Speech of the Commissioner for Infrastructure and Energy
H.E. Dr Amani Abou-Zeid

on the occasion of the

63rd Meeting of the World Tourism Organization (UNWTO)’s
Commission for Africa

08 June 2020
Honourable Ronald. K. Chitotela, Minister of Tourism and Arts of Zambia; and Chair of the UNWTO Commission for Africa;

Mr. Zurab POLOLIKASHVILI, Secretary-General of the World Tourism Organization;

Honourable Ministers responsible for Tourism and Air Transport in Africa;

Representatives of Regional Economic Communities and International Organisations;

Invited Guests;

Ladies and gentlemen;

All protocols observed:

It is with pleasure that I take the floor to address you on matters which I consider top priority to economic development and cohesion of Africa. These are: Tourism and Air Transport.

I would like to thank and commend Mr. Zurab POLOLIKASHVILI, Secretary-General of the World Tourism Organization and my brothers, Hon. Ronald. K. Chitotela, Minister of Tourism and Arts of Zambia; and Chair of the UNWTO Commission for Africa, for convening this important meeting which provides an essential platform for tourism industry, especially when we are all going through unprecedented times.

It is an encouraging and clear signal that we are all committed to pooling our efforts to mitigate the devastating impacts of this global outbreak and most of all that we commit ourselves to protect and facilitate the development of the tourism industry in Africa for the benefit of the continent and its people.

Honourable Secretary General and Ministers

Ladies and gentlemen

Tourism is one of the most important sectors in Africa. This is an industry that, more than others, permeates the socio-economic life of the majority of Africans. It links Africans across borders and provides livelihood to all segments of the African Populations. The tourism industry in Africa employs over 20 million people, i.e. 6.5% of the total workforce.- half of whom are women - and accounts for 8% of the continent's GDP, which exceeds the contribution from manufacturing and the banking sector.

As COVID-19 deforms the global economy, tourism is one of the worst-hit sectors in Africa and African economies are thus probably the worst hit . Across the Continent, hotels are laying off workers while travel agencies are closing, revenues and livelihoods lost. the COVID19 outbreak did not only bring tourism to a stop , but is also severely affecting one of the critical tourism socio-economic enablers and service sectors for many countries and economies across the continent – Aviation. It is very clear that the pandemic is challenging the viability of the continental air transport system as never before in history.

The precautionary measures that have been put in place by most of African countries to contain the COVID-19 pandemic involved closure of important transport infrastructure and services. These include, among others, the closure of major international airports for
passenger flights, closure of important transport corridors affecting directly the landlocked countries and interruption of maritime and land transport corridors.
While we applaud the swift actions of our governments to save lives, it is important to note that these measures significantly affected the intra-African trade and tourism—among many other socio-economic implications.

Honourable Secretary General and Ministers
Ladies and gentlemen

In the light of these challenges, the African Union Commission has anticipated with the post COVID 19 by undertaking a series of measures to support recovery of the African Tourism and Air transport industries, with the involvement of all the key stakeholders and in close coordination with the Africa CDC, aiming at developing and implementing a comprehensive Post-COVID-19 Continental Recovery Strategy to support Tourism sector in Africa, through the establishment of two High Level Task Forces to collect and share policy and regulatory experiences and best practices that can improve COVID-19 responses and economic recovery.

I would like also to recall that The AFRICAN TOURISM STRATEGIC FRAMEWORK 2019-2028 (ATSF 2019-2028), which will serve as a guiding framework for the ongoing recovery strategy, was formulated, taking into account the UNWTO ten priorities of the Agenda for Africa, in line with the recognised socio-economic potential of the tourism industry as espoused in the AU Agenda 2063 flagship of 'making Africa the preferred destination for tourism and the requisite need for a continental tourism development framework as affirmed by the First Ten-Year Implementation Plan of the Agenda 2063, the Seychelles Communiqué 2014, the 2017 Lomé Ministerial Declaration, and the Plan of Action for Tourism (2017-2019).

More than any time before, we need to act quickly but efficiently and develop and implement coordinated and comprehensive PostCOVID-19 tourism Recovery Plans at national, regional and continental levels aiming to support the sustainability of our valuable tourism sector for generations to come, but also helping Member States to lift confinement measures and resume businesses, work and social life, in line with epidemiological and public health criteria.

The Strategies will have to guide Member States, competent authorities, industry bodies, economic operators and citizens through the next steps of the de-confinement process through packages that provide reassurances and clarity for people and a pathway to recovery for tourism and transport through a safe resume of all the sector businesses (transport, connectivity, tourism services in particular hospitality…).
Providing guidance to Member States so that they can progressively resume tourism services and implement appropriate health and safety protocols is now of vital importance.

Support innovative digital solutions not only for combating the pandemic, but also and especially for helping African tourism businesses to cope efficiently with the new realities for planning purposes, managing the flow of tourists, communication will be a valuable opportunity to seize for a thriving and competitive African Tourism.

This means how important is prioritizing the investment in digital skills, including cybersecurity and fostering digital innovation, and connecting tourism businesses and actors with existing data spaces at national, regional and Continental levels. This is
particularly important in rural, remote areas and outermost regions where tourism is fragmented and highly dependent on information, transport and travel accessibility.

**Honourable Secretary General and Ministers**

**Ladies and gentlemen**

Tourism is the backbone of the economy for many African Member States.

The pandemic is putting the growing African tourism industry under unprecedented pressure. As a result of travel and other restrictions, tourism reached a gradual halt during the first and second quarters of 2020 in Africa and globally. Tourism enterprises are facing an acute liquidity crisis. Jobs are also under threat. Without urgent action and emergency funding to bridge the period until tourism flows can resume, many companies could become bankrupt in the coming weeks or months.

Member States and regions most impacted by the downturn in tourism have to be assisted to use the possibilities offered by the Coronavirus Response Initiatives, to support tourism SMEs as part of the ongoing sectorial recovery strategies.

The COVID-19 pandemic will eventually come to an end. The months to come should not be lost for a vigorous and vibrant African tourism industry covering a range of activities such as travel, transport, accommodation, food, recreation on land and water, culture or nature.

The growth of regional tourism in Africa is, on a positive note, likely to cushion the negative impacts of the coronavirus outbreak. It is, hence, necessary that in line with Agenda 2063, African Member States, RECs and the AU, step up efforts to promote and develop regional tourism in the continent.

For the tourism to counter the Covid 19 impacts, support is now more than required and will reinforce later the perception that tourism is a sector that reacts strongly to economic, political, climatic and health crises (- the financial crisis 2008/09 – the Arab spring 2011 – Ebola outbreak...). The fast rebound of tourist arrivals and expenditures after the financial crisis shows that the sector can be resilient if appropriate supportive measures are adopted.

The purpose of our meeting is to reflect – together with UNWTO, Member States, RECs, African institutions, and the industry stakeholders,— about the African tourism of tomorrow and jointly start building a roadmap towards a sustainable, innovative and resilient African tourism ecosystem to achieve the aspirations of the AU Agenda 2063.

**THANK YOU FOR YOUR KIND ATTENTION**