



SPEECH

BY

**THE PRESIDENT OF THE REPUBLIC OF
ZIMBABWE, HIS EXCELLENCY,
DR. E. D. MNANGAGWA**

AT

**THE OFFICIAL OPENING OF THE FIRST UN
TOURISM REGIONAL FORUM ON
GASTRONOMY TOURISM FOR AFRICA**

**VICTORIA FALLS
26 JULY 2024**

First Lady of the Republic of Zimbabwe and Patron of our
Tourism and Hospitality Industry, Dr. Auxillia
Mnangagwa;

Vice President, Hon. Gen. (Rtd) Dr. C. G. D. N. Chiwenga;

Vice President, Hon. Col. (Rtd) K. C. D. Mohadi;

Minister of Tourism and Hospitality Industry,
Hon. B. Rwodzi;

Hon. Ministers and Deputy Ministers;

The UN Tourism Secretary General, Mr. Zurab
Pololikashvili;

Chief Secretary to the President and Cabinet,
Dr. M. Rushwaya;

Senior Government Officials and the UN Tourism
Secretariat;

Excellencies Members of the Diplomatic Corps;

Traditional Chiefs here present;

Invited Guests and Delegates ;

Ladies and Gentlemen.

On behalf of the Government and people of Zimbabwe and indeed on my own behalf, I am honoured to officially welcome you all to this inaugural United Nations Forum on African Gastronomy Tourism.

Zimbabwe is honoured to be the host of this Forum being held here in the City of Victoria Falls, which is home of one of the Seven Natural Wonders of the World, the majestic Victoria Falls, Mosi-oa-Tunya.

May I extend a special welcome to the UN Tourism Secretary General, Mr Zurab Pololikashvili and his delegations, who have joined us.

This event follows hard on the heels of the 67th Meeting of the UN Tourism Regional Commission for Africa and 2nd UN Tourism Regional Conference on Brand Africa, which was held just across the Zambezi River, in our Sister Republic of Zambia, a few days ago.

Similarly, last week, in Harare, we launched the Zimbabwe- Mozambique- Zambia Trans-frontier Conservation Area. These key developments are a reflection of the commitment by SADC member states to grow the tourism sector along with the effective natural resources management, as a catalyst for sustainable prosperity and shared success.

Distinguished Guests;

The tourism and hospitality industry is a critical cog to our country's national development agenda and ongoing journey to realise an inclusive and sustainable tourism sector, which leaves no one and no place behind. Tourism is currently the third largest contributor to our country's National Gross Domestic Product and one of the key economic growth factors having achieved a 34% increase in tourism arrivals, last year alone.

Globally, a positive trend has been witnessed with tourism growth now exceeding 90 percent of its pre-COVID 19 pandemic levels. Regrettably, the African region has been contributing below 5 percent of global tourism performance. As such, the promotion of products such as Gastronomy Tourism and others like the “Brand Africa” initiative will undoubtedly go a long way to enhance Africa as an attractive and competitive destination, worldwide.

I commend the UN Tourism and all stakeholders who continue to push the boundaries and reignite Africa’s tourism sector leveraging on the Continent’s unique natural and cultural offerings, including our foods and cuisines. Congratulations.

Esteemed Delegates;

Today, as we celebrate African Gastronomy Tourism in Zimbabwe, we honour more than just **recipes** and flavours.

We pay homage to the wisdom of those who came before us, who understood the symbiotic relationship between food, well-being, the community and the environment.

Their legacy lives on in our kitchens, where traditional dishes continue to nourish and unite us. Our traditional cuisines are more than mere meals but an expression of our identity, which is blended with the beauty of our landscapes and seasons. I trust that your palates will enjoy the experience and hope that you will embrace possible linkages to broaden Africa's culinary portfolio.

Given that a people's cuisine are a manifestation of their culture; our continent's unique cultural heritage, food and drink, therefore, offers immense opportunities for further expansion of the tourism sector.

In our local Shona language, we say **“hukama igasva hunozadziswa nekudya”**.

This saying encapsulates the importance of sharing food in building people to people relations in our African culture and tradition. By this fact, Gastronomy Tourism offers enormous potential to propel the growth of local, national and regional economies, while enhancing sustainability and inclusion towards the realisation of Sustainable Development Goals. More so as food often comprises about 30% of tourist expenditures, while the industry creates local opportunities for jobs and community empowerment.

In order for us to fully benefit from Gastronomy Tourism, I challenge stakeholders in the sector to continually innovate by developing new products and services. Robust strategies should be implemented to scale up the promotion of gastronomy related tour packages, food festivals and cooking classes, among others, to make Africa an attractive gastronomy tourism destination.

The internet continues to advance and is being utilised as a powerful tool for advertising and marketing, especially in the travel, tourism and hospitality sector. Riding on the wide use of ICT, we must see more people from the continent hosting food shows on contemporary media platforms to advance our unique cuisines.

In the case of Zimbabwe, the Gastronomy Tourism has grown and remains anchored on grassroots initiatives. Recently, under the leadership of the First Lady, Dr Mnangagwa and her teams, in her capacity as the Patron of the Tourism and Hospitality Industry, Traditional Cookout Competitions were rolled out in our country's provinces. These culminated in Regional Cookout Competitions and have seen some of the contestants developing marketable products for both the locally and international markets.

Key lessons learnt include the fact that the traditional gastronomy cuisine goes beyond preparing food and attracting food enthusiasts. It is also a key driver for the transformation of economies, community empowerment and a catalyst for cultural branding for socio-economic benefits.

Distinguished Guests, Ladies and Gentlemen;

Tourism is an intricately integrated system of many actors who rely on each other. It is made up of important value chains in the local economy. As such, to sustainably grow the tourism and hospitality sector, my Government has developed a cluster-based strategy, with Gastronomy Tourism being part of the Culture and Heritage Cluster.

The Zimbabwe Gastronomy Tourism Strategy recognises value chains from suppliers of ingredients which includes local communities and farmers, as well as the processors

and distributors, being airlines, hotels and restaurants. This further draws from the Farm to Market Concept.

Central to gastronomy tourism is a thriving agriculture sector. It is, therefore, imperative that, as we grow this gastronomy tourism sub-sector, Africa must be a continent able to feed itself. Likewise, let us be proud of utilising our flora and fauna, for their rich herbal, medical and high nutritional benefits.

In addition to the cluster-based strategy, Zimbabwe has embraced the **Heritage-based Tourism philosophy**, which focuses on the benefits arising from our unique environment, as well as traditions, culture and norms.

Synergies among stakeholders in the Tourism and Hospitality Industry, including with culinary experts and local communities, are being strengthened to identify and promote locally authentic dishes, traditional cooking methods and local ingredients.

Work is underway in the design of policies meant to support and elevate our culinary artisans and small-scale farmers in the value chain.

Zimbabwe is privileged to be hosting Africa's first-ever Tourism Academy for Culinary Arts, in collaboration with UN Tourism. The Academy will be a training ground for the tourism and hospitality industry. Professionals will be equipped with the necessary skills and knowledge, to enhance the quality of services offered in the tourism sector.

The institutions of higher learning across the continent are challenged to take bold decisions towards capacity building programmes that will grow the pool of highly qualified professionals to impact service level and customer satisfaction in Africa's tourism sector.

Further, studies and research into fields such as culinary and gastronomic creativity should open up new horizons by connecting other spheres such as health, nutrition, food production, sustainability, digitalisation and technological entrepreneurship.

Finally, as we look to the future, let us promote the heritage of our cultural dishes by recognising their potential not only to sustain us, but to grow our economies for shared prosperity. By embracing Gastronomy Tourism, we are collectively making use of our history, resilience, and commitment to a sustainable and culturally rich future of the African continent and the World at large.

With these remarks, it is now my honour and privilege to declare the inaugural UN Tourism Regional Forum on Gastronomy Tourism for Africa officially open.

I wish you all fruitful deliberations and a memorable stay in Zimbabwe, **“the world of wonders and opportunities.”**

God bless you all.

I thank you.