

## ADDRESS BY THE MEC FOR FINANCE, ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT AND TOURISM, MR PAT NGOMANE, MPL, DURING ENGAGEMENT WITH THE INTERIM BOARD OF THE MPUMALANGA TOURISM AND PARKS AGENCY VIA VIRTUAL COMMUNICATION

Friday, 14 August 2020

Interim Board Chairperson and Members;  
CEO of the MTPA;

### ***San'bonani***

1. Thank you very for honouring my invitation to this virtual meeting. We meet in this manner because our country, is still grappling to control the spread of COVID-19. By not meeting physically, **we are also playing our part**, in reducing spreading the pandemic.
2. Interim Chairperson, it goes without saying, that you all aware of the **impact of the lockdown on our economy, particularly on the tourism industry**.
3. Tourism is our **gold mine** in the Province; hence the **MTPA has been mandated to nurture and grow it** so that it will contribute meaningfully to the Provincial economy.

4. This is our first engagement, since appointing you as the **Interim Board and Accounting Authority of the MTPA**, and your mandate will last for a period not exceeding six (6) months, as stipulated in the founding legislation of the Entity.
5. It was therefore necessary for us to meet, so that I can express **my overall expectations from you, over your mandate period.**

### ***Tourism Mandate***

6. Interim Chairperson; like I said, **tourism is our goose that has, for years, laid the golden egg for us.** I therefore, expect you and your team, to lead the process of reviving it. Under your guidance and leadership, you must **make sure that this goose lays the golden egg**, like it did previously.
7. I therefore expect the MTPA to **continue to prioritise partnerships with all stakeholders.** You must **mobilise private sector tourism stakeholders to partner with us**, in coming up with programmes and initiatives, that will resuscitate our tourism industry.
8. This includes **mobilising massive investment into tourism infrastructure projects**, so as to diversify our product offerings and new experiences to tourists, amongst others.

9. It is also important to ensure that there is **stability and good working relations with the communities, through the CPAs and the People and Parks initiatives.**
10. This ensure that all the co-management agreements we have signed with land owners or claimants go on smoothly, thus ensuring that projects that needs to be implemented within the protected areas, enjoy the support of the CPAs that represent the majority of the land-owners or claimants.
11. We have just recently, in collaboration with the private sector, crafted the **Provincial Tourism Recovery Plan**, and the Executive Council has given it a green light. What **I require from you, is to lead its full implementation.**
12. I acknowledge that you only have six (6) months, as the Interim Board, but it would make me happy, if you would **lay a firm foundation towards the successful implementation of the Plan**, when your office tenure expire.
13. We need to find ways to **formalise partnerships, and to mobilise resources** to assist us in ensuring that we deliver on our tourism mandate. There is a need, therefore, to **facilitate investment and partnerships with philanthropic funders.**

14. One major tourism infrastructure project that needs to be finalised, is the implementation of the **Skywalk Project, and this should be done within the current financial year**. This will bring diversification of the Province's products, and as a result, attract more tourists both domestic and international, and ultimately increase our revenue generation.
15. And when we do all these, we must ensure that we **prioritise youth and women empowerment related programmes**, so that they equally benefit from tourism related activities.
16. The **youth are in the majority in our Province, and the majority of them are unemployed**; hence it is necessary that we must continue to strengthen our support to them.
17. This is because a **government which does not invest in their youth is essentially doomed**. Our caring ANC-led government is nothing like that; hence we believe in developing and nurturing our youth.
18. Interim Chairperson; **transformation of the tourism industry** remains our government's biggest concern. In fact, it gives us sleepless nights. It is worryingly very slow; it moves at a tortoise pace.

19. It can't be that, 26 years into our democracy, the **number of black entrants into the industry is still very low**, despite all the enabling legislation in place. Something drastic needs to be done, as a matter of urgency to change the situation for the better.
20. Last year, on the 26th of July, just after I took the political leadership of the Entity, I **addressed the then Board on the same worrying matter of the slow transformation of the industry**. They committed to assist me to improve the situation. However, I believe figures do not lie. The situation has not improved since then.
21. I think we must now develop a tangible Plan on how this could be improved. I thus entrust this Interim Board, with the responsibility of ensuring that such a **Plan is developed and submitted to me within three (3) months** from now.
22. The Plan will guide us; it will enable us to check if we are moving forward in transforming the industry – **it will be our barometer**. Without it, it will be like we are merely shooting in the dark.
23. I truly implore on you to assist me on this one. The Entity needs to **put more emphasis on increasing the number of the previously disadvantaged individuals in game farm ownership, as well as game meat industry**.

24. Game farming has the ability to create high quality jobs; hence the need to transform the industry.
25. There is also a need to **transform the Scientific Services sector, so as to build capacity in conservation**, especially for those who are from the previously disadvantaged groups.
26. Equally so, we must continue to partner with the private sector, law enforcement agencies and social groups to save our natural resources, and **to sustain tourism by ensuring that tourists coming to our Province are protected at all times.**
27. If tourists do not feel safe within our midst, **they will not come back.** In fact, they will possibly influence potential tourists against visiting our Province, and that's what we do not want. We want our *Destination* to remain engraved in the minds of tourists.

### ***Bio-diversity Conservation Mandate***

28. Interim Chairperson, clearly, we would not have tourism if we do not protect and conserve our endangered fauna and flora from poaching. This means we need to **strengthen our conservation efforts**, so as to facilitate tourism growth and development.

29. We must **protect the endangered rhino and other species for posterity**. These animals are some of our major drawcards, which entice people to visit our Province. Without them, less people will be interested in visiting our Province.

### **Alternative funding**

30. We are very much aware of the **funding shortfall of the Entity**. The MTPA continues to receive limited funding, and this has an impact on its operations to deliver on its mandate.
31. As a result, the Entity was unable to generate own revenue at the desired levels. This has, regrettably, negatively impacted its infrastructure maintenance and upgrade delivery programme within the protected areas it manages.
32. It is thus crucial that, the Entity, should look at **alternative funding options and other sources**, that will assist in the promotion of tourism and the management of biodiversity conservation in the Province.
33. **New revenue streams**, thus, needs to be introduced and piloted at the various nature reserves. These streams should be able to provide guidance on the commercialisation of the MTPA's products, within the protected areas, in order **to increase and expand the revenue generation and collection base**.

34. I therefore request the Board to **cost the possible investment and to propose possible sources** as a matter of urgency.
35. Interim Chairperson, as I conclude, surely, we **cannot just sit on our precious metal in the form of tourism; we need to nurture and grow it** for the benefit of all our people.
36. I therefore **require your utmost commitment** to assist me, in realising the mandate entrusted upon me by the Premier of the Province.
37. ***Let's grow the economy of Mpumalanga together***, through tourism.

***Nginyabonga!***