit our province.

I thank you.