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**COMMUNICATION OF THE CHAIR OF THE UN TOURISM COMMISSION FOR
AFRICA**

**H.E. HON. RODNEY SIKUMBA, MINISTER OF TOURISM, ZAMBIA
69TH MEETING OF THE REGIONAL COMMISSION FOR AFRICA
MAHE, SEYCHELLES | 2–4 JULY 2026**

HER EXCELLENCY, THE SECRETARY-GENERAL OF UN TOURISM;

HONOURABLE MINISTER OF TOURISM OF THE REPUBLIC OF SEYCHELLES;

HONOURABLE MINISTERS;

MEMBERS OF THE REGIONAL COMMISSION FOR AFRICA;

DISTINGUISHED DELEGATES;

LADIES AND GENTLEMEN;

Allow me at the outset to express my sincere gratitude to his Excellency, the President of the Republic of Seychelles **Dr Matthew Antonio Patrick Hermine**, the Government and people of Seychelles for the warm hospitality and excellent arrangements extended to us for this 69th meeting of the UN Tourism Commission for Africa here in the beautiful city of Mahé.

I further wish to convey special appreciation to the Honourable minister responsible for tourism, **Honourable Nicola Amanda J. Bernstein**, for the exceptional reception and efforts invested in ensuring the successful hosting of this session.

I also wish to extend my appreciation to all distinguished delegates, colleagues, and partners gathered for this important session. The hospitality accorded to us in this beautiful island is a true reflection of the richness, diversity, and warmth that define our African Continent.

It is both an honour and privilege for Zambia to Chair the UN Tourism Commission for Africa during this important period for the global tourism sector. We have witnessed a strong recovery in international tourism, with arrivals in many regions surpassing pre-pandemic levels following the devastating impact of Covid-19.

However, this recovery remains fragile. The world continues to experience emerging uncertainties, including geopolitical tensions, particularly in the middle east, which have disrupted travel patterns and global tourism flows, creating ripple effects that impact global tourism flows. These developments inevitably affect our continent and call upon us to strengthen our resilience, adaptability, and collective preparedness.

The commission remains committed to addressing these emerging challenges and to developing sustainable, forward-looking solutions that will ensure tourism continues to play a central role in Africa's socio-economic transformation.

This meeting presents us with an opportunity not only to reflect on our progress but also to recalibrate our priorities and collectively chart a clear and practical path for the future of tourism development in Africa.

In this regard, allow me to highlight a few priority areas that require our collective attention.

Firstly, Education, Skills Development, and Capacity Building.

Africa's tourism competitiveness will depend on the quality, skills, and preparedness of our human capital. We must therefore continue investing in education and training programmes that equip our people particularly young people with relevant competencies to respond to evolving global tourism trends and technological advancements.

Secondly, Connectivity and Travel Facilitation.

Tourism growth on our continent cannot be fully realised without improved accessibility. Enhanced air connectivity, visa facilitation, infrastructure development, and seamless cross-border travel remain fundamental to unlocking Africa's immense tourism potential and promoting intra-African tourism.

In this regard, there is need for us to continue advocating for strengthened aviation partnerships and enhanced collaboration with key international and regional stakeholders.

Thirdly, Youth and Women Empowerment.

Tourism must remain a vehicle for inclusive growth and shared prosperity. We must intentionally create opportunities for young people and women, who constitute a significant proportion of Africa's population and whose participation is critical to the sustainability and growth of our economies.

Fourthly, Strengthening Our Creative and Cultural Industries

Africa is richly endowed with diverse cultures, traditions, heritage, and creative expressions. These are strategic assets that distinguish our continent as a tourism destination. We must therefore preserve, promote, and responsibly commercialise these resources in a manner that benefits local communities and safeguards them for future generations.

To advance the UN Tourism agenda for Africa particularly in promoting tourism as a driver of inclusive growth we must strengthen strategic partnerships and cooperation frameworks.

Initiatives such as South-South Cooperation, including strategic engagement platforms like the CAF–CAM Summit between Africa and the Americas, present significant opportunities to deepen knowledge exchange, catalyse investment, and advance sustainable tourism development across our regions.

I am confident that our deliberations during this session will be productive and solutions-oriented. I further trust that the outcomes of our discussions will generate practical recommendations aimed at addressing the challenges confronting our sector while advancing tourism growth across the African continent.

In conclusion,

Allow me to extend my heartfelt appreciation to the Secretary-General of UN Tourism, Ms. Shaikha Al Nowais, for her continued commitment to advancing tourism development on the African continent.

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I also wish to sincerely thank the Regional Director for Africa, Ms. Elcia Grandcourt, and her dedicated team for their tireless efforts in ensuring the successful organisation of this meeting.

I further extend my sincere appreciation to my two vice-chairs, Her Excellency Ms Hannatu Musa Musawa of Nigeria and His Excellency, Mr Marcio Daniel of Angola, for their unwavering support throughout my tenure thus far. I look forward to continuing to work together and to consolidating our collective efforts in driving the meaningful change we seek for our tourism sector.

I wish us all productive deliberations and a successful session.

I THANK YOU.