

**REMARKS BY H.E SAMUEL OLE TUNAI, CHAIRMAN TOURISM AND WILDLIFE COMMITTEE
DURING THE NATIONAL STAKEHOLDERS FORUM HELD AT RADISSON BLU ON 12TH
FEBRUARY 2018.**

**The Cabinet Secretary, Hon. Najib Balala,
Principal Secretary Mrs Fatuma Hirsi Mohamed,
Governor Mike Sonko!**

It is great to be here with KTB CEO, Dr Betty Radier, the Chairman Jimmy Kariuki, County CECs, officials from the Ministry of Tourism and Wildlife. And of course, all the stakeholders present here today!

Let me begin by thanking KTB for organizing this important National Tourism stakeholders Forum. This radical approach is perhaps the first serious national effort in decades to transform the tourism sector. The launch of our Marketing Strategy is timely and is a sure bet in ensuring a cohesive communication of Brand Kenya! Well done!

Can I just say how delighted I am that in less than a month, we are meeting for the second time to pitch for a strategic direction in the tourism sector. It simply underscores the importance of this industry and our commitment to succeed!

And you know, just last week, KTB released some figures which showed that we have, for the first time, welcomed more than 1.4 million international visitors to Kenya over the last year. This is a 9.8% increase from the 1.3 million visitors we received in 2016.

Domestic Tourism performance saw an increase of 15.9% in bed nights from 3.5million in 2016 to 4.05million in 2017.

In terms of revenue, tourism receipts increased by 20% from Kshs 99.69 billion in 2016 to Kshs 119.9 billion last year.

This means that overall, significant strides have been made in the right direction! But it also means that the numbers can be doubled or even tripled! It can be done! But only if we change course!

It is often said that:

“The most resilient societies foster a pervasive culture of innovation at all levels of their growth - one that values risk-taking, embraces experimentation and considers failure an inevitable part of thinking boldly.”

In other words, to grow the tourism sector, we must innovate! Left on its own, the growth is slow and frustrating!

You know it is over 15 years since we passed one million annual visitors. But while our competitors have seen a steady increase in numbers, it has taken us more than 15 years for visitor numbers to climb from 1 million to 1.4 million. That is stagnation!

Let me reiterate again! Even the slightest increase in numbers has major ramifications for our economy! Look at the transport operators, the service industries not to mention jobs!

Tourism is a key super growth sector. A big employer of Kenyans, any increase in numbers will have a multiplying effect on employment.

We know that tourism builds personal links to our country and it encourages further trade and investment. International visitors, for example, are more likely to buy Kenyan products and services after visiting.

Getting people into the Country is just the first step. Their lasting perception of a destination is whether they maximize their time or spent it lamenting about poor services and poor products.

Excellent products are critical to a great experience for a tourist and to the success of our tourism sector in general.

The Council of Governors is cognizant of contribution that each County can inject into our overall success. Indeed counties represent the best frontiers for a national reawakening of the Tourism Sector. In this regard, we reaffirm our commitment to catalyze growth of the sector and ensure broad based approach on sustainable tourism growth.

As a policy statement, we have resolved that each County must identify and promote at least two quality products that will serve as tourist attractions. We strongly believe that our Country is endowed with natural beauty that can only be exploited through concerted effort by local communities supported by their County Governments!

This includes the identification and designing of appropriate inter county annual festivals that enable Counties to showcase their products. You are all aware of the Turkana Festival “Tobongu Lore” - Welcome Home! While historians recall that Turkana is the cradle of mankind, we haven’t quite made it a tourist attraction!

Other Counties are gearing up to conceptualize and tell their own stories. Lamu is already on it! If each County was to come up with their own weekly festival, we could easily create a thriving extravaganza that will keep visitors excited throughout the year!

Because when you think about it, why do people throng the Brazilian capital every year in February? It is the Samba Festival! The annual Reed Dance among the Swazi is another example!

The same can be said about the food festivals in Singapore or the iconic Moroccan culture! These societies have simply used their cultures as a riveting focal attraction to their countries!

Their success is rooted on the timeless essence of culture. As someone once said:

“Culture is the intersection of people and life itself. It is how we deal with life, love, death, birth disappointment...all of that is expressed in culture.”

These cultural festivals could easily open up the Country to a booming revenue stream as well as potential investors in the sector.

We do so in the realization that we are a diverse nation with amazing cultures. This is our strength. We cannot compete with Dubai and their air-conditioned Malls! That is really the only attraction they have!

Yet they receive more international tourists annually because they have created a buzz about their glitzy buildings and shopping malls! I assure you that when we finally get our story together, they cannot march us!

Simply put, it is imperative that we adopt this competitive and transformative approach in order to grow the tourism sector! Our respective Counties can complement the National initiatives to market our treasures!

All these initiatives demonstrate an innovative Council of Governors that is prepared to adapt and to work with the industry and achieve our common goals.

I therefore confirm to you that every County has put in concerted efforts aimed at growing the tourism sector throughout the Country. The path towards a booming tourism industry is on course!

The CECs in particular will continue to play a significant role. As leaders in this mission, I want to thank you all for your efforts to guide your Counties in these exciting and challenging times.

Tourism deserves our focus and I encourage all the stakeholders to keep partnering with us to offer your expertise and insights so that the businesses and the industries you lead will realise their enormous potential.

It is going to be a tough assignment - perhaps even more difficult to achieve! So let me leave you with these beautiful words by Harriet Tubman:

“Every great dream begins with a dreamer. Always remember, you have within you the strength, the patience, and the passion to reach for the stars to change the world.”

I assure you all of the full support of the Council of Governors! Together we can rewrite the history of tourism growth! Let us do it!

Thank you very much.