

**WELCOMING REMARKS BY MEC CNM PADAYACHEE AT
BALMORAL HOTEL ON 9 MAY 2008.**

Chairperson of the Board, Mr L Chiwayo
Members of the MTPA Board
The Acting Head of Department, Mr Lemmy Mdluli
The Acting CEO of MTPA, Mr Abe Sibiya
Captains of the Tourism industry
Honoured guests
Ladies and gentlemen

It gives me great pleasure to welcome you to the 2008 Tourism Indaba. Indeed, it is common cause that the Tourism Indaba presents to all of us a unique opportunity to showcase the diverse tourism experiences South Africans have on their doorstep in our beautiful province Mpumalanga.

The tourism indaba is very important for us as it an opportunity for the local tourism industry to promote our tourism offering to diverse audience and thus increase the contribution of the industry to the provincial economy. I therefore urge you all to take advantage of the endless opportunities presented to us by this Indaba to meaningfully engage local and international delegates to come and experience the picturesque scenic beauty of our province which is blessed with some of South Africa's and the world's best tourist draw-cards; our game reserves, forests, hiking trails and beautiful rivers to name but a few.

Ladies and gentlemen, on 25 April 2008 we launched the Tourism Forum which we believe will serve as a sounding board for all of us to constantly keep in touch with the real feelings within the tourism industry. As government we are committed to working together with the private sector and our communities in our quest to improve tourism as a united front. We are all in agreement that this forum is the right thing to do, it will make everything that we hope for possible.

We believe that by standing together, increasing our tourism offerings, providing excellent service, showing the warmth we are known for and displaying conduct above reproach in our business dealings, I am sure that we will reclaim our competitive edge we all

long for - to attract both domestic and international travellers to the land of the beginning.

Ladies and gentlemen, the Indaba not only entails an agenda to create awareness about tourism industry by showcasing the diverse tourism experiences South African have. It also recognises the importance and contribution of the tourism to the economy and how the accrued benefits therefrom must benefit all our people. Apart from more jobs and greater income for our communities, tourism holds the key to long term tourism success. It is in this spirit that I request all our delegates from Mpumalanga to highlight how easy and affordable it can be to access the tourism experiences we have in Mpumalanga. Further, I request all of you to encourage South Africans and our international visitors to begin taking holidays in the land where the pioneering spirit reverberates throughout and the beating of the African drum signals the start of another beautiful day in Mpumalanga.

Mpumalanga Tourism and Parks Agency must be commended for recognising that it is important to showcase diverse offerings that the sector have. The 29 SMME's that are here with us will not only amass knowledge and experience and learn best practices within the tourism industry but will also increase awareness of Mpumalanga's offerings and help them to forge strategic partnerships with other role players in the tourism industry.

Through fostering synergy in our efforts and encouraging all South Africans to take pride in our diverse tourism products, Mpumalanga will remain one of the most preferred tourism destinations for years to come, enjoyed by South Africans and international visitors alike.

Ladies and Gentlemen, I wish all of you well and hope that like we did last year our exhibition stand wins again.

I thank you.