



**STATEMENT ON OPEN SKY AND TOURISM
DEVELOPMENT**

BY

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Your Excellency the Chairperson,
Honourable Ministers,
Members of the Diplomatic Corps,
Distinguished Guests,
Dear friends of the media,
Ladies and Gentlemen,
Good day.

The African Airlines Association (AFRAA) is highly honoured to be invited and associated to this wonderful event of ATA in Accra.

I'm personally particularly delighted to address this conference in Ghana, a country of reference for its African soul, history culture and political inspiration.

It is indeed a great honour but at the same time an up-hill challenge to take the floor before this august Assembly of Ministers of Tourism experts and professionals to address a core topic of their competence, the way forward for Air Transport and tourism development in Africa.

Many questions naturally roam around: can open sky policy contribute to an effective upturn in the African tourism? Are high air fares major impediments to the blossoming of African tourism? Why after 50 years of independence and self governance, most of African countries are still loitering and questing for the right market for attractive tourism development strategy?

These violent questions need to be squarely answered without complacency if Africa really wants to pave the way to tourism development.

Your Excellency the chairperson, Ladies and gentlemen, my presentation will be structured as follows:

1. African poor performance and easy scape goats
2. Products and best practices in the profession
3. AFRAA recommendations

I. AFRICAN POOR PERFORMANCE AND EASY SCAPE GOATS.

Tourism is one of the biggest and fastest developing industries in the world: with total revenue of \$500 billions in 2004. Out of this huge turnover, Africa accounts only for \$7.5 billion which represent 2.5 % of the world tourism revenue.

In term of traffic, the number of tourists recorded in 2004 was 750 millions in the world out of which barely 25 millions (4.5%) visited Africa.

These African tourists travel to very few countries across the continent, which ranks as follows:

- South Africa 6,1 millions
- Egypt 5,5 millions
- Morocco 5 millions
- Tunisia 5 millions
- Zimbabwe 1 million

Other countries are also visited but only by hundreds of tourists. They include countries such as:

- Kenya and Tanzania
- Botswana
- Mauritius
- Nigeria
- Senegal and
- Ghana

The question is, why the others are not moving forward so as to take their fair share in this growing service industry, which does not require any high technology and so remains one of the most accessible economic development sectors to developing countries?

We do not probably fully realize in Africa the macro-economic development potentials of the tourism industry.

It is our dear wish to receive tourists but have we ever designed and put in place any policy and strategy to effectively achieve this objective?

For instance, countries that put their hope for salvation in oil production invite experts from all corners of the world to undertake research and exploration across their territories. Should we witness such mobilization of specialists to organize our tourism and dig out its wealth?

As I am confident that this ATA event is meant to strongly contribute to this move, I would like us to clear off some misleading analysis that serve

as easy scape goats when it comes to analyzing the poor development of African tourism.

Many in their quarters blame the poor development of African tourism on high air fares and also believe that an open sky policy would be a panacea for the continent. I wish to touch briefly on these subjects with you.

AIR FARES

The tourism market is one of the most globalized in the world. In the decision making process of a tourist traveler, the whole world has become a small village, furthermore a mere map on which a destination is pinpointed, many a time, for its attraction and potential fun. Cost consideration and air fare level rank behind.

It is for this reason, that South Africa, Zimbabwe, Mauritius and Kenya receive more European tourists than Mauritania, Mali, Niger and even Ghana and Togo though the air travel fares to the latter countries are normally lower as they are less distant from Europe.

OPEN SKY POLICY

It is against the same background that Americans and European tourists fly more often to Asia rather than to Africa despite the longer distance and higher air fare.

Open sky policy is neither a major driver of tourism development in the existing African environment. In fact open sky policy is expected to pave

the way for more air services, more competition and cheaper air fares which would boost the tourist traffic.

The reality is that without attractive products on site, no traffic can be promoted and no airline would be willing to operate despite the open sky policy. Many countries such as Tanzania, Mali, and Cape Verde have signed an open sky agreement with the USA without any positive impact on their tourism industry.

Ironically, since Ghana signed the Open sky agreement with the USA, the number of flights to the USA has dramatically reduced. The number of American tourists visiting Ghana might not have increased.

Your Excellency the Chairperson, Ladies and Gentlemen, air fares and open sky policy are parameters that can help enhance tourism in an attractive environment. They are not major tourism development drivers. The sole and unique driven is the product that you offer. It should meet the expectations of the market.

II. PRODUCTS AND BEST PRACTICES IN THE PROFESSION

Two types of profits are involved in mass tourism travels. A full time worker who has saved money the whole year to travel for his holiday and a retired person who has saved, his whole life, has now time and would like to tour the world.

The demand of these two clients is the same;

1. They want fun, a break, a change in their life for one or two weeks. As your tourist guests, they want to be pampered, taken care of and kept busy all days through a diversity of visits, discoveries and fun.
2. Though they are highly interested in wild life and other natural sites, they would like to continue enjoying the same level of comfort they have at home and even more. This includes hotel accommodation, food and restaurant, telecommunication facilities (phone, internet, etc...) and last but not the least, security.

This list of requirements clearly shows that natural landscapes, mountains, sea shores or wild life by themselves would not yield tourism development, no matter how beautiful they are, unless an approximate environment is created around them to provide dreaming holiday time, fun, break and change.

Most of African countries have left their natural tourists attractions in their original state without any such additional touches to make them actual tourist resorts, where people can enjoy and rejoice. Here are the main reasons for the poor tourism performance of most African countries.

III. AFRAA RECOMMENDATIONS

1. Creation of tourism development Authorities

Tourism should be viewed as one of the most important development projects in African countries. As such, it requires to be organized and ran

as a business project, autonomous from government's general administration with its own budget, objective and economic result targets.

Such an autonomous body would access all the needs and requirements for an appropriate tourism development and take initiatives to be responsive to these needs, which might include:

- Road pavement
- Hotel and lodge constructions
- Wild life reserves and parks organization.
- Cleaning of the sea shores and other tourist sites
- Road transport organization
- Financial support and incentive to private sector to get fully involved.

2. Security Enhancement

African countries must heighten the security and protection provided for their tourist guests. The police presence and security assurance should be visible all over so as to make tourists feel confident and comfortable.

Harassment of beggars at street cross roads should seriously be dealt with to avoid all sorts of embarrassment. Road transport changes should be fixed, published and controlled so as to avoid easy cheating of foreigners.

3. Promotional Organization foreign markets

Tourism development authorities will have to use experts of the main tourist markets such as those of ATA to help them understand the

motivations of the tourists, assess their expectations and design with the intelligence of these insiders, the appropriate products to offer.

Once the products are defined, they would need to be promoted on the market with the assistance of the same associate experts.

Events such as African days should be organized on site in the US and European countries with African cultural performances.

We need to penetrate the restaurant sector in the US, Europe, and Asia with African cuisine and entertainment so as to slowly incite the general public to visit Africa without apprehension. This type of action should be directly or indirectly initiated, engineered and monitored by the tourism development authorities.

3. Development of a New Air Transport Policy and Creation of Strong Carriers

Across the world, there is no tourism thriving country without at least a strong national carrier to back the economic performance of the sector. In Africa for instance, the top tourist countries have the most important airlines. They are; South Africa, Egypt, Morocco, Tunisia, Kenya and Mauritius.

The tourism traffic increases the activities of the airline and most of the time, the domestic airline operations enlarge the scope of products that the country can offer nationwide and the tourists feel save to deal throughout with the same carrier that has an office in their countries back home.

Reliable air services and national airline development must definitively be part of the agenda of the tourism development authorities.

Your Excellency the Chairperson, once the traffic is there, no matter how many carriers would be operating. Competition should prevail and help improve on air services and reduce costs for the benefits of the travelers and also for a much more development of the tourism and airline industries.

CONCLUSION

Your Excellency the Chairperson, as I have deliberately escaped from the narrow areas of high fares, and open sky matters where usually tourism and airline experts undertake endless debates.

I am actually more interested in development strategies in your sector because, tourism ranks among the few gold mines that Africa can easily explore and derive wealth from.

Tourism prosperity would be that of the airlines and I believe that the airline industry is indispensable for the continent economic integration and development.

As you can see, Tourism and Airline Industries are key factors for the continent's economic salvation. We need to realize it and work together hand in hand to develop them jointly.