

Address by the MEC for Economic Development, Tourism and Environmental Affairs, Mr Sihle Zikalala, on the occasion of the 47th Annual General Assembly of Airlines Association of Southern Africa held at the Wild Coast Sun Hotel

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Programme director Alan Khan;

Chairperson of AASA Adv. Mondi Samson;

The Deputy Director of the Department of Transport Mr. Sinethemba Mngqibisa;

Director of Civil Aviation Ms Poppy Khoza

CEOs of member organisations;

Representatives of Airlines;

Ladies and Gentlemen

It is our distinct honour to join you today in celebration of nearly half a century of cooperation, collaboration and partnership amongst aviation industry players.

As all of us gathered here appreciate, the aviation sector is pivotally important to driving economic growth and creating job opportunities. For this reason, as the Department of Economic Development, Tourism and Environmental Affairs in KwaZulu-Natal, we have a number of exciting initiatives being undertaken in the province in support of this critical industry.

We recently celebrated tourism month during September where we encouraged the people of KwaZulu-Natal to explore and travel within their province. The tourism sector is one of the key growth sectors in the KwaZulu-Natal economy, of which an important component of tourism is air transport. Aviation plays a central role in supporting the tourism sector. Over 54% of international tourists now travel by air. Tourism is particularly important in many developing countries, where it is a key part of economic development strategies. In Africa, an estimated 5.8 million people

are employed in areas supported by the steady influx of overseas visitors, most of whom arrive in the region by air, and contributed US\$46 billion to GDP in African economies in 2014. Many believe that a career in the Aviation Industry only pertains to becoming a pilot, but sectors and careers in the tourism sector can also benefit significantly through the development of our airports and increasing our route connectivity.

It is therefore pivotal to continue developing products that will be added to the existing market and look at the value chain of those products in an effort to include more people to participate in the tourism industry.

The theme for this year's assembly - *"Building Human Capital for African Airlines"* - is very relevant and meaningful to us here in KwaZulu-Natal. Last year, the Province hosted International Civil Aviation Day, a global call to all countries to acknowledge and recognise the fundamental and potential contribution of aviation to the socio-economic development of all nations. South Africa is a signatory to the International Civil Aviation Organisation and adheres to resolution A29-1 of the United Nations by observing the International Civil Aviation Day (ICAD) annually on December 7. This event also recognised the importance of skills development and career options available in the aviation sector. Many roles in the air transport sector require a highly qualified workforce and a significant amount of training. One must also emphasize that growth especially in the aerospace sector can help drive innovation and skills development in countries that have not been associated with aircraft manufacturing such as South Africa to some extent.

Having said this, the KwaZulu-Natal Provincial Government is playing a monumental role in developing and upskilling the youth in the aviation industry. In 2014, we adopted the KZN Integrated Aerotropolis Strategy and since then we developed the

Durban Aerotropolis Master Plan, where we essentially envisage an Airport City centred around King Shaka International Airport.

This multi-billion development is anchored around King Shaka International Airport and within the confines of Dube Trade Ports Special Economic Zone and will be built over the next 50 years. Its success is also dependent on development of a wide range of skills. In this context that strategic framework, the Provincial Growth Development Plan (PGDP) and the KZN Aerotropolis Strategy emphasises the need for skills development of KZN citizens, especially the youth to meet the future demands of the KZN economy in general. One of the 10 strategic levers of the KZN Aerotropolis Strategy is Knowledge Support of the KZN Aerotropolis Development. To achieve this, we have identified the need to establish an institution to deal with the skills gap for the development of the Durban Aerotropolis, hence we are working with the University of KwaZulu-Natal in the process of establishing the Aerotropolis Institute Africa (AIA).

Ladies and Gentlemen, it must be noted that job opportunities don't only lie within an airport precinct or within the airport fence, but also outside the airport fence playing a supporting role that leverages off an airport and supports its operations. Skill sets outside the airport precinct include specialised town planning, Airport City Planning, Airport-Linked Intermodal Transport Centers including planning and operations, Smart City Planning and Implementation thereof. We should not forget other skill sets such as Environmental Specialists, Airport Commercial Development, Investment Promotion, Business Support and Tourism.

In our pursuit for global connectivity, we have formed a Route Development Committee under the auspices of the Durban Aerotropolis comprising the Dube Trade Port, Tourism KZN, Trade & Investment KZN, King Shaka International Airport

(ACSA) and the Department of Economic Development, Tourism and Environmental Affairs. In fact, we recently sent a team that is undertaking this project to attend the Annual 23rd World Routes 2017 in Barcelona, Spain.

Programme Director, KwaZulu-Natal has also embarked on an ambitious programme to rejuvenate its regional airports. Our grand plan is to improve accessibility of our regional economies by both domestic and international travellers. Moreover, regional airports play a critical role in emergency medical, disaster, fire and rescue flights, freight aircraft, fuel supply to aircraft, pilot training, firefighting training, anti-poaching exercises, tourism and other aviation activities.

These regional airports include Mkhuze Airport, Richards Bay Airport, Newcastle Airport, Pietermaritzburg and Port Shepstone Airport. In August this year, we celebrated the handover of the security perimeter fence at Mkhuze Airport and we are undertaking to rehabilitate the runway. Many of these regional airports are surrounded by vacant developable land that makes provision for non-aviation activities.

The KwaZulu-Natal provincial government has also identified the need for technological innovation and collaboration and has begun developing science and technology parks in four key regions across the province to promote the knowledge economy, drive socio-economic development and increase competitiveness. Two of these Technology Parks are housed within two airport precincts, one at Newcastle airport and the other at Pietermaritzburg Airport. But these will not operate to their optimum if we do not have enough pool of skills to administer them.

Thus, the Aerotropolis Institute Africa is placing much attention on development of key areas including: Aviation Economics, Air Cargo Logistics, Airport Management,

Smart City Airport, Airport Environmental Planning, Sustainability, Aviation Policy and Regulations, Airport Infrastructure Planning, Airport Synergies, Aviation Maintenance and Aeronautical Engineering amongst others.

Again, we do this realizing that it is essential to focus on the critical area of skills development, transformation and equipping our aviation personnel to meet the challenges of ensuring a successful airline industry into the future. This will, in turn, create a complimentary environment for trade, investment and tourism and therefore contribute to economic growth and social participation.

We reiterate that ours is the economic growth which is anchored on distribution and creation of jobs.

Ladies and gentlemen, we can only succeed in this venture if we all work together; government across all tiers, businesses, civil society and all formations of our people. We require dedication, hard work, cooperation, innovation and a willingness to learn and to sustain delivery. My parting words to you this morning, a phrase by Helen Keller is that *“The only thing worse than being blind is having sight but no vision”*. I truly believe, this the 47th Annual AASA Assembly, has great aspirations to make the aviation an ever more prosperous one, and we as Provincial Government wish you a great success.

I thank you

Sihle Zikalala, MPL

MEC for Economic Development, Tourism and Environmental Affairs