

SA remains open to welcome people from the world

PRETORIA: South Africa will always be open to welcome people from around the world, says Tourism Minister Derek Hanekom...



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Minister Hanekom was speaking at the opening of the 2015 Tourism Indaba in Durban on Saturday. The event was attended by over 1,000 exhibitors from 20 African countries, and about 2,000 buyers from the world's tourism source markets.

He said the Indaba is also an important opportunity to meet and to discuss common challenges, barriers and opportunities at a policy level.

"We are determined that our country will always be open to welcome people from around the world. We are united in our resolve to build the positive brand of Africa as a continent of unparalleled tourism opportunities, and to enhance tourism as a mainstream economic sector - a sector of hope for Africa and its people.

"We are also united in denouncing the spate of recent attacks on foreign nationals living in our country. These deplorable incidents of violence do not reflect who we are as a nation, or who we are as a continent," he said.

Minister Hanekom lauded the swift and decisive action of government, and the support of the overwhelming majority of people who ensured that the divisive intentions of those behind the attacks had been neutralised.

"We have also begun the work of addressing the underlying causes of the violence. South Africa will never allow the criminal actions of a few to derail the togetherness forged by the vast majority of our people in the past two decades of our democracy," he said.

Hanekom said the tourism sector is now contributing over 9% of South Africa's Gross Domestic Product (GDP) and

supports over 1.5 million job opportunities countrywide.

On the African continent, he said tourism directly and indirectly supports 20.5 million jobs and represents 8.1% of Africa's GDP. In some countries, more than 50% of their GDP comes from tourism.

"Driving the growth of tourism in South Africa are a wealth of wonderful tourism assets: our landscape and biodiversity; our wildlife; our people and our cultural heritage.

We have also developed a wide range of products and services that create memorable experiences for tourists," he said.

He said international arrivals in Africa increased to 56 million tourists last year, and are expected to grow by between 3% and 5% in 2015. According to the minister, this will probably exceed the projected growth in global arrivals, which is between 3% and 4% for 2015.

"More and more people are venturing out to discover new places, leaving the familiar behind to seek unique experiences, to meet new people and discover their culture.

"In embarking on this journey together, as tourism leaders in the public and private sectors, cooperation and partnership are the keys to our success.

When we stand together in the face of challenges, and when we do business together at Indaba, we are so much stronger," he said.

From its early beginnings as a South African trade platform, the Indaba has evolved into Africa's largest and most successful tourism trade platform.

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