

**ADDRESS BY THE PREMIER OF MPUMALANGA TSP MAKWETLA AT THE FLY MPUMALANGA.COM
GALA DINNER
NELSPRUIT
29 APRIL 2005**

Program Director

Honourable MEC's and Members of the Legislature

Honourable Mayors and Traditional Leaders

The Executive Manager of Kulula.com, Mr. Gideon Novak

Task Team Convenor Mr. Irvin Phenyane

The acting CEO of the Mpumalanga Tourism Authority, Ms Shoni Malao

Representatives of all our corporate partners in the Fly Mpumalanga initiative

Distinguished celebrated guests and eminent persons

Senior government officials

Ladies and Gentlemen

It is with much pleasure and excitement that I join you here today at this occasion of the launch of the inaugural flight of the Fly Mpumalanga.com initiative.

Today's event is another important milestone in the province's gradual steps of reasserting itself and reclaiming its legitimate role and place in our country's development.

This process of reasserting ourselves and focusing on matching our true potential is an important one if we are to decisively break new ground in the struggle against poverty and lack of opportunities for decent livelihoods for our people.

Programme Director, the launch today of an affordable air transport service to Mpumalanga, like the Mpumalanga Heritage Research Project we launched at the beginning of this month, is an important dimension in the strategy to expand our tourism industry in this province.

As we excitedly announced three weeks ago, the Heritage Research Project will make a key contribution to the identification and prioritization of additional heritage sites in the province.

As we all know people want to be able to move in an efficient, fast and inexpensive manner. This initiative will afford more choice in the mode of transport that tourists, business travelers, and ordinary people can use to visit our province.

We firmly believe that the improved availability of flights and air service operators to the Kruger Mpumalanga International Airport (KMIA) will contribute to many more people choosing to visit us.

We are hopeful that as more and more people become exposed to our region, they will come to appreciate the enormous economic potential of this province and the abundant business opportunities Mpumalanga can offer, thus inducing and supporting economic growth and improving the living standards of our people.

Programme Director, it is the Microsoft Czar and philanthropist, Bill Gates, who is reported to have remarked that the locomotive for development in the 18 th century was agriculture, in the 19 th century it was trade (as more countries traded) and in the 20 th century it was manufacturing. But in the 21 st century it is going to be the service sector with telecommunications, electronic technology and tourism leading the way.

We can have differing views on Bill Gates and his predictions, but the Department of Environmental Affairs and Tourism (DEAT) confirms that “ *over the last ten years tourism in South Africa has emerged as a leading economic growth sector and is now one of the largest contributors to Gross Domestic Product (GDP), and offers significant employment and enterprise development opportunities .*”

In 2002, the World Travel and Tourism Council estimated that South Africa's travel and tourism industry generated R108.5 billion in revenue for the country. They also estimated that the industry's direct impact on the economy was estimated at close to half a million jobs and its total contribution to the GDP, when taking into account its effect on the rest of the economy, was equal to 7.1%.

In view of these statistics it seems imperative that we should all roll up our sleeves and position ourselves to seek to attract a higher share of the huge economic benefits generated by tourism in our country's economy.

Accordingly, we cannot be satisfied to remain as the fourth most popular destination for foreign tourists or the sixth most popular domestic attraction in the country.

These indicators of the competitiveness, or rather the lack of it, in this sector in our province, are rather worrying and a key blockage to our efforts to advance in realizing the vision of a better life for our people.

Today's launch is another example of a vibrant partnership for addressing the various critical challenges in the province. I wish to single out and commend all the tourism stakeholders in our province and commercial airline partners that are part of this initiative.

The effort of increasing air volumes to Mpumalanga and improving air access was never going to be a solitary effort by the provincial government or any one of the stakeholders involved.

Therefore I wish to salute your commitment to this partnership and urge you to be steadfast in this singular determination to level the playing field within our aviation industry, and to provide a regional transport infrastructure that is responsive to the needs of our various sectors and ordinary people.

Programme Director,

In our midst this evening there are eminent persons and inspirational individuals who have sacrificed their important commitments to lend a helping hand to this initiative.

With sincere humility we wish to thank you for profiling this intervention through your celebrated status. The humble message from the people of this province is that you are a valuable resource for our country and in our communities.

Wherever you go please give our warm regards to the countless people you associate with, and cultivate friends for our province so that they can visit us and enjoy the warmth of this province, their country.

Lastly, allow me to thank the MEC for Transport and the MEC for Economic Development and Planning, MEC's Fish Mahlalela and William Lubisi respectively, for the leadership they have provided to this initiative.

To the Project Team and its Convenor, Mr. Irvin Phenyane, you have made us proud, always remember that where there is passion even the most formidable challenge melts away. Keep the foot on the throttle for the sake of the many destitute communities in our province.

Thank you everybody for coming.