

**SPEECH PRESENTED BY THE MEC FOR ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT, ENVIRONMENT AND TOURISM, MR J.L (JABU) MAHLANGU, MPL, DURING THE EHLANZENI TOURISM KRUGER DAY HELD AT SKUKUZA AT THE KRUGER NATIONAL PARK, EHLANZENI DISTRICT.**

**Friday, 30 April 2010**

Programme Director, Mr William Mabasa;

Our host, the Executive Mayor of Ehlanzeni District Municipality, Her Worship Councillor Khosi Mkhonto;

Honourable MEC for Culture, Sport and Recreation, Mr Vusi Shongwe;

Deputy Mayor of the District, Councillor Selby Khumalo;

Members of the Mayor Committee present;

Managing Director of the Kruger National Park, Mr Abe Sibiya;

Our social partners, business and product owners;

Invited guests;

Members of the Media;

Ladies and gentlemen;

*Good Evening!*

There is an Indian saying which says and I quote:

*“We do not inherit this land from our ancestors; (but) we borrow it from our children.”*

Councillor Mkhonto; ladies and gentlemen, let start off by appreciating the invitation from the District Municipality, to be part of and to address this significant event, aimed at promoting tourism in the district to ensure that product owners and local communities benefit from the windfall being afforded by the forthcoming biggest sporting event in the universe.

It can only mean that **“Working together, we can do more”** to grow our tourism industry for the benefit of our people.

Ladies and gentlemen, I’ve deemed it relevant to start my speech with the Indian quotation, for the fact that we collectively have a responsibility over our environment. The Bill of Rights in our progressive Constitution states that *“Everyone has the right to an environment that is not harmful to their health or well-being; and to have the environment protected for the benefit of present and future generations.”*

Based on this constitutional mandate to all of us, you will understand why I believe the Indian saying is relevant. Indeed we’ve borrowed the use of our environment from our children, hence we have a collective responsibility to conserve it for their future use. We have their permission to enjoy it now, though responsibly, but we must ensure that they too, will have an opportunity to enjoy it, lest we will never find eternal peace when we have departed. We dare not fail to live up to the commitments we made in our Constitution.

Our Constitution mandates us to *“prevent pollution and ecological degradation; promote conservation; and to secure ecologically sustainable development and the use of natural resources while promoting justifiable economic and social development.”*

Everyone is a tourist; and as we **Re-discover life** in our internationally renowned Kruger National Park, we must also re-commit ourselves to life; that is, re-commit that we believe and support the life after us – the future generations who are Constitutionally equal beneficiaries. As we **Re-discover life** in Ehlanzeni where the sun rises, we must re-commit ourselves to continue to be pioneers to save our environment.

Our environment faces serious challenges of pollution, waste and de-forestation attributed to development, which has led to global warming. I believe we cannot therefore, fold our arms and continue to live life as normal, even though the reality of climate change is staring at us. I believe none of us want to be counted when our children look back to inspect the damage, we caused them.

As we look forward to host the world in 41 days during the 2010 FIFA World Cup games, we must always remember the challenges we face; and at the same time start to act to mitigate the effects of those challenges. Temperatures across the world are starting to rise; sea levels are also rising; and the unpredictable weather pattern is fast becoming a reality. If we continue to act irresponsibly towards our environment, we will eventually find ourselves submerged under water, with no food and diseases being rampant. The big question is, who will you blame? The answer is in your hands!

Ladies and gentlemen, as graders pack and go; single lanes broaden, and the construction sites are cleared, we need to remain mindful that the real work for us in the tourism sector has just started. As one of the host cities for the 2010 FIFA World Cup games, our capital city, Mbombela, is geared up to receive the world. The challenge we are still facing though in our tourism and hospitality industry, is the level of customer service. Our front-line staff remains critical, as they are our Ambassadors in the industry. Their attitude can make or break us, hence we will from 13-19 May 2010, embark on a Service Excellence training for over 12 000 front-line staff across the province.

We all have to elbow the wheel and be good hosts, thus ensuring that our hospitality industry is permanently engraved in the minds of our visitors after *Re-discovering Life* in our scenic district and province at large.

Ladies and gentlemen, the decision to earn eternal interest from the proceeds of the World Cup is solely in our hands. Give our tourist a warm Mpumalanga welcome – show them that we are people who love and cherish visitors. I believe that this District Municipality, under the leadership of Executive Mayor, Councillor Mkhonto, have made significant strides in ensuring that we continue to communicate our readiness, our products and our people’s hospitality.

You continued to ensure that our municipalities are beautified, and that the infrastructure has been improved in preparation of the world cup. Our tourism entity, the MTPA under the leadership of Mr Charles Ndabeni, has also made significant strides in ensuring that we market our tourism destinations to the world. We can also congratulate them, for clinching a deal with Comair, which will make flying to the province very affordable. This deal will see Comair flying six times a week to the KMIA and will for the first time, offer business class. We believe that the deal came at a right time, just as we are anticipating a huge number of foreign visitors to decent on our doorstep. The inaugural Comair flight to the province will land on Tuesday, 04 May at the KMIA, where the project will be launched.

In preparing for the World Cup, we can report that we have amongst others, successfully trained tour guides and a number of front-line staff on customer relations, and in foreign languages like French and Portuguese. We are confident that they are ready to smile and say ‘welcome to Mpumalanga’ in the language of the guests. This region, Ehlanzeni, was the first to call upon our neighbours in Mozambique and Swaziland to partner with us on this journey. Today, the people of the two countries feel the football fever as it sweeps through the Mozambican coastline and the Swazi escarpment.

Through our co-operation agreement and joint initiatives with our neighbouring countries, Ehlanzeni has really made Mpumalanga a true African host province.

Our ports of entry, both air and land, are welcoming because of the great work the district and all other stakeholders has done. Your commitment as a district towards promoting and growing our tourism industry is much appreciated. The scramble for the last tourist standing is yet to start, and you must have that tourist as Ehlanzeni – We must continue to market our destination and lay bare her offerings. At the same time, business needs to see the events of the next two months not as an inconvenience, but as a great feast, for the people will benefit economically. You need to prepare and pay your staff for the long hours and for extra efforts; you will need to improve your service standards and improve your products, if you want to smile all the way to the bank.

Ladies and gentlemen, in the next few weeks before the greatest soccer spectacular in the world, we will do the following:

- Open the Visitors Information Centre and Customer Assistance Facility in Komatipoort, in partnership with the Ministry of Tourism and the Nkomazi Local Municipality;
- Announce an agreement with Shosholaza Meyl and the Passenger Rail Agency of South Africa regarding a special train service from Maputo to Nelspruit for the duration of the Mbombela games.

As I close, may I take this opportunity to convey our sincerest appreciation to all those workers, who toiled in the scorching sun and the torrential rains to deliver the infrastructure in time.

Ladies and Gentleman as of tonight, we can no longer speak of the last lap – for we have torn the finishing line ribbon. The next 40 days are, but a victory and celebratory lap. Despite all doubt cast and doom predicted, our nation is ready to host the world. Well done to all of us.

Once more, let me congratulate the district municipality, for adhering to its mandate of ensuring a conducive environment for the development of the tourism sector in its jurisdiction. Your continuing efforts to harness this sector, which is the 'gold mine' of the province, are highly appreciated.

Indeed **“Working together, we can do more”** to grow our tourism industry for the benefit of our people.

I leave you with an inspiring quote from American author and motivator, Ralph Waldo Emerson, who once said and I quote:

*“Most of the shadows of this life are caused by our standing in our own sunshine.”*

I hope you are not standing in front of your own sunshine, lest you moan about the darkness caused by your own shadow.

*Africa, Ke Nako!*

*Nyalo Litfuba leAfrika!*

*Agora eahora!*

*Obrigado!*