

## REMARKS BY THE MEC FOR FINANCE, ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT AND TOURISM, MR VUSI MKHATSHWA, MPL, ON THE OCCASION OF THE MPUMALANGA YOUTH AND WOMEN ENTREPRENEURSHIP IMBIZO HELD AT EBUTSINI CULTURAL VILLAGE, ALBERT LUTHULI LOCAL MUNICIPALITY

**Tuesday, 26 October 2021**

Programme Director;

Deputy Minister of Tourism, Mr Fish Mahlalela;

Deputy Minister of Small Business and Development, Mr Sdumo Dlamini;

My colleague in the Mpumalanga Executive Council, MEC for Culture, Sports and Recreation, Ms Thandi Shongwe;

Executive Mayor of Chief Albert Luthuli Local Municipality;

Chairperson of the MTPA Board, Mr Victor Mashego;

Other Board members present;

CEO of the MTPA, Mr Johannes Nobunga;

CEO's of SEDA, NYDA, SEFA, NEF, and MEGA;

CEO of CATHSSETA;

Government and MTPA officials present;

Members of the media;

Ladies and gentlemen;

***Good morning!!***

1. Programme Director, Ladies and Gentlemen; allow me to take this opportunity to thank the organisers of this historic and much-needed youth and women entrepreneurship Imbizo, for allowing me to say a few words.

2. This Imbizo affords us an opportunity to deliver, what I can refer to, as the economic manifesto of our Department of Economic Development and Tourism, in relation to the youth and women in the Tourism Sector. One is talking about a manifesto because we are in the election mode. This is because in six (6) days' time, we will be voting to elect our representatives in the local government sphere.
3. As we are gathered here today, we must continue to remember that we are still under level 1 of the national state of disaster brought about by the COVID-19 pandemic. These are the challenging circumstances for humankind, as defined by this pandemic, which has wreaked havoc in the tourism sector as well. Like other economic sectors, tourism was not spared, and my plea to all of you is to get vaccinated.
4. Fundamentally, as part of mitigating the spread of the pandemic, we must continue without failure to observe all the non-pharmaceutical interventions of **social distancing, proper wearing of masks, sanitising and washing our hands regularly.**
5. Programme Director, allow me to highlight from the onset, my dissatisfaction with the slow pace in which transformation is happening in the tourism sector. The sector remains skewed and is not reflective of the demographics of the Province and the country at large.
6. This programme must, therefore, give proper direction on how, through government tourism stimulus packages, we will open the doors for our youth and women to meaningfully participate in the sector.

7. I can state without fear of contradiction that the tourism sector remains a key driver of South Africa's economy, as it contributes enormously to economic growth and job creation. Thus, it is imperative that government continues to create a conducive environment for youth and women in tourism, to pursue tourism careers, including entrepreneurship.
8. In this regard, we have a collective responsibility to influence an entrepreneurial culture among youth and women, that fosters business development and economic growth.
9. The current statistics in the tourism sector does not make for happy reading, since it presents a very bleak future, with no hope for the youth and women in the sector. Transformation in the sector remains a challenge which is be tackled head-on, without fear or favour.
10. Our youth and women have been marginalised for a very long time, and as a result, they remain located at the periphery when it comes to participation in the mainstream tourism.
11. Programme Director, our aim through this gathering this morning, is to encourage the youth and women to take their rightful place in the tourism sector. We are saying to the youth and women, take advantage of government programmes, aimed at inculcating the spirit of entrepreneurship in the tourism sector.

12. For us to escape being judged harshly by history, we have a collective responsibility to do everything in our power, to unlock business opportunities for youth and women entrepreneurs in the tourism sector.
13. Programme Director, we are not here today to postulate nor grandstand; we come here solely to advance the interests of the youth and women in the tourism sector. In this regard, we reaffirm our commitment to work with the Department of Tourism and other strategic partners, in pursuing the noble agenda of the youth and women in the tourism sector.
14. To clearly demonstrate our intentions to modernise and reignite tourism in the Province, I have taken a conscious, yet unpopular decision to some, to appoint a young person to lead the Mpumalanga Tourism and Parks Agency (MTPA). I have appointed a young and energetic chairperson to lead and promote tourism in Province.
15. Programme Director, the decision to appoint Mr Victor Mashego as the chairperson of the MTPA was informed fundamentally by the fact that throughout his life, he has been pre-occupied by the agenda of advancing issues of young people.
16. As a province, we remain committed to transform the sector by infusing the energetic and agile youth and prolific women into the sector.
17. Programme Director, I will be failing in my responsibility as a Member of the Executive Council, if I do not seize this opportunity to encourage all and sundry gathered here today, to go and exercise their constitutional right and vote on 01 November 2021.

18. As I conclude, allow me to take this opportunity to make a clarion call to all stakeholders, to come up with tangible and pragmatic interventions, aimed at ensuring that this Imbizo does not become a bureaucratic talk shop, but produces real solutions to the problems facing the youth and women.

19. *Let's grow Mpumalanga together* through tourism!

Thank you!