

**SPEECH BY THE PRESIDENT OF UGANDA HIS EXCELLENCY YOWERI KAGUTA
MUSEVENI ON THE OPENING OF THE 4TH INTERNATIONAL INSTITUTE FOR
PEACE THROUGH TOURISM AFRICAN CONFERENCE AT THE KAMPALA SERENA
HOTEL 21ST MAY 2007**

Protocol observed

Ladies and Gentlemen:

First of all let me welcome you all and particularly to our visitors, welcome to Uganda. I am sure you have already been infected by the hospitality of our people. It may have been a long journey to some 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 notion of peace through tourism is one that this country and indeed Africa can bear true testimony. Uganda has experienced its share of conflict and can recount the effects and stagnation caused by conflict and war. In 1886, religious and political conflict led to the death of young men in the king's courtyard for standing firm to their faith and message of peace. Every year on June 3rd we remember the Ugandan Martyrs and thousands of pilgrims flock to Namugongo to celebrate the act of faith and cause of peace.

In the 1970's Ugandans suffered one of the most unfortunate and darkest chapter of our history under the rule of the late Idi Amin, we had to fight to liberate and vowed not to let our country slip back into such brutal and careless management. Recently the film industry capitalized on that history and recounted the story which some viewers thought was an exaggerated horror comedy, those of us who lived in that time, know and testify that it was very real.

The first part of the 1980's was also characterized by a struggle to gain our true democratic independence. Since 1986, our country has undergone a fundamental social and economic

transformation, thanks to the peace and stability that was ushered in by the NRM government. The strong democratic institutions and sound economic management has enabled us to build the infrastructure to facilitate the free movement of persons and spur economic growth.

I must note that the entire pacification of the country has been clouded by the instability in Northern Uganda largely manifested by misguided banditry. Recent developments in the peace process re affirm our commitment to the complete pacification of this country and entire region.

My brief recount of our history of conflict and its resolution points to important events and milestones that have affected or transformed our tourism industry and clearly expound on the fragility and inter linkage of peace and tourism.

Thanks to the act of faith by the Uganda Martyrs, faith based tourism is abound. The thousands of pilgrims that flock Namugongo actually help to grow the economy of that town and indeed Kampala. The Pentecostal faiths crusade for peace and religious tolerance and wherever they stage to spread the gospel, the livelihood of the communities is transformed by the trade opportunities that emerge.

The massacre of tourists in Bwindi in 1999 and that of the late Jimmy Sekassi in the Murchison Park in 2001 are some of the unfortunate incidents that point to the fragility of tourism and peace. The shadow of fear took too long to fade and this re emphasizes our resolve to maintain peace and stability because of the value and importance we attach to it in protecting the growth of the tourism industry.

The theme of this conference, “Building Strategic Alliances for Sustainable Tourism Development, Peace and Reconciliation on the African Continent.” is especially important in the context of Uganda and Africa’s situation. For a long time, this country has suffered from the effects of cross boarder conflict in Zaire, Rwanda, Sudan, Kenya and others. The root of these problems lies in the historical fragmentation of our people and resources, bad governance and ideological misconceptions.

The solution to some of these problems lies in regional integration and cooperation, democratic governance and pacification of the region. The benefits are enormous in terms of transboundary resource utilization, trade and investment.

It is my hope that as this conference deliberates on the important topics like healing the wounds of conflict, poverty reduction and building public private partnerships and alliances will generate new ideas and innovative approaches will emerge to concretize the achievement of the objectives and theme of this meeting.

Government recognizes tourism as the fastest growing industry with a high potential for job creation and a relatively low capitalization requirement. The country is richly endowed and task is to harness and expose its beauty to the world.

Statistics show that the world's international tourist arrivals were 842 million in 2006, Africa attracted 25.6 million, this represented 4.8 percent for Africa and 3 percent for Sub Saharan Africa respectively. In terms of growth Sub-Saharan Africa (+12.6%) leads the performance so far, pulled notably by South Africa, Kenya, Mozambique, Swaziland and the Seychelles. The estimated value of the international tourism cake was US\$683 billion in 2005, the Germans were the top spenders spent 72.7 billion the United States 69.2 billion, Britain 59.6 billion, and china 21.8 billion. In this whole business, Uganda's contribution is negligible.

The question that we have been slow to answer is why in spite of all the natural and cultural endowment and peace, the country has not fully utilized and benefited from the resource?

We have closely examined this question and developed a response strategy that will improve and enhance our competitiveness on 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 a tourism resource. Most of the districts have not included tourism development in their development planning. I urge the tourism ministry spearhead the awareness campaign among the tiers of political and administrative institutions and the populace to look at tourism as a resource and 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. The product will sell better if it is well packaged.

There is need to build our domestic tourism base. The most successful destinations in the world benefit from the domestic tourism base to sustain their operations. The various cultural events in the cultural institutions can be used as a promotional tool to attract visitors to the region. I would like to interest our traditional leaders to invite all their neighbors to the cultural celebrations.

The need for capacity building can not be over emphasized; tourism is a professional industry that requires skilled personnel in all its spheres. Hotel operations, tour guiding, site and travel management all require professionals. Government is currently supporting the training of hotel operational staff. These 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 wasteful expense.

This country has a lot to offer in terms of tourism; however we have continued to rely on the traditional and limited resources and markets to grow the industry. Product diversification and the creation of new markets is a key to the growth of our tourism, promoters of the tourism industry should therefore explore new markets like in the Far East and develop new products like sports, community and agro tourism to enrich on what we traditionally offer.

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. Uganda stands to benefit from the regional tourism circuits as it taps into the developed markets of our neighbors and has unique resources that would add value to the regional tourists.

In November this year, the country will host another important Meeting of the Commonwealth Heads of State, CHOGM. The hosting of high profile meetings is a testimony to the international confidence that the country has built over the time. The tourism service providers should take advantage of this confidence to market and expose the beauty and potential of our country to the rest of the world. Government will continue to attract international meetings to support the hospitality and tourism business.

It is important for the private sector to remember that attracting these conferences is a competitive process with other equally willing hosts. The quality and range of our services provides the competitive edge. It is therefore important that as the private sector develops their products, innovativeness, professionalism and standards are paramount.

Main streaming tourism into every sphere of our economy should become the main thrust of the effort to position the industry as a competitive and vibrant sector. All sectors in the private and public domain should focus on providing and beautifying the infrastructure and products to attract visitors.

One of the key constraints to tourism development has been the weak law and regulations to guide and enforce proper development in the industry. I am glad to note that the new tourism bill is in progress and will soon be discussed by the policy makers in parliament.

The role of the law in the sustainable development of tourism and poverty alleviation is critical. The legislation should enshrine policies that are pro poor and underpin a coherent institutional framework and supportive infrastructure for the private sector.

The lack of a strong law on tourism development has allowed the amorphous growth of the industry with low regard to standards, disharmony with international best practices and the

stagnation of key tourism resources. This has affected the productivity and competitiveness of the sector in relation to our close partners.

I therefore urge the policy makers to incorporate principles and regulations in the new legislation that will enhance the achievement of the goals of PEAP and synchronize with the millennium development goals.

I specifically would like to sign a legislation that empowers the local communities to take advantage of the opportunities to benefit from tourism and enshrine the principles of sustainable tourism development. Such a law should;

- Provide a frame work for the cooperation of the public and private sector.
- Enable the tourism board to be efficient, dynamic and supportive of the sector in promoting and expanding the tourism base.
- Be comprehensive define the principles of tourism resource protection and exploitation ensures the standards and classification of tourism resources, sites and personnel.
- Mandate and empower the state to designate and establish tourist sites and attractions
- Support professionalism and the development of manpower and employment in the industry
- Provide supportive structures and financial assistance to micro and small medium enterprises

Finally, as we grapple with the challenges of tourism development, we should not loose focus of the pre condition of peace in fostering the growth of the travel and tourism industry. I wish to reaffirm the government's commitment to the entire pacification of the country, to the maintenance of law and order, the provision of support infrastructure and sound economic management principles to facilitate the growth of the tourism industry.

It is now my honour to proclaim the week of 20th – 25th May 2007 as the **Peace through Tourism Week** and declare the conference of the 4th International Institute for Peace through Tourism in Kampala officially open.

I wish you fruitful deliberations.

FOR GOD AND MY COUNTRY

