

Transcript: Statement by the Chairperson of the UNWTO Regional Commission for Africa

ADDIS ABABA, ETHIOPIA, April 21, 2017
/EINPresswire.com/ -- In Addis Ababa, Ethiopia the Fifty-ninth meeting of the UNWTO Commission for Africa and High-level Meeting on Chinese Outbound Tourism to Africa was opened today.

Chairperson of the UNWTO Regional Commission for Africa is Hon. Dr. W. Mzembi (M.P.) from Zimbabwe, who is also a candidate for election to the next Secretary General for the United Nations World Tourism Organization.

This is an exact transcript of his address to this high level audience today:



- Taleb Rifai, Secretary-General of the UNWTO,
- Excellencies, fellow Ministers
- AU Commissioners here present
- Excellencies, Ambassadors accredited to the Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia and Permanent Representatives to the African Union here present

- Private-sector tourism and hospitality industry representatives,
- Distinguished Guests
- Ladies and Gentlemen,

“

For Africa to ... become a major source market for the global tourism industry ... That journey will not be an easy one, but it is one we MUST embark upon.”

Hon. Walter Mzembi

Allow me to add my voice to those who have already spoken and, on behalf of the UNWTO Regional Commission for Africa, and indeed on behalf of all of those who have made the journey to attend our Commission meeting, to express sincere gratitude to the Government and people of Ethiopia for their warm welcome and the generous hospitality they

have extended to us all.

It is always invigorating to return to this city, the headquarters of the African Union. It symbolizes the essence of the unity of Africa and encourages us to be bold and forthright – in the knowledge that, acting together and with a commonality of vision and purpose, we can succeed and advance our nations and our people towards the attainment of the ambitious objectives set out in Agenda 2063 – the continental developmental blueprint.

Excellencies, we meet against the background of a relatively positive year for the global tourism industry. International tourist arrivals grew by 3.9% to reach a total of 1,24 billion : and, based on current trends, the UNWTO Panel of Experts projects further positive growth of between 3% to 4 % in

the coming year.

Statistics, Excellencies, are useful – but they can also be misleading and, if we are not careful, can lull us into a false sense of well-being and contentment. In illustration of my point : those statistics indicate growth of 8% in tourist arrivals in Africa – whereas the reality is that the bulk of that percentage increase represents recovery from where we were before, in 2014 and 2015, rather than actual growth.

As a Continent, as an African collective, we still lag behind other regions of the world in terms of performance and we continue to command between 3% to 5%, ONLY, of global tourism arrivals and receipts. Given the richness of our Continent and the staggering diversity of the tourism product we offer, we cannot content ourselves with this measly share of the global tourism trade. It simply makes no sense and we must commit ourselves, seriously, to work harder and in a more focused, targeted manner, to more fully and more successfully exploit the massive potential which resides in that product.

So, let us not be unduly misled by such statistics : and let us not relax in any way, shape, or form. The onus is on us, as African Ministers of Tourism, to get our act together, to intensify and accelerate our efforts – at national, regional and continental levels – to ensure, firstly, that our industry is accorded the respect and recognition it deserves within our own countries, regions and within the administrative structures of the African Union, and, secondly, to ensure that our individual and our collective efforts are directed – and let us give ourselves a definitive timeframe – towards growing Africa's contribution to and its benefit from global tourism.

An important part of our Agenda over the coming days is devoted to China's outbound tourism flows and how we, as African nations, can mobilize ourselves – specifically at national and regional levels – to accommodate and service the 600-plus million tourists China is expected to unleash on the world by the year 2020. Colleagues will recall that the Chinese Premier himself provided these figures when he addressed the 1st World Conference on Sustainable Tourism for Development in Beijing in 2016 – underlining the importance, to China, of the tourism sector within its own economic performance matrix.

China has achieved this status as the world's biggest tourist source market in the space of just 20 years. In part, this is due to the pursuit of successful economic development policies which, in turn have facilitated the emergence of a strong middle class which, in turn, both money-ed and passport-ed, has been encouraged to travel the world.

By 2050, Africans will number 2,4 billion people – twice the current population of China : and it should and indeed must be our intention, Excellencies, to emulate the Chinese experience : for Africa to likewise become a major source market for the global tourism industry : for Africa to earn its place at the top table of global tourism by virtue of successfully and sustainably growing its percentage contribution to international tourism flows and for Africa to realize its massive potential, including in the tourism sector.

That journey will not be an easy one : but it is one we MUST embark upon : and it is one which has to start here, amongst ourselves, as Africans, in Africa.

Some two years ago, Excellencies, you tasked me, as your Chairman, to engage the African Union Commission with the specific task of raising awareness about our sector and its enormous developmental potential at the highest levels of our continental mother-body, and to work to ensure that tourism is effectively reflected, and indeed clearly imbedded in the AU's Agenda 2063.

In my subsequent engagement with the Commission, I stressed three areas of strategic importance:

- Firstly, the urgent need to develop an overarching continental Tourism Policy;
- Secondly, to oversee the coordination and implementation of such a Policy, the need for a stand-alone Commission for Tourism, with its own substantive Commissioner; or, at the very least and as an interim measure, the creation of a substantive Directorate for Tourism, Bio-Diversity and Aviation; and
- Thirdly, the need for the Commission to convene meetings of African Tourism Ministers and to provide us with an appropriate, collective platform to deliberate, amongst ourselves and with others the myriad issues and opportunities relating to our sector.

As I have reported previously, the response from the Commission has been positive and I am confident that we, and they, are on the same page. It is my fervent hope that the newly-installed Commission at AU Headquarters will embrace what has been achieved thus-far and that they will commit themselves to working with us to progress those beginnings towards the conclusions set out in bullet-points one and two above.

Excellencies, another positive outcome of my engagement with the Commission was the convening, in Lome, Togo, from 14 to 18 March, 2017, of the First Ordinary Session of the AU Specialised Technical Committee (STC) on Transport, Trans-Continental and Inter-Regional Infrastructure, Energy and Tourism.

The Agenda of that meeting included all core tourism-related issues and it is my hope, Excellencies, that the action-oriented outcomes thereof are being or will be factored into our work, as Ministers of Tourism, at both national and regional levels. It is my hope, also, that the Commission has taken due note of the outcomes and that, going forward, the issue of tourism and its powerful, multi-faceted potential for sustainable development, will feature more and more prominently within AU priorities – specifically within Agenda 2063 and the alignment of that Agenda with the Sustainable Development Goals Framework.

The fact that we are now well into the UN Year of Sustainable Tourism for Development provides even further justification and a high-profile, global platform, for us here in Africa to push our respective Governments, our regional tourism bodies, the AU Commission and indeed the UNWTO for more action towards the attainment of those ambitious objectives.

Excellencies, like many of you, I attended the recent ITB Fair in Berlin.

Migration and the possible negative impact on legitimate international tourism flows of measures which some countries are putting in place to curb or stop what they view as illegitimate travel, are very topical issues across Europe and the developed world more generally. And, as you know, African countries are not immune from those curbs or the more widespread impact on the free movement of tourist travelers.

Whilst in Germany I was favoured with a paper authored by the Ministry of Economic Cooperation which speaks specifically to the issue of the migration of Africans to Europe and which speaks of the need for a ‘Marshall Plan’ – between the EU and Africa – to create decent employment opportunities on the continent and to provide those who currently risk and often lose their lives crossing the Mediterranean waters with a viable stay-at-home alternative.

This concept of some form of ‘Marshall Plan’ to support the development of low-hanging fruit opportunities in the tourism sector across the continent – specifically to create employment

opportunities for our people – is very much a key element of my own vision as your Chairperson and, indeed, as the AU-endorsed candidate for the post of Secretary General of the UN World Tourism Organisation ; and forms the basis of the commitment I have made in my campaign engagements across Europe in particular, of working, with the EU and others, towards a future where Africa provides Europe with tourists.....not migrants.

A related, key component of that vision for the future, is the urgent need for us, and our cooperating partners, to initiate discussion on the possibility of establishing a Global Tourism Fund. I do not want to pre-empt debate on the issue – but, if tourism ministries across the globe could claw back just a single dollar from each tourist arrival, it would provide seed capital of around US 1,2 billion dollars for such a Fund.

By way of Joint Venture or PPP arrangements, such seed capital could be used to leverage twice or three times that amount and see the creation of a meaningful source of finance to support the realization of tourism-related projects in our countries : projects which will not only boost tourist arrivals but which will also create decent employment opportunities for our people : and which will enable the tourism sector to make a meaningful, sustainable contribution towards Agenda 2063 – the Africa We Want.

In all this, we look to our Organisation, the UNWTO, for leadership and guidance.

Allow me to thank our esteemed Secretary General, Dr Taleb Rifai, for the unstinting support he has always extended towards us, African Ministers of Tourism, and for the understanding and encouragement he and his dedicated Team continue to provide us in our work. Those efforts have been duly encapsulated in the Framework provided by the Memorandum of Understanding concluded between the UNWTO and the African Union, and provide the basis for far greater and more intensive interaction going forward.

Excellencies, I conclude as I began – by welcoming you all here, by thanking you for the confidence and support you have always given to me as your Chairperson; and by urging you and indeed all of us to greater effort and action, so that we actualise the potential of our sector, gain greater recognition and respect for tourism at national, regional and continental levels, and bring our industry to the very mainstream of our continent's collective socio-economic developmental programme.

With effort, focus and determination, and with the right leadership, I am very confident of our success.

Excellencies, I wish you all fruitful deliberations during this 59th CAF meeting.

I Thank You

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