



## DIRECTORATE OF INFORMATION AND COMMUNICATION

*Press Release N°318/2016***AU PROMOTES AFRICA AS A HIGH POTENTIAL TOURIST DESTINATION TO AMERICAN BUSINESSES AT THE 11<sup>TH</sup> ANNUAL PRESIDENTIAL FORUM ON AFRICA TOURISM**

**New York, USA – 19 September 2016:** The African Union (AU) Deputy Chairperson H.E. Mr. Erastus Mwencha led a delegation of key African policy makers and businessmen to champion the growth of tourism between Africa and the United States of America at the 11<sup>th</sup> Presidential Forum on African Tourism which was organised by NYU Africa House, Africa Travel Association (ATA) and the Corporate Council on Africa. The forum took place on the side lines of the 71<sup>st</sup> session of the United Nations General Assembly (UNGA).

The forum brought together key stakeholders with an aim of accentuating the role played by the tourism sector in driving inclusive growth and development. In attendance were members of the diplomatic corps, business people and representatives from the American tourism sector, airlines, media as well as faculty and students of New York University.

During his keynote speech, H.E. Mr. Mwencha noted that Africa enjoys one of the fastest-growing tourism markets of the last decade with the number of tourist arrivals on the Continent growing from 17.4 million in 1990 to 65.3 million in 2014; an increase of over 375 percent. Income generated from tourism has increased exponentially with Africa generating over \$43 billion in tourism revenues in 2014, reflecting a steep uninterrupted upward trend from previous years. Africa is the second fastest growing tourism region after South East Asia, due to the rise in international arrivals to Africa from emerging economies in Asia and Central and Eastern Europe. However in spite of its growth, tourism only contributes 3% of

the continent's GDP and 7% of total employment in Africa and African arrivals constitute only about 5 percent of the world's international tourist arrivals, which represents only a 3.5 % share in the global market.

In light of the above statistics and to take better advantage of the opportunities inherent in the tourism sector, the continent has developed a Common Approach to transform African economies which is enshrined in the AU's Agenda 2063. The AU and NEPAD, along with other pan-African organisations such as the African Development Bank, have adopted a package of policies and agreements to boost tourism and by extension economic growth including:

- Development of infrastructure through the AU's Programme for Infrastructure Development in Africa which puts forward a package of priority infrastructure and energy projects, which would positively impact tourism on the Continent.
- Establishing an open-skies policy which seeks to liberalize air services on the Continent in order to make them more available and competitive.
- Educational programmes that aim to increase literacy rates and promoting high quality vocational training
- Branding the continent through NEPAD's action plan for tourism which addresses the issue of marketing and branding as well as to mitigate against perceptions of political instability and civil unrest as well as alarmist news reporting which can seriously hamper branding efforts and kill the tourism sector
- Promoting free movement of people by encouraging African countries to liberalize cross border movement of people within Africa personified in Visa free travel for African nationals
- Reinforcing the AU's regional integration initiatives such as the East African Community (EAC) acting as a regional bloc to attract tourists from all over the world to various destinations in East Africa

The Deputy Chairperson concluded his address by inviting U.S. and international investors to participate in the growing African tourism market as Foreign direct investment (FDI) not only brings capital, but also much needed technology, know-how and management solutions which can enhance the development of tourism.

Hon. Vincent Biruta, the Minister of Environment and Forestry while making a speech on behalf of H.E. Paul Kagame, extolled Rwanda's strong culture of hospitality and invited the audience to attend the 41<sup>st</sup> Annual World Tourism conference to be held in Kigali in November 2016. Hon. Biruta spoke about the positive effects of integrating local communities in the management of Rwanda's natural sources; a strategy which has been combined with the use of technology to foster community ownership (including the conversion of former poachers) and active participation in protection of Rwanda's flora and fauna encouraging local business growth and enhancing key social welfare initiatives in health and education.

The audience also benefitted from an Africa Tourism Ministerial Roundtable to discuss the theme **"Driving Africa Tourism Growth Through Innovation, Entrepreneurship and Technology"** The panel was made up of African ministers managing the tourism portfolio in their respective countries and included Hon. Vincent Biruta (Rwanda), Hon. Nina Intalou (Mali), Hon. T. Nambahu (Namibia), Hon. Sidi Tunis (Sierra Leone) and Hon. Walter Mzembi from Zimbabwe and who is also the Chairperson of the UN World Tourism Organisation Commission for Africa (UNWTO) (CAF) and has received endorsement from the African Union as the choice for Africa to become the next Secretary General of the United Nations World Tourism Organization.

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