

SPEECH BY HON. MORRIS DZORO, EGH, MP, MINISTER FOR TOURISM AND WILDLIFE DURING THE WORLD TOURISM DAY HELD ON FRIDAY, 27th SEPTEMBER 2007 AT THE KENYATTA STADIUM, MACHAKOS

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Ladies and Gentlemen

Today marks the climax of a successful and eventful week which we have focused national attention to tourism potential in the country and particularly in Machakos district.

I believe that within the past seven days of activity, the people of this region have rediscovered how well endowed they are in terms of tourism attractions and products. I also believe that many members of the community now know what each one of them can do to benefit from tourism.

For a long time, Kenyans regarded tourism as the business of foreigners with their role limited to provision of services. However, all this is changing fast, and we now have more Kenyans taking up traveling as part of their lives and investing in the sector in both small and large scale enterprises. What this means is that domestic tourism is growing at a pace that had not been seen before. Last year, for example, out of the KShs. 56.2 billion realized from tourism, KShs. 18.5 billion came from domestic tourists. This figure is almost equivalent to the total tourism earnings in 2002 which was KShs. 21.7 billion.

With this outlook, there is a strong case for my Ministry and tourism stakeholders to come up with measures to ensure that these gains are not only entrenched but are maximized and sustained. That is why as we locally interpret the United Nation World Tourism Day theme “**Tourism open doors to women**” we have deliberately placed more emphasis on promoting domestic tourism.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

International tourism still remains the strongest pillar of our economy but we all know it is very sensitive to adverse developments. Perceptions of insecurity such as global terrorists’ threats or natural disasters such as the Tsunami that hit the Far East can bring down a thriving tourism business if it is solely based on international visitor arrivals. On the other hand domestic tourism can withstand such threats thus cushioning the industry from adversity.

At present, domestic tourism has become a significant form of tourism in Kenya owing to the rapid economic recovery that we are experiencing, backed by aggressive marketing. We foresee the local tourism business going up significantly as the incomes of Kenyans gradually increases. My Ministry’s objective is to tap on these positive developments and encourage all Kenyans to become active participants in domestic tourism. In this regard, we recently established the Domestic Tourism Council with membership from all

stakeholders in the industry to develop this sub-sector to its full potential.

We are now reaching out to the communities to sensitize them on the rich heritage which can not only contribute to economic growth but can also transform their lives if well exploited. Here in the Eastern region, we have a thriving culture with unmatched handicraft talent which we have identified as key products to be developed for tourism. Here, I want to recognize the Wamunyu Wood Carvers' Cooperative Society for the efforts they have made in sustaining the art since commercial wood carving in Ukambani region started in 1918. This community-based enterprise now needs to grow to the next level where it can be able to sell its products online as there is a huge market. This is what happened to the Malindi Woodcarvers Cooperative Society which is now a success case both in terms of organization and income generation.

The others places that we have identified during this tourism week with high potential are:

- Kwakatunga Forest which is a very scenic site and a typical rain forest endowed with rich bird life and an ideal picnic site;
- The Magic hill at Kwamuilu where an un-usual anti-gravity phenomenon yet to be explained continues to attract people from near and far;
- The Lukenya Hills and ranches where you can watch sand harvesting sites, stone quarry, plains' game and ranches;
- The Iveti honey making venture which blends both traditional and modern hives technology just to name a few.

By recognizing these areas as tourists' sites, we want to create an Eastern circuit which tour operators can use with Kitui, Machakos and Makueni as the focal points. Here we want to open up an Eastern circuit that will promote community based tourism where local people can develop their traditional products and others especially focus on their economic empowerment.

I want to encourage these organized groups to look for funding opportunities from agencies such as the Tourist Trust Fund. This Fund is a financing programme formed by

the Government and the European Union that focuses on diversifying sustainable tourism projects and optimizing tourists' satisfaction. Under this programme, proposals for tourism related business are invited to be considered for funding. Community ventures that seek to develop tourism related business and have links to conservation and protection of natural resources are particularly encouraged to apply.

While in the past, tourists were more interested with wildlife, sceneries and hotels, currently more and more visitors are keen on experiencing the cultures of their hosts. This has spurred the development of cultural tourism and is now one of the fastest growing tourism products. This trend has brought about new opportunities for the rural based communities to benefit from tourism related activities in the name of Home-stays.

In this new initiative that my Ministry is promoting, we are encouraging people who have suitable houses to accommodate visitors to explore how they can do it. Officers from my ministry are available to examine the standards of such houses and make necessary recommendations for licensing. Soon we shall come up with specific standards for Homes-stays so that this form of hospitality can be integrated in the mainstream tourism industry for the benefit of the rural communities.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

As we observe this year's World Tourism Day today, we are celebrating the gains we have made in the last five years. From less than 1% growth in 2002, we are now above 10% growth and steadily going up. Tourism is now the leading foreign exchange earner in Kenya and one of the fastest growing economic sectors. It is one of the top five sources of foreign exchange to over 80% of the countries in the world. Given that it is a labour intensive industry, tourism opens many job opportunities within the areas that receive many visitors.

To enable as many Kenyans as possible to benefit from this thriving sector, my Ministry is opening new tourists' circuits within all corners of the country. We have now opened the Western, the Northern and the North Rift circuits to not only ease pressure on the popular sites such as the beach and the wildlife parks, but also to spread the gains to all parts of the country. That is why we hold the Kenya Tourism Week / World Tourism Days in different places and mainly focusing on the unexplored areas so that they too can be marketed.

During the Kenya Tourism Week that is coming to a close today, we have tried to create networks of tourism stakeholders who will contribute to its growth by organizing relevant forums where they could participate in exchange of ideas. This includes facilitating access of local people to the tourism product while educating the communities on local attractions.

There are many other grand initiatives currently in place especially in diversifying the range of tourists' products that we offer and developing new ones such as cultural tourism, sports tourism, agro tourism and others. What we need now is more and more investments to ensure sustainability of our tourism for posterity. This is the only way that tourism will empower everyone including our rural communities economically and

significantly reduce poverty.

In conclusion I want to encourage women to come out strongly and showcase what they are good at. Most of the products we see in the market today such as basketry, beadworks and many others pass through the hands of women in the production processes. However, when it comes to marketing, you find it is mostly the men who dominate and hence reaping the lion's share of the profits. I encourage women to come strongly and participate in the entire process of product developments and promotion because (indeed) **“Tourism opens doors to women”**.

I wish to thank all those who have ensured that we have a successful Kenya Tourism Week and wish you God blessings as you embark on new ventures into Kenya's tourism industry.

Ahsanteni sana!

Hon. Morris Dzoro EGH, MP
MINISTER FOR TOURISM & WILDLIFE