

**REMARKS BY THE KWAZULU-NATAL MEC FOR ECONOMIC
DEVELOPMENT AND TOURISM, THE HONOURABLE MICHAEL
MABUYAKHULU ON THE OCCASION OF THE EXHIBITION
ASSOCIATION OF SOUTHERN AFRICA CONGRESS 2014**

27 JANUARY 2014

Programme Director;

Dignitaries Present;

Ladies and Gentlemen;

All protocol observed.

On behalf of the provincial government of KwaZulu-Natal, we would like to express our gratitude for being part of this gala dinner, which is part of this year's edition of the Exhibition Association of Southern Africa Congress.

Programme Director, allow us to express our gratitude as the provincial government of KwaZulu-Natal for your decision to host this exhibition in our city of Durban in particular, and the province of KwaZulu-Natal in general.

As the provincial government, we are acutely aware of the important impact which conference delegate spend can have on the economy of our province. However, we also realise that the impact of such events extends way beyond this simple fact. One of the core benefits of hosting such events is the actuality that it builds the knowledge and capacity of our local population in important realms such as exhibition organising and the key trends in this sector and which is the very basis of your congress.

We are hoping that this conference will lead to an improved understanding amongst the business events organisers in our region of EXSA and the nature and extent of the exhibition and events industry.

Programme Director, as all of us know, with the changes in the economic landscape globally, Africa is not only emerging as the frontier of growth but is emerging as the continent of the future. Research after research has revealed that Africa, in the next few years, will far outstrip other continents in terms of growth and development relative to where it is now.

In this regard, the economic growth of the continent will have a domino effect in the growth of companies seeking to exploit new opportunities, and this will result in the concomitant growth of the marketing and exhibition industry in the continent.

It is because of this reason that we believe that this congress is important because it will assist to grow the exhibition industry in the Southern African region and the continent as a whole. As the provincial government, we have always been awake to the reality that our fate, and indeed our prospects for future growth, is intertwined with that of the African continent. It is because of this reason that we have positioned the province of KwaZulu-Natal as the gateway to the continent of Africa using our multi modal logistics platforms.

According to a study which was released recently, the Global Association of the Exhibition Industry has identified a majority of companies in all regions declaring an increase of their turnover since 2011. The study also found that, most companies are planning new strategic developments with 75% planning new activities in either the classic range of exhibition activities (venue/organizer/services) or in live or virtual events (or both) and 49% planning to expand exhibition operations to new countries.

The study further stated that the exhibition media remains remarkably dynamic with a majority of companies positively embracing the challenges of new ranges of activity or geographical development. Clearly this shows that this industry is on the cusp of growth, particularly on this continent

It is also as a result of our clear understanding of the value of business events that the KZN provincial government in close collaboration with the Durban municipality of eThekweni, made a decision to establish a dedicated convention bureau to promote the many business events venues and services of our province and to provide relevant support to business event organisers such as yourselves to host key events such as exhibitions in our region. The KwaZulu-Natal Convention Bureau, the first of its kind in our country, has been particularly successful in securing business events for the province of KwaZulu-Natal since it was established in mid-2010.

This agency together with a range of private and public sector partners have secured over 40 business events thus far worth some R2bn for our region. Some good examples of key exhibitions that have recently been secured are the World Routes Development Forum for 2015 - the world's most significant aviation trade show; the Sport and Event Tourism Exchange for the period 2012 – 2014 as well as the 2016 Instalment of the World Aids Congress.

We are particularly proud of what are two of South Africa's and Africa's most significant exhibition centres namely the Inkosi Albert Luthuli International Conventional Centre (popularly-known as the Durban ICC) and Durban Exhibition Centre and the Royal Show Grounds. The Durban ICC is Africa's most significant convention centre. Furthermore, the Royal Showground's hosts Africa's flagship agricultural show - the Royal Show - and the most important horticultural show in the Southern Hemisphere, the Sunday Tribune Garden Show on an annual basis.

We are also pleased to report that the publication ‘Business Travel Destinations’ together with ‘Visa’ credit card have awarded our province for the second year running, the prestigious title of ‘Africa’s Best Business Tourism or MICE destination for 2013’. You therefore have no excuse but to bring your next exhibition of event to the ‘Zulu Kingdom’.

One core benefit of business events is that it stimulates leisure tourism and further business event or tourism opportunities. Research has revealed that as many as 20 – 40% of conference delegates that attend a conference and have a stimulating overall experience of the destination in which it is hosted return as leisure tourists and very often with their family and friends. In addition they very often become key ‘word of mouth’ ambassadors for such regions which assist other potential leisure tourists and meeting and business delegates to ultimately make up their mind to visit or use such a destination as a meeting place.

We would like you to have such an experience. We invite you to enjoy this place of unparalleled beauty; culture and diversity; the province of KwaZulu-Natal, a place which we fondly refer to as the ‘Zulu Kingdom’, an area renowned for its conservation efforts, natural attractions, pre-historical and historical sites. Some of its key natural attractions include the uKhahlamba Drakensberg Park, and iSimangaliso Wetland Park World Heritage Sites, game reserves such as Hluhluwe-iMfolozi, South Africa’s oldest game reserve and where the white rhino was saved from extinction, and the Tembe Elephant Park, which reportedly has the biggest elephant in Africa.

The mysterious Drakensberg Mountain range are also renowned for its rock art evidence of the early San people or Bushmen, and this was one of the reasons why it was declared a World Heritage Site. Some of KwaZulu-Natal's most fascinating historical sites are battlefields of the like of Blood River, Isandlwana, Rorkes Drift, Talana, Colenso and Spionkop.

KwaZulu-Natal also has a rich cultural mix, which ranges from the cultures of one of the biggest Indian population concentrations outside mainland India to the famous Zulu people. We are also proud of our 'Beach Culture' a range of world class beaches, internationally recognised surf spots and shark diving reefs.

Please do not leave our region immediately after this conference. We would like you to savour these special experiences and over and above that spread the word of your experiences and to return with your friends and families as holiday makers! The Zulu Kingdom awaits you!

I thank you!