



Address on World Tourism Day 2025

The Journey of Transformation at Constitution Hill

Distinguished guests, ladies and gentlemen, I greet you all and extend Chief Justice Mandisa Maya’s greetings to you as well. Be assured that we in the Judiciary also understand the significance of occasions such as we are celebrating today. It is poignant to address you on World Tourism Day 2025 at this historic site of Constitution Hill. This place, once a prison that confined the likes of Nelson Mandela and Mahatma Gandhi, has transformed into a beacon of freedom and justice. The recent UNESCO World Heritage inscription of Constitution Hill underscores its significance and ensures that the stories of those who fought for freedom are preserved to inspire future generations. As we look around this hilltop, we are reminded how far South Africa has come – from a past of oppression to a present founded on democracy and human rights. Constitution Hill’s evolution from a place of injustice to the home of our Constitutional Court symbolises the triumph of justice over tyranny. It stands as a living monument to the resilience of our people and the transformative power of our Constitution.

Our gathering today celebrates not only tourism but also the ongoing transformation of our society. This hill, now a vibrant museum and heritage precinct, welcomes visitors from around the world to learn about our past and our transition to freedom. Every person who passes through the old prison into the Constitutional Court’s chambers becomes part of a living dialogue between past and present. As we mark World Tourism Day under the theme “Tourism and Sustainable Transformation,” let us draw inspiration from this place: even from the darkest chapters, new hope can arise, and every step forward is guided by our values of dignity, equality, and freedom.

Tourism as a Catalyst for Sustainable Transformation

It is in this spirit of renewal that we turn to tourism itself, for it too carries the power to transform societies when guided by values of inclusivity, dignity, and sustainability.

Tourism is far more than leisure or sightseeing – it can be a powerful engine of positive change. The United Nations World Tourism Organisation chose this year’s theme to highlight tourism’s potential as an agent of sustainable development. Tourism, when managed responsibly, can uplift communities and foster understanding across cultures. It has the capacity to boost local economies, protect cultural heritage, and safeguard the environment. In South Africa, we have seen how tourism creates jobs and brings opportunity to rural areas and townships, allowing people to share their cultural traditions and natural landscapes with pride. *Tourism is more than an economic sector; it is a catalyst for social progress, delivering education, employment and new opportunities for all.*

For tourism to truly drive sustainable transformation, it must be inclusive and mindful of future generations. This means ensuring that the benefits of tourism reach everyone – especially those historically excluded – and that development does not come at the cost of our environment or our communities. As we grow our tourism sector, we must ask: Are we empowering local entrepreneurs and sharing opportunities broadly? Are we protecting our natural heritage so that future generations can enjoy it? Do we respect local culture and the dignity of communities? Answering “yes” to these questions requires good governance, strategic planning, and an inclusive approach so that tourism development aligns with long-term sustainability goals. When tourism is guided by conscience – when it *restores, respects, and truly transforms* the places it touches – it becomes a force that not only showcases our country’s beauty but also uplifts our society.

Justice and Legal Values: Foundations of Sustainable Tourism

This is where law and justice step in, providing the framework of values and rights that ensure tourism’s promise of transformation is not fleeting, but fair, inclusive, and enduring.

Ladies and gentlemen, as a representative of the Judiciary, I speak about the values and legal foundations that underlie our vision of sustainable transformation. Our Constitution is the bedrock of those values, providing a moral compass for all sectors of society – including tourism. The Constitution’s Preamble calls on us to “*improve the quality of life of all citizens and free the potential of each person*”. This is a call to transformation. It reminds us that every policy and industry in our nation – tourism included – should ultimately uplift our people and unlock the talents of those who were left on the margins. Tourism, done right, can indeed help improve quality of life by creating jobs, fostering community pride, and promoting social cohesion.

Equally important are the foundational values of dignity, equality and justice enshrined in our Constitution. These are not abstract ideals – they are practical guides for how we pursue

development in a fair and inclusive way. Consider how each of these values connects to sustainable tourism:

Our Constitution reminds us first of the dignity of every person. In the context of tourism, dignity means treating communities, workers, and visitors with respect. It means ensuring that no one is exploited in the pursuit of profit. When a local artisan is fairly compensated for their craft, or when an employee at a lodge earns a living wage, we are not only building an economy — we are affirming human dignity. Tourism, when guided by this principle, becomes a way of honouring people as much as places.

Closely linked to dignity is the principle of equality. After generations of enforced inequality, true transformation requires that tourism open its doors to those who were excluded in the past. This means supporting black-owned and community-based enterprises, involving women and young people, and extending tourism's benefits to rural areas as well as cities. Equality in tourism also means that our natural and cultural wonders must be accessible to all South Africans, not only to the privileged few or international visitors. When tourism is inclusive, it heals old divisions and creates shared pride in our heritage.

Justice is another pillar of our constitutional vision, and it applies just as much to tourism as to any other sphere of life. Justice demands that the benefits and burdens of tourism be shared fairly. It calls on us to protect people and the environment from harm. Our courts stand ready to uphold these principles — ensuring that developments are responsible, that community voices are heard, and that heritage sites are safeguarded. In this way, tourism becomes an instrument of restorative justice: preserving places like Constitution Hill not only to remember the pain of the past, but also to educate, inspire, and empower future generations.

Finally, our Constitution embraces the principle of sustainability. It grants everyone the right to an environment that is not harmful to their health and well-being, and it requires us to protect that environment for present and future generations. Tourism, therefore, must be developed within ecological limits. It cannot be an industry that consumes more than it gives back. The law itself requires that our development be ecologically sustainable while promoting justifiable economic and social development. In simple terms, we must meet the needs of today without compromising the needs of tomorrow. By holding ourselves to this balance between progress and preservation, tourism becomes a partner in building a future that is both prosperous and enduring.

When dignity, equality, justice, inclusivity and sustainability guide our actions, tourism becomes a powerful tool for nation-building. The Judiciary's commitment is to uphold

these constitutional values and rights, so that our legal framework enables sustainable transformation. In this way, good law and good governance create the space for good tourism. They ensure that as we welcome more visitors to enjoy our landscapes and heritage, we do so in a manner that enriches our people and safeguards our legacy.

Reflections on Progress and the Road Ahead

As we stand here on Constitution Hill, reflecting on South Africa's progress, this site itself tells a story of hope. Constitution Hill reminds us how far we have come. It links the pain of our past to the promise of our future. In just over three decades of democracy, we have built a thriving tourism industry and a constitutional democracy that is a model for the world.

Yet, our journey is far from complete. Sustainable transformation is a path we must walk together. We know that poverty and inequality persist. We know that our environment – from wildlife to wetlands – is under pressure from climate change, reckless exploitation and unsustainable use. World Tourism Day 2025 is an opportunity to reflect and to reaffirm our commitment to tackling these challenges with the same resolve that brought us freedom. It affirms that tourism will be part of the solution – harnessed to support rural development, to educate people about conservation, and to promote intercultural dialogue that strengthens peace. As one conservationist observed, tourism holds immense potential to connect and inspire us – but if it is built on exploitation, it betrays both people and planet. Let us therefore ensure our tourism always aligns with our highest values.

Looking ahead, I am filled with optimism. I see young South Africans launching sustainable tourism ventures, communities proudly sharing their heritage, and our institutions steadfastly upholding the rule of law. If we remain true to our Constitution's values, we will balance economic growth with protecting our environmental treasures for generations to come.

I close by challenging all of us to remember that each of us has a role in this story. The Constitution's vision of a transformed society cannot be realised by government alone – it requires all of us. Tourists, business owners, officials, community members, and yes, Judges too – we are all partners in building a South Africa that is inclusive, just, and sustainable. On this World Tourism Day, from this hallowed ground of Constitution Hill, let us pledge to walk forward together on the path of sustainable transformation. Let tourism enrich both visitor and host; let it educate as much as it entertains; and let it leave none of our people behind. In doing so, we honor the legacy of those who sacrificed for our freedom, even as we empower the next generation to carry that legacy forward.

Enjoy World Tourism Day and let us together ensure that tourism remains a true force for good in South Africa and the world.

Thank you.