

Transcript: Hon. Dr. Walter Mzembi's vision statement on UNWTO's future under his leadership

MINISTER OF TOURISM AND HOSPITALITY INDUSTRY OF THE REPUBLIC OF ZIMBABWE addresses ministers in Ethiopia at the UNWTO Commission for Africa conference

ADDIS ABABA, ETHIOPIA, April 22, 2017 /EINPresswire.com/ -- On April 19, UNWTO Candidate Walter Mzembi spoke out about his vision for the future of UNWTO, and the future of global tourism. He spoke in Addis Ababa at a reception hosted by the Zimbabwean government on the sideline of the UNWTO's Commission for Africa meeting.



TRANSCRIPT of Dr. Mzembi's statement:

Her Excellency Honourable Hinut Woldermariam, Minister of Culture and Tourism of the Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia

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I believe we need to speak the truth, both to ourselves and to others: so let me proceed by recalling a number of key facts and posing a few pertinent questions - to ourselves, as Africans.”

Hon. Walter Mzembi

His Excellency Dr Kwasi Quartey, Deputy Chairperson of the AU Commission

Excellencies, Colleague Ministers

Mr Tewolde GebreMariam, Chief Executive Officer of Ethiopian Airlines

Invited Guests

Ladies and Gentlemen

First and foremost, my sincere thanks to you all for being here this evening. I am aware of how tight our CAF programme is and the heavy demands upon your time : so I am very grateful that so many of you have been able to accept the invitation and to join me as I share with you some thoughts about the electoral campaign in which, on your behalf, I am engaged.

Tonight, I am prompted to speak to Africa - notwithstanding my global vision for tourism which has already been distributed to you.

For the past year, I have literally traversed the world, sharing and building that vision with input from member states. Since 2016, I have also attended all statutory Regional Commission meetings - gathering information, absorbing opinion and regional nuance, and adding to my own understanding and appreciation of the issues of real concern to our sector.

My take on global tourism, therefore, is not the result of a desk-top exercise. It derives, rather, from a lengthy, comprehensive physical engagement with the entire Executive Council.

But before I proceed, Excellencies, again let me acknowledge the presence amongst us of the outgoing Secretary General of our Organisation, Dr Taleb Rifai - now in the twilight of his tenure at the helm of the UNWTO. Someone whom we will all miss very much and someone whose remarkable legacy speaks for itself.

In Africa - and perhaps more specifically sub-Saharan Africa - you will be remembered and indeed revered for your strong adherence to principle : and to the promotion of tourism to foster understanding, particularly in destinations under siege for one reason or another.

I cite the holding of the 20th Session of the UNWTO General Assembly, by Zimbabwe and Zambia, in 2013, along with Executive Council meetings in Kenya, Egypt and Algeria, as just some examples of the supportive, inclusive approach which has always characterised your leadership.

But these examples are a mere microcosm of your global calendar and the philosophy you have always followed - of promoting tourism as a vehicle to create greater understanding between peoples and cultures, to resolve conflict and, as you have always said, to make this world a better place for all.

But we have now entered a new age : and the global environment which has characterised your tenure of office has changed and indeed continues to change - quite dramatically in some respects - presenting new, multi-faceted challenges for our sector and, inevitably, for your successor.

The threat of terror - specifically directed at the tourism industry - is now more pronounced than ever before. Equally, the impact on travel of natural disasters, many of them the direct consequence of the phenomenon of climate change.

But add to this

the new and intensifying trend towards isolationism and intolerance by state administrations;

- the apparent shift towards unilateralism and the nationalistic politics of the far right;
- the threat of cyber-terrorism and the unintended consequences of the ICT revolution;

and it is clear that whoever assumes the post of Secretary General, will have his or her hands full with a vastly changed global environment : will have to grapple with the impact of political decisions emanating from nation states against each other - where diplomacy has been sacrificed on the altar of nationalistic unilateralism : and where tourism-economies find themselves at the mercy of such extreme politics.

Accordingly, the incoming Secretary General, will have to be suitably equipped - in terms of qualification, professional experience, general aptitude and craft-competence - to successfully confront those challenges and to effectively respond to the expectations of UNWTO members in this changing world.

Excellencies, Dear Colleagues,

I believe we have no option but to be very honest with ourselves and, in so doing, to ask ourselves a number of questions relative to the pedigree and calibre of the person we would wish to deploy to Capitan Haya street in Madrid; and, obviously, the direction our Organisation should take going forward.

I believe we all agree that this is not a purely sectoral contest. It is not purely about Tourism : and it is not a contest devoid of political content or context.

It is, rather, a quest to find the best, most qualified, most competent person to lead us into the future.

The quest is decided by way of an election. Our electoral college - the Executive Council - comprises 33 member states, each one, nominally at any rate, representing 5 others. It is the Council which comes up the single candidate to recommend to the General Assembly : but, to what extent, if any, do those 33 members consult with the broader membership they represent, with regard to the election of the Secretary General ?

When they cast their ballots, whose choice are they expressing ? Their own, subjective national preference or the consensus choice of the collective they are purportedly representing ?

I raise these two issues because, as we observe this election process, it is becoming apparent that a number of 'deals' are being struck - some on the basis of bilateral reciprocal trade-offs - which, often, have little if any relevance to our tourism sector.

Of course, we should not be naive : this is sometimes how things happen and sometimes how these international systems operate. But if we simply close our eyes to it, or worse, become a party to it, we risk, in the end, being beaten by that system : and becoming accessories to the success of other regions rather than our own.

I do not believe we should allow ourselves to be beaten by any entrenched system. Our Continent and our Organisation deserve better. Indeed they deserve the very best.

I believe we need to speak the truth, both to ourselves and to others : so let me proceed by recalling a number of key facts and posing a few pertinent questions - to ourselves, as Africans.

Firstly - we need to be fully aware that we, Africans, constitute a third of the total membership of the UNWTO : 55 out of 157 member countries. It could be said that we provide the heart and soul of the Organisation;

Secondly - we need to appreciate that since 1957, when Robert Lonati inaugurated what would later become the UNWTO, Europe has led the Organisation for some 44 years. The Americas (Mexico) led it for 8 years : and the Middle East, under our brother Taleb here, has led it for 8 years.

The highest post Africa has ever occupied within UNWTO is that of Regional Director for Africa - a post currently held by the Seychelles.

Thirdly - we need to be aware that there exists an established, albeit informal principle of rotational equity which seeks to achieve fairness in the designation of leadership positions within the UN system : the very principle which saw our brothers Boutros Boutros Ghali and Kofi Annan elected to the very pinnacle of UN Leadership posts.

Fourthly - we must never lose sight of the unyielding efforts of our Heads of State and Government to bring about reform of the entire UN system - specifically the Security Council - and their determination

to achieve a greater presence and visibility for the Continent throughout the UN system.

I pose the question : Are we, as Tourism Ministers, fully aligned to this broader vision so cherished by our Heads of State and Government ?

Fifthly - and consequent upon the previous point - we must remember that in order to optimise our chances of securing these international positions and fulfilling the wishes of our Heads of State and Government, the African Union conceived the concept of Candidature Committees at both sub-regional and Continental levels : specifically to allow for cross-regional and cross-Continental consultation so as to allow the best candidate to emerge, and then to fight, as a single united Africa, in support of that candidate.

It was this transparent, democratic formula and the unity of purpose manifested by Africa which recently secured an African, Dr Gilbert Fossoun Hounbo, former Prime Minister of Togo, the key post of Director General of the International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD).

Dr Moushira Khattab of Egypt and Dr Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus of Ethiopia and indeed I myself, Walter Mzembi, have submitted ourselves to the same stringent selection process as we seek election to the head of UNESCO, WHO and UNWTO, respectively.

The point I seek to make, Excellencies and Dear Colleagues, is, in essence, an obvious one : namely that if we respect and honour the vision of our Heads of State and Government - of seeing Africa accorded its rightful place within the broad international body politic; and if we respect and honour the decisions they have made to gradually bring that vision into reality; and, equally as important, if we remain united in our pursuit of that noble objective, then we constitute a formidable force - well able to overcome the machinations of the entrenched system to which I have referred.

Excellencies,

Election time is drawing nearer. The stakes for Africa are high. If we miss this opportunity - especially if we miss it by virtue of division or allowing ourselves to be used : to become distracted by the blandishments of others who believe, sadly, that Africans can be 'bought' - then it will again slip beyond our reach for a decade and possibly more.

Excellencies,

As I ask you to reflect on the issues I have raised, allow me to also address, briefly, the essence of my vision for the future development of global tourism under the aegis of the UNWTO.

My Statement of Policy and Management Intent lists a four-pronged Agenda covering the following areas :

- Administrative and Governance Reform of the Organisation
- Resource Mobilisation and Business Development
- Responsible Tourism and Sustainability
- Organisational Repositioning and Brand Development

My candidature is about

- reform and renewal of the Organisation;
- providing leadership which will take the UNWTO beyond marketing excellence into the realm of high-level diplomacy and statecraft : which will take it to new levels of global visibility, consequence and relevance : and which can deliver growth with equity and real value to all member states in terms of their membership expectations.

It is about

- building an Organisation with more universal membership;
- to enhance its effectiveness and relevance within the broader UN family so that tourism, with its cross-cutting presence within all 17 SDG's, can fulfil its potential as a significant contributor towards global socio-economic development under the SDG framework;

It is about

- building a more fully inclusive Organisation;
- one which accommodates and reflects all views and which seeks, through inclusive consultation and interaction, to find comprehensive solutions to the challenges which confront the industry today;

It is about

- ensuring greater fairness and equity in the development and growth of global tourism, especially in the emerging world where tourism receipts continue to lag significantly behind other parts of the world;

It is about

- ensuring that the Secretariat is more reflective of the UNWTO's broad membership; and more gender sensitive;
- ensuring that the Regional Commissions become more visible, present and operational in their respective theatres of activity;

It is about

- working tirelessly to secure Tourism's place as an integral and indispensable component within the broader trade and investment value chain : after all, each trade and/or investment begins with a visit;

It is about

- initiating debate on the creation of a Global Tourism Fund, by way of innovative, creative think-tanking, with the objective of clawing back even a single US dollar from each tourist arrival as seed-capital for such a Fund;

Without some form of sector-specific Fund, it is hard to see how UNWTO, how Tourism can fulfill its obligations under the SDG framework; or how UNWTO can adequately respond to the development-related expectations of member states, especially those in the emerging economies;

My candidature is about

- building the Organisation's capacity to respond more effectively and practically to the many vexing challenges which confront the global industry today.
- Issues such as Tourism and Security, Travel Bans, the Use/Abuse of Travel Advisories, the issues of Migrants; the impact of Currency Fluctuations; Pandemics; Climate Change, Natural Disasters; Child Sexual Abuse;
- Member states expect the Organisation to respond to these issues and to be visible and audible, on behalf of the global tourism industry, especially at international fora where such matters are debated;

These, then, are the core components of my vision. In all, they constitute a comprehensive Ten Point Plan (of Action).

Much greater detail is contained in the folders which Honourable Ministers and Excellencies, you will take away with you this evening.

Excellencies,

The key to such vision lies, essentially, in Leadership - exactly the caliber of leadership which I offer.

Our distinguished host Minister cited leadership - or the lack of it - as a key factor constraining the development of tourism in Africa.

I believe we can all agree with this. I believe we all recognize the opportunity we now have to deploy one of our own into the cockpit of global tourism. Let us not squander that opportunity to accelerate the realization of our own vision, "The Africa We Want", through Agenda 2063.

Excellencies,

Let me conclude by saying how deeply honored and indeed humbled I am by the faith which African Heads of State and Government have reposed in me through their unanimous endorsement and the confidence they have in my ability to provide leadership of this global Organisation

I am more than ready to serve global tourism and will do so to the very best of my ability.

Excellencies, My Dear Brothers, and Sisters,

My sincere thanks to you all, once again, for being here this evening.

May God Bless You All.

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