

OFFICIAL OPENING OF PHILLIP SANDERS RESORT

ADDRESS BY MEC MXOLISI DUKWANA

DATE: 04 NOVEMBER 2011

VENUE: PHILLIP SANDERS RESORT

Programme director,

MEC's of different departments,

Chairpersons and members of different public entities,

Director Generals and Heads of different departments,

Mayors and Speakers of different Municipalities,

Tourism stakeholders,

Members of the media,

Ladies and gentlemen,

After almost four year of speculation, stop and start and negative publicity, we are here today to witness the awakening of a giant that will undoubtedly shape the contours of tourism in the Free State.

Following the environmental scan of the tourism landscape throughout the country, the Free State Provincial Government deemed it fit that the Free State deserves a hospitality facility of world class status to enable us to position our lovely province within the growing tourism industry in the country.

It might have taken longer than we anticipated, but today we can stand tall and say we have achieved what we set out to do. In 2007 Phillip Sanders alongside other 5 state resorts which are Willem Pretorious, Soetdoring, Sandveld, Maria Moroka and Sterkfontein Dam where earmarked for the commercialization to bring them in par with similar facilities in private hands.

To ensure that this facility could meet with our own expectation, as the owners, we subjected it to rigorous trial runs. Surely it is not the first time that some of you have been to Phillip Sanders. We have hosted several high profile events at this facility with the aim of soliciting views of some of influential stakeholders about the state of this facility.

We have subjected this place to a varying profile of guests who have given us valuable response in as far as structural work is concerned, distance from CBD, and airport signage, IT availability as well as the feel of this facility. All feedback we

received confirms that our plans are correct and have taken the needs of the industry into consideration.

The project manager has already adhered to some of the challenges we have faced with which affect our deadlines. For that reason we missed the opportunity of the World Cup 2010 where it is estimated that 120 000 people visited Bloemfontein and could have used this facility.

We further hoped that during MACUFE 2010 and 2011 this place would have been home to many travellers but that was not to be. However, once we were happy with the state of this facility, we then agreed that the state would not be able to run and manage the facility of this standard and meet the demands of the leisure and hospitality industry.

For this reason, the Free State Provincial Government decided to invite bids from capable companies to manage this facility on behalf of the Free State Provincial Government. The successful bidder was Rantsoareng Hotel Group JV C² who will formally take over this facility and ensure that it becomes the pride of tourism hospitality in the Free State.

This joint venture has the combination of the cutting edge marketing and established hospitality experience. We leave this facility into the capable hands of Rantsoareng Hotel Group JV C² with hope that they will take it to greater heights so that it will be counted as one of the world class accommodation facilities in the province and country as a whole.

We have instructed that the process of grading this facility should be expedited. We have to acknowledge ladies and gentlemen that there are lot of accommodation facilities in the Free State, the only problem is that they are not graded by the Tourism Grading Council of South Africa, therefore their service standard is questionable. In total Free State has about 5000 accommodation establishments only a few of which are graded which creates serious problems for tourism and travel industry in the Free State.

Another challenge in this regard is that Bloemfontein does not have a 5 Star hotel to boost business tourism. We therefore believe that with this facility, we are on track in addressing this issue which will eventually have a bearing on the Air lift strategy in the Free State. For too long now business in the Free State and elsewhere in the Country complaining about the difficulty of travelling in and out of Bloemfontein using air travel. Our assessment has shown that the more high standard accommodation facilities we have, the more attractive the Free State will be attractive to business.

In an effort to address some of these challenges, we are seriously considering a central reservation facility which we believe will assist in enhancing hospitality management in our Province. We also believe that this facility will indeed make life much easier for tourists and travellers not to struggle for information with regard to available accommodation in Bloemfontein. This will also assist establishment owners in terms of their establishments' visibility and availability to the markets.

The intention is also to provide these establishments with marketing and other support to help them penetrate the markets and attract more business. For far too long our tourism enterprises have been operating on the periphery while the industry was demonstrating growth and they were unable to benefit from such.

Programme Director, this official opening coincides with the finalization of the preparations of the ANC Centenary Celebrations in Mangaung next year. About 120 000 people are expected to descend on Mangaung for the celebrations. We believe this will boost our tourism industry and thus, grow the economy of the province.

We can proudly announce that the ANC has selected this facility as its Head Quarters for the centenary celebrations. This is a welcome statement of approval to Phillip Sanders in particular and tourism and hospitality industry in Bloemfontein in general..

In conclusion Programme Director, whilst we persuade the world to tour our province, we need to work hard to instil the culture of domestic travelling among the people of the Free State. They have to take time to know and enjoy what the Free State has to offer.

To the new Facility Management Company we want to assure you our full support and believe that you will meet the requirements and the promises that you have made to turn this facility into a tourism and hospitality of choice. We will walk this journey together every step of the way and hopefully this model can then be replicated in the Free State so that we can see much more tourist visiting our province and spending longer periods in the Free State.

As we always say, “you want to walk fast walk alone. But if you want to walk far walk together”. Congratulations with your successful bid. Remember your success is ours.

I thank you