

SPEAKING NOTES
MEC SAM MASHININI
2016 LILIZELA TOURISM AWARDS
VENUE: BETHLEHEM, LAVENDER HILL LODGE
DATE: 08 SEPTEMBER 2016

Deputy Minister of Tourism: Tokozile Xasa

Executive Mayor of Thabo Mofutsanyane: Mme Mmalefu Vilakazi

Mayor of Dihlabeng Local Municipality: Mme Lindiwe Makgalema

HOD Matilda Gasele

Management of the Department

Tourism Product Owners

Honoured Guests

Members of the Media

Ladies and Gentleman

Programme Director, it feels good to be here, Dihlabeng Local Municipality is part of Thabo Mofutsanyana District which by his own admission gladdened the late President Mandela. In his book *Long Walk to Freedom*, he wrote, "The province of the Orange Free State has always had a magical effect on me, though some of the most racist elements of the white population call the Free State their home. With its flat dusty landscape as far as the eye can see, the great blue ceiling above, the endless stretches of yellow mealie fields, scrub and bushes, the Free State's landscape gladdens my heart no matter what my mood. When I am there I feel that nothing can shut me in that my thoughts can roam as far and wide as the horizons."

Ladies and Gentlemen, please join me in congratulating the new Mayor of Dihlabeng Local Municipality, Councillor Lindiwe Makgalema. She is part of the fresh air that will sweep through the Free State. After the recent municipal elections in the province, 23 mayors have been deployed and 13 of those are females, including 11 Speakers. Both the Executive Mayor of Thabo Mofutsanyane Mmalefu Vilakazi and Dihlabeng Mayor are with us tonight, let's all rise and give them a warm applause.

The Free State and South Africa as a whole, without a doubt, place a high premium on service excellence. Tourism is an industry that's characterized by excellence and by an intensely guest-focused culture. This industry is made up of a team of committed individuals whose passion is on show for all to see and experience. To succeed in this industry you have to have unattached passion for what you do. If you are in it for money or to pass time, know that you are in a wrong place.

I always encourage our people to do the best of abilities to uplift and empower themselves, Apple co-founder, Steve Jobs once said, "Your work is going to fill large part of your life, and the only way to be truly satisfied is to do what you believe is great work, is to love what you do. If you haven't found it yet, keep looking. Don't settle."

Programme Director, during last year's Lilizela National Awards, Honourable Minister Derek Hanekom said, "The tourist experience is determined by what all of us do. SA Tourism markets our country as a whole, and you market your products. The successful marketing of our diverse offerings - our vibrant cities, our beaches, our national parks, our world heritage sites, our cultural diversity, and so much more translates into the successful marketing of our country. But what we market has to be backed up by what we offer."

The Free State like the rest of South Africa is part of the global world. We need to know what the world is doing and be able to shape our own destiny. The world's biggest economies are currently meeting in China at the G-20 Summit. President Zuma is in the Summit to make a case for South Africa. On the sidelines of the G-20, the BRICS leaders met to shape a common view and position. President Zuma engaged with his counterparts to ensure that available benefits do not pass South Africa by.

We all have to take queue from our leaders. Current statistic show that the Chinese are the most visitors to South Africa followed by India and other African countries. Are we ready to tap in that market.

One of the aspects of the hospitality, we have to pay attention to, is grading our facilities. Travellers and tourist alike, prefer guided facilities because that gives them a level on comfort and confidence even before they arrive. Among other things the Tourism Grading Council of South Africa looks for:

- Scenic or natural vista (beyond that of the immediate garden area) e.g.: water view, rural outlook, mountain view or natural bush setting offering some Safari Activity such as Game Drives.
- The host / representative must be contactable 24 hours, 7 days per week.
- The Host / Manager on duty must be available to check guests in/out or within a maximum of 10 minute drive from the property.

- Daily servicing of the rooms must be included in the tariff.
- Shared facilities (not with host) must be a minimum of a guest dining room and guest lounge area.
- Bathroom facilities must be en-suite. If not, exclusive use of bathroom facilities per room is ensured.
- Meals and beverages must be provided (may/may not be prepared by the property).
- Servicing of rooms 7 days a week
- Provide at least one guided experience and or activity i.e. natural or cultural experiences to the guest organised by the establishment which may or may not be included in the rate.
- Guests should have a reasonable probability of seeing / experiencing i.e.: flora and fauna.
- If the lodge specified is advertised as a 'Game Lodge'. The animals provided on the Game Lodge need to be free roaming and not contained in enclosures. An endangered, indigenous/ specific specie can be housed in adequately spaced viewing areas, which should as closely as possible resemble the natural environment of the animals.
- Convenient, secure and well lit car parking facilities must be made available when required. Due consideration to be given to the customer-friendliness of the parking facilities and the proximity to the accommodation facilities. Should no parking be available, a guest shuttle service should be provided.

Programme Director, excellent service has its own rewards, and tonight's awards recognize and acknowledge contribution made by tourism industry players and businesses, who work passionately and with pride to deliver a world class product and service. These Lilizela Tourism Awards also give national recognition to establishments and raise their profile both locally, nationally and internationally.

During the 2015 Provincial and Lilizela Tourism Awards, 5 (five) of Free State establishments placed our province on the map and won awards and 2 (two) of our establishments won awards at national level. This proves that our province has what it takes to be the best in the hospitality industry and accept that tourism is a new gold.

Over a total of 57 Free State tourism product owners vied for a final spot for the various provincial awards. These awards have become the complete compliment for excellence in tourism when they were launched in 2013. They are the ultimate reward for entrepreneurial and service excellence that sets global benchmark standards.

Establishment owners and participants should aim for the skies if they want to make an impact in this cut throat business. They can be motivated by the words of the iconic Martin Luther King Jr when he said, “If a man is called to be a street sweeper, he should sweep streets even as Michelangelo painted, or Beethoven composed music, or Shakespeare wrote poetry. He should sweep streets so well that all the hosts of heaven and earth will pause to say, here lived a great street sweeper who did his job well”.

Programme Director, to improve on our product development, we have introduced a tourism development and hospitality grant. This we are doing to as part of our tourism transformation agenda where we have identified a need for diversified tourism development so as to have variety of products and attractions for both domestic and international tourists to enjoy in the Free State. In line with our objectives and the National Tourism Sector Strategy (NTSS), we have identified and prioritized the following areas in the tourism sector to receive grants:

- Grading of accommodation establishments, prioritizing the historically disadvantaged
- Enterprise development in tourism
- Development of tourism products and attractions
- Green/Responsible Tourism projects
- Community based tourism
- Home stay tourism
- Events tourism development
- Tourist Guiding Development
- Arts & Crafts

Programme Director, I will be committing a big error if I could conclude without making a mention of our flagship programmes. Macufe will be taking place from 02 – 11 October. In November from 11 – 12 November we will have the Flower Festival. These activities attracts thousands of revelers to our province. It is for this reason that we have initiated a Home Stay Programme to ease the strategy of accommodation in Mangaung. For this purpose we are inviting house owners in Mangaung to fill forms for consideration to participate in the Homestay Programme.

I thank you!!!