

**REMARKS BY THE MEC FOR ARTS, CULTURE AND TOURISM
IN KWAZULU-NATAL, MRS WEZIWE THUSI, AT THE THETA
BOAT CRUISE HELD IN DURBAN ON 11 MAY 2008**

All MECs present

Leadership of the tourism industry

Members of the media

Good evening

Welcome to our province and thank you for your support over the past 17 years when our province has successfully hosted Africa's premier tourism trade show – the Tourism Indaba. Over the years, tourism has proven to be one of the biggest economic drivers in our Province and country, ensuring some tremendous growth, thus creating a lot of job opportunities for our people.

This tremendous growth has not been without its challenges considering our past as a country. However, I believe that we all need to focus on the bigger picture, that of working together as stakeholders and making South Africa a winning country.

I am happy to be on this cruise because it gives us an opportunity to interact on issues affecting the industry and hopefully come up with viable solutions in terms of taking the industry forward. One of the challenges facing the tourism sector is the slow pace of transformation. It is important that this process is fast-tracked to ensure that the majority of our people also benefit from the economic spin-offs brought about by tourism. This is one area where failure is not an option.

The Department of Arts, Culture and Tourism is playing its part in ensuring that the industry is transformed. We have established some partnerships with the industry for the benefit of emerging entrepreneurs. We have a very successful Mentorship Programme where successful establishments are encouraged to assist their emerging counterparts. This programme has yielded positive results and it would not have been a success without the willing participation of the private sector.

We must also acknowledge the shortage of skills in the tourism sector. The Department of Arts, Culture and Tourism, together with some partners, has come up with several initiatives aimed at drawing young talent to the sector. We have an annual Tourism Career Exhibition where we industry partners talk directly to unemployed tourism graduates and learners about available opportunities in the tourism field, both in public and private sectors.

For us to succeed though, we need to forge stronger partnerships as government, training institutions and the private sector to ensure that we raise the levels of skills among the employed and those searching for employment.

The challenges I have just mentioned have not hindered growth in the tourism sector over the past years. The continuous economic growth brought about by the industry should propel us to build on that strong foundation. I hope that in our deliberations during the course of the Indaba we will be able to deal with critical issues such as assisting our emerging entrepreneurs to access funding,

marketing of their businesses and also arm them with the necessary skills to run their enterprises professionally and in a sustainable manner. We must see to it that they move from the periphery and take centre stage.

Ours is a Province of many opportunities, especially as we count down to the 2010 FIFA World Cup. We view this spectacular as more of a tourism and business event than just soccer. It is estimated that the event will generate about R11 billion in tourism revenue. Between now and 2010 an estimated R51,1 billion could be contributed to national Gross Domestic Product (GDP). This could be used as a launching pad for previously disadvantaged people and emerging entrepreneurs to expand their businesses even beyond this soccer extravaganza.

As a Province we always stick to best practices in order to make sure that visits to KwaZulu-Natal remain etched on visitors' minds encouraging them to look forward to their next visit. This also ensures that those who have sampled our hospitality become our ambassadors and spread the word about the Zulu Kingdom.

Currently we are working on strategies to increase the number of foreign tourists visiting our shores. This we are doing as research shows that foreign tourists are bigger spenders than domestic ones. I am quite positive that we will succeed in this regard. We have started working with international tour operators to repackage the Province.

KwaZulu-Natal is very optimistic about the future for obvious reasons. We boast two World Heritage Sites, beautiful scenery, a rich history and cultural diversity as well as competitive prices. These things, packaged correctly, are a visitor's dream which cannot be sold if we do not work together as stakeholders to ensure that we have the necessary skills and continue to improve on what we already have.

Let me pause there and allow further interaction as we go on with our cruise.

I thank you.