

**SPEECH BY MS ELIZABETH THABETHE, DEPUTY MINISTER OF
TOURISM
CHINA-SOUTH AFRICA BUSINESS FORUM**

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**Ministers and Deputy Ministers
Leaders of Business and Industry
Your Excellencies
Member of the media
Comrades and friends**

I greet you all

May I once again extend our warmest welcome to those whom amongst are visitors to our beautiful country on the occasion of the 10th BRICS Summit which has in all earnest began with its business

It gives me great honour and privilege to address you on the occasion of this special gathering, The **China South Africa Business Forum**.

Let me start by saying that whilst we as South Africa and are hosting the 10th BRICS Summit this year, in many ways 2018 remains an important year for China-South Africa relations

It needs to be observed that this year, 2018 marks the 20th anniversary of diplomatic ties between China and South Africa and we will in a same vein begin the all-important round of the Forum for China Africa Cooperation (FOCAC) to steer the future China-Africa cooperation agenda to greater heights

Equally, business and trade between South African and China has seen tremendous growth in the last decade alone, and that has only happened because you in attendance here today made it so happen

Honoured guests

We must seize the opportunities and fully leverage the strengths of mutual trust, economic cooperation, and the friendship between people of our two nations.

These opportunities must translate our ambitions into concrete results that benefit our people, and ensure the continued development and upscaling of China-South Africa **Comprehensive Strategic Partnership**. agreement signed in 2010 and commonly referred to as the Beijing Declaration.

Ladies and gentlemen

According to the latest UN World Tourism Organization (UNWTO) reports, the global tourism sector outperformed the global economy for the seventh consecutive year being the fastest growing broad economic sector in 2017, it outperformed manufacturing (4.2%), retail and wholesale (3.4%), agriculture, forestry and fisheries (2.6%) and financial services (2.5%) respectively.

In South Africa, 1.5 million jobs were supported by travel and tourism in 2017, which is 9.5% of the total employment in the country. The total contribution of travel and tourism to SA's GDP was R412.5bn (8.9% of GDP) in 2017 and is forecast to rise by 2.9% in 2018.

Tourist arrivals from the BRIC nations increased by 6.1 percent in 2017, higher than the average of all tourist arrivals to 275, 521 visitors.

We are proud to say that China remained the leading growth market for South Africa's tourism industry, with year-on-year growth recorded at 38 percent last year, accounting for the largest number of international visitors to South Africa.

Ladies and Gentlemen, Honoured guests, a clear cooperation plan for Tourism growth is what is emerging

China and South Africa have pledged mutual support for each other's tourism ventures and we are deepening cooperation on all fronts of human development anchored in the high level Comprehensive Strategic Partnership (CSP).

Article 20 of the declaration talks about "co-operation in tourism training, capacity building, promoting and developing cultural and medical tourism, promotion campaigns and information sharing, thereby acknowledging that the tourism industry is a generator of economic growth and empowerment, employment and foreign exchange".

Pursuant to the Beijing Declaration, South Africa and China signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) on Co-operation in the field of Tourism on 28 October 2013.

The areas of cooperation identified in the MoU includes:

- a) Information Sharing;
- b) Tourism Investment;
- c) Marketing and Promotion;
- d) Skills Development and Training; and
- e) Tourism Safety and Service Standards.

Our Minister of Tourism, Minister Derek Hanekom and Minister of Culture and Tourism, Minister Luo Shugang, met in China in June 2018, where they reaffirmed their commitment to implement the broad areas of cooperation enshrined in the MoU signed in 2013.

We have committed to continue to nurture the sector and drive increasingly impactful and collaborative strategies and programmes for sustained, inclusive growth into the future.

COOPERATION IN SKILLS DEVELOPMENT

South Africa remains has identified skills development in the tourism and hospitality subsectors as a fundamental priority, and we are proud of the realization of the commitments made to assist South Africa in terms of providing opportunities for skills development through institutions in China.

Alarming high levels of unemployment and the almost non-existence of practical workplace exposure in the country in particular compelled the partnership between Chinese Culture and International Education Exchange Centre and CATHSSETA to adopt a skills internship strategy.

The intention is to place the successful students in various vocational training, Emphasis is placed in the fields of Chefs, Tourist Guiding, and Hospitality Reception for the development of a sustainable and reliable “skills pipeline” is as much a national need as it is critical for the growth of this sector.

Another initiative, which will empower graduates with exposure into the Chinese industry to gain **on- the-job** experience through the Work Integrated Learning programme is a mandarin language training where a group of 20 tourism practitioners (front line staff and tourist guide) were trained.

Further discussions with the Chinese Culture and International Education Exchange Centre to roll out the Mandarin language training at TVET Colleges that are offering travel, tourism and hospitality courses in South African.

Post the *South Africa High-Level People-to-People Exchange Mechanism held in April 2017*, numerous skills initiatives have been incorporated in the draft implementation plan and will soon be finalised.

Some of those skills are aimed at ensuring that we are primarily well position to cater four our increasing Chinese tourists and includes amongst others (1) specialisation course on Chinese traditional cuisine (2) tourist guide and front line staff in Mandarin to equip them to better service the market. (3) Training or upskilling of new entrants on adventure guiding

LADIES AND GENTLEMEN, HONORED GUESTS

We reaffirm that international cooperation in the area of tourism is an important lever of foreign policy and an instrument of economic diplomacy in strengthening the broader bilateral relations between South Africa and China.

The issue of improving travel freedom through visa waiver for ordinary passport holders has been topping the agenda in various bilateral engagements between the two countries to increase tourism and people-to people exchanges.

South Africa and China registered a historic milestone in improving the visa regime between the two countries through the signing of the Visa Requirements Simplification Agreement during the State Visit on 24 July 2018

Consequently, South Africa established eleven Visa Facilitation Centers across China, in the following cities: Beijing, Shanghai, Guangzhou, Chengdu, Xian, Shenyang, Wuhan, Jinan, Hangzhou, Chongqing and Kunming.

The other incentive is the 10-Years BRICS Business Visa.

This new measure is extended to business visitors from BRICS countries (Brazil, Russia, India and China), holding diplomatic, official/services and ordinary passports, who apply for visas to visit South Africa for short-term business purposes and is valid for ten years.

Infrastructure Investment to unlock tourism growth

The importance of the relationship between government and business in the tourism industry can never be overemphasized. For tourism to thrive, governments need to forge a stronger collaboration with the industry

Ultimately we need not only to invest in public policy and services, we need to invest in the public infrastructures and industry that make tourism work.

With the substantial growth in the tourism sector over recent years such has exceeded expectations of both the private and public sector.

As a consequence, shortfalls in services have emerged in some locations. We know the regions need improved tourism infrastructure, from toilet facilities to carparks to telecommunications, to roads

We are looking to invest in infrastructure, the conservation estate and training for our tourism sector workers, we need investment in the costal and marine tourism initiatives and we need more services

I also need to urge to keep sustainability at the core your agenda – from ensuring sustainable economic development, including increased exports and decent jobs paying higher wages, to addressing climate change and protecting the environment.

IN CONCLUSION

The relationship between the Governments of South Africa and China over the years has been mutually beneficial guided by trust, respect and friendly relations.

We have committed to continue to nurture the sector and drive increasingly impactful and collaborative strategies and programmes for sustained, inclusive growth into the future.

It is my believe and hope that business relationships from both countries will continue to be equally conducted in the letter and spirit of this proud history of partnership and cooperation between our governments

To conclude, let me wish the forum a great success!