

**ADDRESS BY THE MINISTER OF TOURISM, HON. SABAH ZITA OKAIKOI ON THE OCCASION OF
THE GHANA INTERNATIONAL TOURISM FORUM 2010, AT THE ACCRA INTERNATIONAL
CONFERENCE CENTRE ON MONDAY, 26TH JULY, 2010**

Colleague Ministers of State,

Hon. Members of Parliament,

Your Excellencies and Members of the Diplomatic Corps,

Chief Executives of Corporate Ghana,

Esteemed Tourism Practitioners

Distinguished Guests,

Members of the Media,

Ladies and Gentlemen:

On behalf of the Government and people of Ghana and on my own behalf, I will like to extend warm felicitations to our distinguished invited guests and delegates for being here with us today. This International Tourism Investment Forum is the first in the series of investment fora the Ministry of Tourism will be organizing to attract investors to the Tourism Industry in Ghana.

It is my greatest privilege therefore to extend a special welcome to our participants, investors and stakeholders in the tourism industry.

Distinguished Guests, I believe this forum is coming on at a most opportune time when our country has been opened up to the whole world during and after the just ended FIFA World Cup fiesta in South Africa with the sterling performance of the Black Stars. Since the end of the World Cup, many enquiries have been made from a lot of people who have expressed interest to visit and do business in Ghana. It is evident that visitors who travel to Ghana for whatever reason; either for business, recreation, or other purposes eventually become tourists and are exposed to the numerous opportunities that the sector has to offer. It is therefore our responsibility to package the tourism industry adequately and professionally to attract the right market and investors for our socio-economic development.

Invited Guests, the objective of this forum is to promote tourism as a job creation and income generating activity. It is meant to upscale and increase tourist arrivals as well as promote and encourage public-private participation in the tourism industry. So many opportunities exist in the tourism sector especially for local businesses and entrepreneurs and for foreign investors and it is our belief that when packaged well, we

can attract the needed funding and investment for the tourism sector for increased revenue, job creation and wealth creation.

This forum therefore provides a good platform for many of us here to begin the journey of exploring the untapped and diverse tourism investment opportunities particularly with the natural, historical and cultural resources spread throughout the country with a view to adding value to these resources to attract funding from investors who would then add value to the resources.

Invited Guests, the rich and diverse tourist attractions ranging from the long beaches, natural and artificial lakes, waterfalls, national parks and wildlife reserves, monkey and hippo sanctuaries, scenic mountains and landscapes, the chieftaincy institution coupled with durbars and festivals, herbal medicine, craft villages and handicrafts, UNESCO designated Castles and forts which were built since the 14th Century, to mention a few, are all ready for investment.

These attractions are potential areas for investors who are interested in tourism development. There is no doubt that there is a huge market in infrastructural development such as airports, tourist transportation and highway rest stops. Financiers and investors have a wide range of options to choose from in the area of recreational, amusement parks, air transport carriers, hotels and resorts, luxury coaches, shopping malls and conference centers.

Invited Guests, we urge our investors to take advantage of the enabling environment provided by the political and economic stability being enjoyed in this country to invest in the tourist sector. The strategic geographical location of the country in terms of the easy landing for maritime and air transport and direct access to overseas markets, present enormous advantages for doing business in Ghana. The generous tax concessions, and incentives outlined by LI 1817 of 2005 give assurance to investors to partner us to drive the tourism sector forward.

Distinguished Ladies and Gentlemen, we are convinced that this Forum will provide a platform for foreign and local businessmen to forge partnerships for the acceleration of investments in various areas of the tourism sector. May I invite all of you to take some time off your busy schedules and visit various tourist sites and places of interest organised by the tour operators union of Ghana. It is time to explore Ghana and support tourism initiatives that are being promoted by the tourism sector. This is a call to all Ghanaians to show interest in what nature has bestowed on us for our benefit, recreation and business. The Ministry is committed to the development and promotion of domestic tourism alongside international tourism in order to have an integrated tourism development for socio-economic benefits for our people.

Distinguished Guests, it is worth-mentioning that the future prospects for the tourism industry in Ghana are very promising despite the challenges of inadequate funding that the tourism sector faces presently. The Ministry of Tourism will intensify its collaboration and co-operation with all its social partners and stakeholders including other Ministries, Departments and Agencies, Metropolitan, Municipal and District Assemblies, the Private Sector, Traditional Authorities and the local communities as well as bilateral and multilateral agencies to support the growth of tourism on a sustainable basis.

We solicit the support of all of you because tourism has a major role to play in national development, and we need all the assistance we can get to lift tourism development to a high level in Ghana.

To ensure competitive and sustainable tourism development, the Ministry is in the process of coming up with the Tourism Bill to bring the needed linkages between tourism legislation and other related laws to remove perceived bottlenecks in the tourism industry. We believe that the bill will ensure that the tourism sector becomes compatible with modern tourism practices worldwide backed by the needed funds.

Ladies and Gentlemen, a close look at the programme shows that there is a lot to learn during these two days. There will be addresses on the current challenges and new ideas for future direction in the tourism industry. Our distinguished speakers will touch on branding Ghana, capacity building and skills development, destination management and marketing systems as well as access to finance in the tourism industry amongst others. It is our hope that at the end of the Forum, Ghana's tourism potential would have been sold to both the local and international business communities who have enduring interest and passion for tourism development.

I believe that, this is the time to galvanize our collective resolve and develop an enviable tourism industry which is capable of contributing effectively to employment creation, revenue generation and redistribution of incomes for our people in all our communities in pursuit of the Government's Better Agenda Policy.

I take this opportunity to acknowledge and thank all who have contributed and supported in various ways to make this event happen. Special thanks go to our collaborator, the Ghana Investment Promotion Centre, (GIPC) led by the Chief Executive Officer, Mr. George Aboagye and his staff, staff of Ministry of Tourism (MOT), and Ghana Tourist Board,(GTB) our Guest Speaker and other speakers, the Chairman for the plenary sections, delegates and participants and our sponsors, SIC Insurance Company Ltd,(SIC), Business and Financial Times, (B & FT) Best Western Hotel, African Regent Hotel and the Exhibitors. We thank all of you and we are confident that

you will once again offer your support whenever we call. Thank you, and may God Bless you.