

**SPEECH BY THE PRESIDENT OF THE REPUBLIC UGANDA HIS
EXCELLENCY YOWERI KAGUTA MUSEVENI AT THE OPENING
OF THE 5TH Africa ASIA BUSINESS FORUM AT THE SPEKE
RESORT MUNYONYO 15th JUNE 2009**

Protocol observed

Ladies and Gentlemen:

First of all, I welcome you all to this important conference. I also welcome our visitors to Uganda. I am sure you have already been accorded a warm reception by our people. It may have been a long journey for some of you but it is a journey that will remain memorable as visit to the true Pearl of Africa; a land truly Gifted by Nature.

Since the pre historic times, travel has been the vehicle of trade, territorial expansion, cultural assimilation, war and peace. Travel and Tourism is the vehicle to discovery, social and economic integration and the interconnection of the world.

In the later part of the nineteenth century, the scramble for Africa began and much of the political and geographical dimensions of Africa as we know it emerged then. It is important to note that this search and scramble was started by tourists in search for discovery, trade and religious pacification. This further emphasizes the importance of tourism as a vehicle to social and economic transformation.

The Africa Asia Business forum is for the first time focusing on tourism under the theme of forging business linkages for sustainable tourism

development in Africa. We have sustained the argument that true economic transformation lies in enhancing our capacity to trade. I wish to thank the organisers and sponsors of this forum for supporting a platform that addresses the core challenges of development.

Predominantly our tourism is nature and heritage based. This is a resource that Africa has in abundance but is increasingly under the threat of erosion and depletion while competing with other social and economic mediums. I am happy that we are taking this approach of enhancing business linkages to sustainably develop our tourism.

The world has undergone a severe recession in the recent months following the spike in oil prices, food prices and the credit crunch. The interesting aspect of this phenomenon is that tourism as an economic activity has not been severely hurt in comparison to other economic sectors. This reinforces the argument that tourism has matured and is resilient to short term economic shocks.

Uganda is in the process of evaluating our economic development paradigm and moving to five year national development planning programme under the theme of Wealth Creation. Tourism is one of the core sectors from which the provision of other products and services is prioritized. This emphasizes the importance and recognition by government that tourism is an economic and social transformation sector.

The question that we are yet to ably answer is why in spite of all the natural and cultural endowment and peace, our countries have not fully utilized and benefited from the tourism resource?

We have closely examined this question and developed a response strategy aimed at improving and enhancing our competitiveness in the international market. First, we need to create awareness among the people to start looking at the natural and cultural endowments in their midst as an economic resource.

Most of the districts have not included tourism development in their development planning. I urge the ministry responsible for tourism to spearhead the awareness campaign among the tiers of political and administrative institutions and the populace to begin looking at tourism as a crucial resource and how to harness it.

Secondly, we need to add value, develop and package our tourism products. Most of our important tourist resources are not easily accessible; they lack basic sanitary facilities, good guides and are in bad state of repair.

There is need to build our domestic tourism base. The most successful destinations in the world benefit from the domestic tourism base. We should begin with the various cultural events as a good vehicle to attract visitors to the region.

The need for capacity building can not be over emphasized; tourism is an important service industry that requires skilled personnel in all its spheres. Hotel operations, tour guiding, site and travel management all require professionals.

Interventions to enhance the quality of service will continue to be supported but need to be complimented by the private sector. Professionalism will positively impact the balance sheet and should be considered as an investment rather than an avoidable expense.

The tourism fraternity should start planning and marketing the product with a regional focus. The East African Community has developed a common marketing strategy and is making progress in harmonizing the policies and utilization of Trans boundary resources. We stand to benefit from the regional tourism circuits since we have unique resources that would add value to the regional tourism product.

Investment attraction and promotion of business linkages between Africa and Asia is a key to this transformation. I am happy that this forum is focusing on this important theme. Uganda and the rest of Africa has a lot of potential that Asia can explore in terms of attracting Asian tourists, and in terms of investment. The investment climate in this destination is among the most favourable and gives true rewards. Our business enterprises are young but vibrant and would benefit from mutual partnership with Asia.

This forum offers that opportunity to dialogue on some of the critical concerns of the industry, network with a cross section of stakeholders in the public and private domain and address the issues that will promote business between our nations, enrich our people and sustainably develop tourism,

It is now my honour and pleasure to declare the Fifth Asia Africa business forum open and wish you fruitful deliberations.

FOR GOD AND MY COUNTRY