

**KEYNOTE ADDRESS BY FREE STATE MEC FOR ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT,
TOURISM AND ENVIRONMENTAL AFFAIRS, MXOLISI DUKWANA, AT THE
LAUNCH OF 2010 TOURISM MONTH, BULTFONTEIN**

3 September 2010

Programme director
Premier of the Free State
Mayors from district and local municipalities
Boertjiefees organisers
Exhibitors and spectators
Dames en here

Mnr Seremoniemeester dit voel rertig so reg om hier tussen die mense te wees. Dit is 'n besondere voorreg om al die mense hier toe te spreek rondom die viering van Boertjiekontreifees hier by Bultfontein. Hierdie fees is 'n geleentheid om mense mekaar te bring om saam te kom sing, speel en dans.

*Vroer hierdie jaar het die premier die mense van Bultfontein en die Bultfontein landbou-
unie belowe dat die Vrystaat-regering alles in sy vermoë sal doen om saam met die
mense te werk om mense se lewens te verbeter.*

Today we are seeing the results of that commitment. Boertjiekontreifees is one of the biggest and most supported shows in this country. This show comes at the time the country is celebrating tourism and heritage month.

The intention during this month and therefore this show is to show the people of the Free State the beauty of this province and the unity in its cultural and heritage diversity.

Today we are witnessing collaboration between the farmers, farm workers, municipality and the provincial government. Both young and old, black and white, rich and poor are here to celebrate the "samelewing tussen die mense van Tswelopele".

As the premier has said, we have started a process of building a model society which will show the rest of the country how people of different background can work together and build a country which coming generations will be proud of. The variety of activities taking place here is a demonstration that sport and games can build a nation.

It is our belief as government that the Boertjiee Kontrie Fees can be the melting pot of fun, culture, heritage which are critical ingredients to grow tourism in the Free State. Tourism in the Free State has got a huge potential. We have to put a lot of effort to ensure that farming tourism, mine tourism, water sport, game viewing, mountain climbing and biking, hiking trails, hunting, and water sport.

In this way we hope to raise the bar in tourism. We have to work hard to achieve the following:

- cultivating the culture of travelling and tourism among the people of the free state
- hospitality and industry to aim for service excellence and provide travellers and tourists with memorable experience
- transform the tourism industry to facilitate the entrance of those who otherwise would not be able to do so
- develop and promote township tourism
- promote and market reserves and resorts owned by the free state provincial government.

You might be aware that the Free State provincial government has identified all cultural and heritage activities taking place in the Free State as appropriate stimulants of Tourism Development in the Free State.

These include the following:

- the Ficksburg Cherry festival in Setsoto
- the Gariiep Water Sport Festival in Tolokogo
- the Philipolis Wit Blitz festival in Letsemeng
- the Nampo Maize Festival in Nala
- die Reitz Biele Mielie Fees in Nketoane
- the Air Shows in Dihlabeng and Mangaung
- the Hot Air Balloon Show in Dihlabeng

Tourism Month celebration comes just after few activities that took place in the country and the province to make sure that tourism takes its rightful place and thereby contributes towards the development of the provincial economy.

These include Tourism Indaba whose primary aim, was to prepare and measure tyhis country's potential and preparedness for the 2010 FIFA World Cup. To pave way for tourism month the department hosted the 2010 tourism expo in partnership with ToGoTo enterprise last month in Bethlehem.

The highlight of the event was the official launch of the coffee table publication called ToGo or Not ToGo publication which will provide independent travellers with unique Southern South African destinations and attractions available.

Our collective challenge is to take advantage of any activities or projects that we can utilise to market our province beyond the exciting event that took place in our country in June and July (2010 FIFA World Cup) to further unlock the potential of tourism industry.

We were presented with the most important platform to showcase to the world what this country is capable of. We managed to host the event and our hospitality also passed the test.

During this soccer extravaganza, as a province, we managed to lure 35 000 tourists to our shores from which more than 90 percent of them utilised our tourism products and services ranging from accommodation and tour guide services. This included tourist from other countries.

During the launch of tourism month last year I indicated that: "The people of the Free State have to make a choice to compete with other provinces and loose or carve a niche for themselves in the landscape in South Africa and make a mark".

Ladies and gentlemen, arts and craft, sports, culture, history and heritage including township tourism are some of those attributes that the department has put more emphasis on as their link to tourism industry can yield very desirable results. This industry can never flourish if we fail to tap and harness into opportunities and advantages presented by the uniqueness of our province.

Ladies and gentleman, as mentioned that one of today's aim is to promote domestic travelling, we need to realise that as citizens, by travelling at home, we contribute significantly to the tourism industry, its competitiveness and service levels.

We need to go out there as Free Staters to explore this rich historic province of ours. We need to advocate for different tourism products that this province has and unleash the Free State as the hidden treasure of South African tourism so that people from other

countries and provinces can really believe and embracing our unique qualities and tourism offerings.

The exercise will also allow us to learn more about our diverse tourism attractions, which puts us in a better position to do more for our country.

Programme director, tourism sector has proved to be more resilient than some other economic sectors. We have different categories of businesses in the tourism sector like any other sector.

There are those that are well established and developed, and those still battling to make it. Government encourages assistance of the small, medium and micro-enterprises (SMME) and mentorship from those who have travelled this road and fully understand its hardships.

It also supports annual and period competitions such as tourism awards, best town competition and ETEYA awards to mention but few. This is mainly because such competitions allows and encourages peer discussion amongst tourism stakeholders and this interaction is one of the most important elements that can be used to strengthen our businesses and improve our service delivery.

Government is appealing to all with vested interest in the tourism industry to please partner with them in the quest to further develop this precious economic milestone to reach its full potential.

We hope we will see more of initiatives like this in future to help us understand and grow this industry whilst turning it into one of the primary contributors to our economy.

Thank you!