

SPEECH BY HON. MORRIS DZORO, EGH, MP MINISTER FOR TOURISM & WILDLIFE, DURING THE OCCASION OF THE 10TH KENYA TOURIST BOARD ANNIVERSARY HELD ON 12TH JULY 2007 AT KENYATTA INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE CENTRE, NAIROBI

Published on: Friday, July 13th 2007

Assistant Ministers, Hon. Raphael Muriungi and Hon. Kalembe Ndile,

Permanent Secretary, Ministry of Tourism and Wildlife,

Chairman, Kenya Tourist Board

Managing Director, Kenya Tourist Board,

Tourism industry stakeholders,

Distinguished Guests,

Ladies and Gentlemen

Today is indeed a great day for all of us as we join the Kenya Tourist Board in their celebration of ten years of existence. It is a day to savour the successes and reflect on the lessons learnt not only by KTB but also by the entire tourism sector in Kenya.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

You will all agree with me in noting that it has taken KTB a long journey for them to be where they are today. The organization was formed by the Government out of sheer necessity and due to the great importance attached to the tourism sector. If we were to throw a glance back to the 1990's, we see a tourism sector that was in the midst of many challenges and lacking a clear focus in marketing and promotion. It is upon this realization that the Government through a Legal Notice established the Kenya Tourist Board as a state corporation with the mandate of promoting and marketing Kenya as a tourist destination both internationally and locally.

Ladies and Gentlemen

Right at the onset, KTB was plunged into the deep end of challenges and little wonder the organization has grown strong and can now boast of a trail of considerable successes. What do I mean by this?

It does not require much effort for us in the tourism sector to be reminded of the 1997 Likoni Clashes that saw the tourism arrivals nose-dive by almost 50% especially at the Coast Province. The ensuing El Nino rains of the same year wrecked havoc on our infrastructure thus further affecting the tourism sector.

To worsen the situation, the terrorist related bombings that targeted the US Embassy in Nairobi in 1998 and later Paradise Hotel in Kikambala resulted into an upsurge of negative publicity in the international media and travel advisories imposed on us by our main tourist generating countries.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

In face of this grim picture, the Kenya Tourist Board as the organization charged with the duty of promoting Kenya as a tourist destination had a choice to make: either to coil back or soldier on and put Kenya back on the global tourism map. As the Minister responsible for Tourism, I am proud of the fact that KTB opted for the latter, thus contributing immensely to the status of the tourism sector that we are enjoying today.

The members of the KTB staff put on a brave face and worked with other stakeholders to ensure that our tourism sector remains significant. Within a few years we have all witnessed a turn-around in the sector with tourist earnings increasing by over 100 per cent from Kshs. 25.8 billion in 2003 to 56.2 billion in 2006.

Similarly, tourist arrivals have increased from about 1 million to 1.6 million over the same period. Domestic tourism has now become more significant than ever before with more and more Kenyans taking time off to enjoy our tourist facilities and attractions.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

I need not belabour the point that Kenya Tourist Board has done a commendable job in promoting other tourist products in addition to our traditional beach and wildlife products. Cultural tourism has become a major component of our tourism sector and now the entire world knows that our cultural heritage goes beyond the Maasai community.

It is needless to mention that the eco-tourist products that have come up especially for the last five years are many and communities are taking them as an avenue for reaping the benefits emanating from the tourism sector.

This strategy of product diversification has seen the opening up of areas that were previously not frequented by tourists. These include the Western Region, Mt. Kenya circuit, North Rift and even the Northern frontier.

I would like to acknowledge the great effort made by Kenya Tourist Board in diversifying the source markets for our tourism. Initially, we only thought of Western Europe in our tourism marketing endeavours despite the fact that all of us knew the great danger associated with putting all the eggs in one basket.

Following the travel advisories of 2003, the lesson came to us the hard way and now we know better. In this regard, I am happy to note that KTB have made inroads in Eastern Europe, China, Japan and Middle East.

What has amazed me most is the indomitable spirit shown by our tourism marketers and their realization that travel advisories cannot diminish the beauty of our country in the

eyes of potential tourists. A simple glimpse on the increased arrivals from the US market can attest to this. Currently, the US has overtaken Germany to become the second leading market for our tourism.

We all welcome the new focus adopted by the Kenya Tourist Board in marketing this country as a tourist destination. The Board is now focusing more on the end consumer through advertising, PR Campaigns, and consumer campaigns both directly and in partnership with the travel trade. This will enable us give a true and solid picture of what we have to offer as well as tap into the high end of the tourism markets in line with the new Government policy.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

As we all know, marketing a tourist destination is a huge task that cannot be accomplished by any single entity without input from other partners. Tourism stakeholders from the private sector, Government agencies including foreign missions, development partners and communities have played a key role in supporting the Kenya Tourist Board in its endeavours.

On behalf of KTB, I would like to say many thanks for your great support. This is well exemplified by the Tourism Market Recovery Programme that we all undertook in a spirit of brotherhood and all of us can now say that our efforts were not in vain. We call upon all of you to join us as we take the extra mile that is ahead of us in tourism development and marketing. As you are all aware, tourism has been recognized as one of the sectors to drive the economy towards achievement of the new socio-economic blueprint, that is, Vision 2030.

The challenge before us is work together as tourism stakeholders in order to consolidate and sustain the growth that we have so far attained. It is with utmost tenacity that we should guard against going back to those dark days of closure and dilapidation of tourism facilities and consequent loss of tourism income and jobs.

According to the feedback we get from KTB, the tourism stakeholders in the private sector have the challenge of investing in order to provide adequate bed capacity, continuously improving the quality of service to attract up market tourists and creating packages for the domestic tourists who are increasingly becoming important. I have no doubt on my mind that with concerted efforts, we will be able to scale these challenges.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

In a nutshell, I am sure that you will all agree with me in recognizing that Kenya Tourist Board has done an excellent job since its inception. We therefore need to laud the efforts of all KTB staff as we celebrate their tenth anniversary.

With those remarks, I once again congratulate KTB and wish them fruitful years ahead.
Thank you.

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