

MEDIA RELEASE - 18 February 2003

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MOOSA UPBEAT ABOUT TOURISM GROWTH IN SOUTH AFRICA

DEPARTMENT OF ENVIRONMENTAL AFFAIRS AND TOURISM
REPUBLIC OF SOUTH AFRICA
MEDIA STATEMENT
Contact Phindile Makwakwa: 082 850 9559

The Minister of Environmental Affairs and Tourism, Mohammed Valli Moosa, participated in the parliamentary media briefings organized by Government Communication and Information System (GCIS) this morning (Tuesday, 18 February). Sharing a platform with the Ministers of Labour, Education, and Public Works in the Human Resource Development and Employment Strategy presentation, Minister Moosa gave an overview of the successes and challenges faced by his department in the year 2003.

The Minister reiterated that South Africa remained the best performing tourist destination in the World, with the latest statistics showing that foreign tourist arrivals to South Africa increased by 10.1% for the first ten months of 2002 - 478 580 tourists - compared to the same period the previous year.

"October 2002 recorded the highest monthly foreign tourist arrivals in 2002 and this is great news not only for the tourism industry but for the country as a whole," said the Minister. "The job opportunities created by tourist visits to our country are enormous". A total of 579,355 foreign tourists visited the country in October last year against 480,464 in October 2001, recording a 20.6% (98,891) growth - the highest since 1998. (See attached table)

The other focus of the briefing was on the legislation to be tabled before Parliament this year and includes two conservation bills and the marine and air quality bills. The Minister emphasized the need for a Biodiversity Bill, especially in view of the unregulated nature of the biodiversity environment. "Most companies including foreign corporate giants obtain our indigenous plants and patent them for their selfish ends and we want to bring a stop to that," said the Minister.

The hosting of the World Parks Congress in September 2003 was also raised as a milestone for conservation. The congress will be held in Durban from 8-17 September.

He also emphasized the importance of the establishment of an environmental court in Hermanus in conjunction with the department of Justice, Public Works, Prosecuting authority and the Asset Forfeiture unit.

"This measure will expedite the prosecution of environmental crimes which have had to wait too long in the magistrates courts," said the Minister. Asked whether the department was considering a total ban on abalone, he said although this proposal was being discussed, government has "not yet lost the battle in the fight against abalone poaching" and a total ban may not be necessary.

The air quality discourse and enforcement will receive further attention this year and the department will strengthen its legislation to deal with defaulting companies. The Minister promised to deal firmly with companies who do not comply with their operating permits, adding that the department would not hesitate to close down these companies if the need arose.

Finally Minister Moosa acknowledged South Africa's international role in the WSSD (World Summit on Sustainable Development) outcomes implementation process. The Minister has been appointed to chair the 11th Session of the United Nations Commission on Sustainable Development (CSD), which takes place in New York from 28 April to 09 May 2003.

"My appointment as chair of the 11th session of the Commission on Sustainable Development will give South Africa an opportunity to influence the direction of the WSSD outcomes process," he said.

To view the Minister's presentation, please visit the Department's website: www.environment.gov.za

Issued by Phindile Makwakwa - Ministerial Spokesperson
Ministry of Environmental Affairs and Tourism 082 850 9559