



ADDRESS OF H.E. DR. AMANI ABOU-ZEID, AUC COMMISSIONER FOR INFRASTRUCTURE AND ENERGY AT THE VIDEO CONFERENCE MEETING OF THE AFRICAN UNION SUB-COMMITTEE ON TOURISM, , 21ST APRIL 2020

- **Honourable Chair of the Tourism Sub-Committee**
- **Honourable Ministers of Tourism**
- **Dear Colleagues**
- **All protocols observed:**

On behalf of the African Union Commission and on my own behalf, I would like to express my profound gratitude to my brothers, Hon. Ministers of Tourism for honouring our invitation to attend this virtual meeting despite the difficult period we are all going through to contain the negative impact of COVID-19 pandemic.

This is a very encouraging and clear signal that we are all committed to pooling our efforts to mitigate the devastating impacts of this global outbreak and most of all that we commit ourselves to protect and facilitate the development of the tourism industry in Africa for the benefit of the continent and its people.

- **Honourable Ministers**
- **Ladies and gentlemen**

Tourism is one of the most important sectors in Africa. This is an industry that, more than others, permeates the socio-economic life of the majority of Africans. It links Africans across borders and provides livelihood to all segments of the African Populations. The value of the tourism industry in Africa now stands at over USD 165 billion accounting for 7.8% of the continent's GDP, which exceeds the contribution from manufacturing and the banking sector. The industry accounts for more than 6.2% of total investments valued at USD 28.5 billion and employs over 20 million people hence accounting for 6.5% of the total workforce. According to the 2017 report of the World Travel and Tourism Council (WTTC) it was further projected that at 5%, the tourism industry will grow much faster than the forecasted 4.8% economic growth rate for the continent over the next ten years.

Most importantly, tourism contributes significantly to community development and provides many opportunities for women's self-employment in income-generating activities. Women make up nearly 60% of the tourism workforce in Africa. However, their contribution is largely in the low-status, low-paid, and precarious jobs.

Globally, the tourism industry is bracing itself for an economic impact that could potentially push several countries into recession, as a result of the ongoing coronavirus crisis on all continents. Without a steady stream of visitors the tourism industry alone is expected to experience an unprecedented financial loss of billions per month. Corona virus has disrupted the supply Chain worldwide by a terrible shock to mobility.

UNWTO has revised its 2020 forecast for international arrivals and receipts, though emphasizes that such any predictions are likely to be further revised. The outbreak of Coronavirus COVID-19 presents the tourism sector with a major and evolving challenge.

In Africa, where the stylized facts on tourism show that the sector has become an important contributor to the continental GDP, employment and exports in recent years, this outbreak is not just impacting people and the health care systems of the continent but is also severely affecting one of the critical tourism socio-economic enablers and service sectors for many countries and economies across the continent – Aviation. It is very clear that the pandemic is challenging the viability of the continental air transport system as never before in history.

As COVID-19 deforms the global economy, tourism is likely to be one of the worst-hit sectors in Africa. The continent is just recovering from the aftermath of the deadly Ebola virus, but the pandemic is reversing earlier gains. In many places, hotels are laying off workers while travel agencies are closing.

The coronavirus epidemic is putting up to 20 million jobs in the continental travel and tourism sector at risk, with travel likely to slump by more than a quarter this year, Africa being among the most affected continents. This impact would depend on how long the epidemic lasts and could still be exacerbated by recent restrictive measures, such as those precautionary taken by African countries themselves.

There is no telling how long it will take to bring COVID-19 under control, or how many people will be affected. However, it is too early to fully estimate the impacts this outbreak will have. The damage to the travel and tourism sectors is just beginning to show. But We African governments in an attempt to safeguard our tourism industries, must act now, working in cooperation with think tanks, regional organizations, communities and international actors, to take steps to limit the damage, to design effective solutions – and lay the foundations for a healthier, more resilient future.

- **Hon. Ministers,**

The objective of this meeting is therefore to exchange ideas on a comprehensive response and recovery plan for the Tourism sector in line with the Continental Strategy on COVID-19. I am glad to inform you that the Department of Infrastructure and Energy has been working closely with the Africa CDC, Social Affairs Department and our key partners in the African Tourism sector to put together some proposals that will be submitted to you for consideration.

- **Honourable Ministers**
- **Ladies and gentlemen**

The African Union Commission has launched a number of key Agenda 2063 flagship programmes that are expected to accelerate overall economic growth including development

of the tourism sector. These include the **Single African Air Transport Market (SAATM)** which was launched in January 2018 and the **African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA)** whose agreement was signed in March 2018 together with the Protocol on the **Free Movement of Persons, Right of Residence and Right of Establishment**. The latter also addresses the process to establish a single **African Passport**. Furthermore, the ongoing implementation of the **Programme for Infrastructure Development Infrastructure in Africa (PIDA)** is achieving significant progress in the fields of aviation, railway, road, ICT and energy networks that are aimed at interconnecting and bringing about economic transformation of the continent.

It is obvious that these major and bold initiatives, will facilitate ease of movement and doing business in the Africa which are key factors for boosting development of the entire tourism industry in the continent.

- **Honourable Ministers**
- **Ladies and gentlemen**

On behalf of the African Union Commission, I would like to express my appreciation that we have been getting from our various partners in accomplishing our work in this sector. In particular, I would like to mention the UN Economic Commission for Africa (UNECA) who have always been with us and the World Tourism Organisation (UNWTO) which has provided a comprehensive platform for the Tourism Ministers to deliberate on pertinent issues related to Tourism and Covid 19 pandemic.

Once again, I feel greatly honoured to be with you in this important meeting and share your invaluable wisdom on the best way of protecting and advancing the continent's tourism agenda. I believe, we will have a very fruitful meeting with the right outcome

Thank you for your kind attention.