

KEYNOTE ADDRESS ON BEHALF OF MEC MXOLISI DUKWANA

ToGoTo 2010 TOURISM EXPO: BETHLEHEM, FREE STATE PROVINCE

GALA DINNER

29 JULY 2010

Programme Director

Executive Mayor for the Dihlabeng Municipality

Representatives from ToGoTo Magazine

Nominees for the 2009 best Guest House of the year

Distinguished Guests

Ladies and Gentlemen

Good Evening

I am burdened with an honour or honoured with a burden tonight to represent the MEC for Economic Development, Tourism and Environmental Affairs Mr Mxolisi Dukwana at this august occasion. MEC Dukwana would have loved to be with you this evening but due to other serious pressing and unavoidable engagements, he could not be here with us. I hope and trust that his apology has been accepted.

This Expo comes just over a month after the biggest ever marketing opportunity this country will ever experience in our life time. The FIFA World Cup presented South Africa with a single most important platform to show case to the world what this country is capable of, both in staging and managing international events of that magnitude and of course welcoming the people of the world such that they could feel home away from home.

Whilst the pessimist, unfortunately here at home and abroad kept on predicting negative things and even painting a gloomy picture about what to expect from South Africa nothing but positive experiences were told by those who came to South Africa.

Programme Director, South Africa is at the dawn of the new economic era and tourism is and should be a very important sector to realize that. Tourism has been identified as one of the cornerstones to economic prosperity of the Free State province. However, this industry will never flourish and thereby help resuscitate the provincial economy if we fail to harness and tap into opportunities brought by what has become known as the new gold.

We have studied the trends and more than ever before are convinced that we are on track in developing this important sector. Few interventions will be critical in this regard. These are;

- Aggressively growing the travel and tourism industry
- Transforming the tourism industry to facilitate the entrance of those who otherwise would not be able to do so
- Cultivate the culture of travelling among the people of the Free State
- Hospitality and industry to aim for service excellence and provide travelers with memorable experience
- Develop and promote township tourism

The Free State has been tagged one of the most rural provinces in the country and as such, its uniqueness from other areas has and will always play a central role when promoting and selling Free State Tourism offerings. But the worrying factor, ladies and gentlemen, is the realization that this uniqueness is yet to be fully explored.

The same sentiments were also shared by the Honorable MEC himself, Mxolisi Dukwana, during his 2010/11 Budget Vote that “the Free State province itself is a hidden treasure of South African Tourism waiting to be discovered. On costs to tourism, the Free State is still regarded as the least expensive tourism destination region in the country. The centrality of our province is our most important competitive advantage in real terms and still remains to be exploited”.

This Expo in its second year now is a critical contribution from the private sector in turning the fortunes of the Free State around. It is through expos of this nature that tourism products owners are given a platform to mingle with their peers from both within the country and internationally. This provides an opportunity for them to learn from one another, share challenges and possible solutions that somehow characterize and hinder the much needed progress in this industry.

Modeled along the lines of the Tourism Indaba, held in Durban annually, this initiative should develop and grow in stature like the Indaba. We have to work together in our endeavor to make the Free State a tourism destination of choice. MEC Dukwana always throws a challenge to the people of the Free State about what can and should be done to improve tourism in the Free State. He says, "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 vast tourism landscape in South Africa and make a mark".

Our challenge is to make a frank but critical assessment of our participation in some of these exhibitions and evaluate its impact in what we do. The experience gained or observed by exhibiting side by side with the best in the world should start benefiting us. We agree that the criteria, objective, uniqueness and special attributes of participation in these exhibitions should be reviewed so that we can maximize the value of participation.

Ladies and Gentlemen, in the recent past some among us have accused this government, particularly this department of negligence and abandoning its responsibility in as far as tourism development is concerned. We want to assure the industry players that we cannot abandon our mandate. It is for this reason that the Free State Provincial Government will remain committed to initiatives like this the EXPO organized by ToGoTo, a total private initiative.

Perhaps it is important at this stage, Programme Director to indicate that the Government is not in the tourism business or any other business for that matter. The role of Government is to develop policies that will guide the tourism industry in the Free State so as it can have a meaningful and significant impact that could propel this province towards exclusive and diversified economy able to generate decent jobs for its

people. So I hope all of us gathered here this evening are going to draw some inspiration from this expo to put our tourism products on the national and international map.

At this point ladies and gentlemen, let me also take this opportunity to applaud the brave initiative to compile and produce the book (ToGo or Not ToGo) envisaged to be launched during the course of the expo. This coffee table publication is anticipated to provide independent travelers with unique Southern South African destinations and attractions available for tourists. This publication is indeed meant for all of us, so I hope that as custodians of the tourism industry, we will definitely be the first to make effective use of thereof.

This opportunity could never have come at the right time programme director, as we are just a month away from the tourism month, during which we expect active participation of all tourism stakeholders. This is the very important month in our provincial calendar as tourism product owners will be afforded an opportunity and a perfect platform to market and sell their products.

We therefore ladies and gentlemen, appeal to the business community, civil organizations as well as any other stakeholders with vested interests to the tourism sector, to partner with us in a quest to further develop this precious economic milestone to reach its full potential.

The 2010 FIFA World Cup presented us with an ideal platform to kick start programmes to market our province and through this soccer spectacle, **we were able to lure 35 000 tourists to our shores from which more than 90% of them utilized our tourism products and services ranging from accommodation facilities and tour guide services.**

The latest economic statistics indicates that the following countries, United Kingdom, United States, Australia, France and Brazil have been the strongest contributors to tourism spending to date. They have contributed almost 51 percent of spending in leisure and business travel categories such as accommodation, restaurants, retail, car rentals and air travel.

Speaking at the recent Free State Economic Development Summit, MEC Dukwana urged the people of the Free State to shed their modesty and start looking far into the horizon because everything is possible. He quoted a renowned writer Marriane Williamson in her book , Back To Love when she wrote, “Our deepest fear is not that we are inadequate. Our deepest fear is that we are powerful beyond measure. It is our light and not our darkness that frightens us. We ask ourselves whom I am do be brilliant, gorgeous, talented and fabulous?” This fear of failure ladies and gentlemen makes us inadequate. This fear of competition makes us jealous and incompetent. This fear of thinking big reduces us to social and economic dwarfs we are.

It is time to wake up and smell the coffee!!!

I thank you!