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EIGHT AFRICAN LEADERS SPEAK ON CONTINENT'S TRAVEL OPPORTUNITIES

Africa Travel Association (ATA) and New York University's Africa House Showcase Africa at ATA's Second Annual Presidential Forum on Tourism in New York

New York, N.Y., October 4, 2007 – The Africa Travel Association (ATA), a 33-year old global travel trade association promoting tourism to Africa, held its Second Annual Presidential Forum on Tourism in New York City on Friday, September 28 at New York University's Law School in Greenwich Village. Hosted by New York University's Africa House, the theme of the event was "positive news on Africa."

The forum provided African leaders with the opportunity to present the continent's rich travel opportunities to almost 200 leaders from government, non-government and business communities, the tourism industry, travel trade media, and education. Each leader spoke of the need to market "Destination Africa" in a way that benefits both the continent as a whole and each individual country.

"The participation of these amazing leaders of Africa in the forum proves without a doubt that the tourism industry can contribute to a country's overall economy, stability and development," ATA Executive Director Edward Bergman said. "I hope that shining a spotlight on individual countries and their diverse travel products will strengthen the commitment of the public and private sectors to market "Destination Africa" around the world."

Joining Bergman in the opening remarks was Dr. Yaw Nyarko, New York University's Vice Provost of Globalization & Multicultural Affairs. "While growth forecasts for travel to Africa look good," he said, "Africa remains the least traveled region."

The panelists were introduced by Ali Velshi, CNN senior business correspondent. "The fact that Africa has so many countries and cultures and experiences is a great opportunity. Visitors can return to Africa year after year and never have the same experience twice," said Velshi. "Countries that can convey a unique selling point to potential visitors, while still capitalizing on the 'mystique' of Africa as a whole, will succeed in mining new sources of tourist revenue, and ATA is the vehicle to make this happen."

"Africa is a collection of 53 different countries, so tourists will surely never get bored," said ATA President and Ghana's Minister of Tourism and Diaspora Relations (MP), Stephen Asamoah-Boateng. He added that Africa accounted for only four percent of travel arrivals in 2006. "The best way to market Africa and change these numbers is to develop a strategy to make Africa more visible."

Tanzanian President Jakaya Mrisho Kikwete said that one way to increase tourism is to add more hotels, improve infrastructure and increase source markets. "North America is important," he said. Kikwete launched ATA's inaugural forum in September 2006.

Cape Verde Prime Minister José Maria Neves said that the tourism industry is helping drive Cape Verde's economic growth, with an average annual growth of 20 percent per year over the last five years. He said that the tourism sector will "be the main engine of growth and transformation" for his country.

Speaking in Sesotho, Lesotho's Deputy Prime Minister, Archibald Lesao Lehohla, invited the audience to visit the land-locked country. He stressed Lesotho's combination of modernity and history and culture.

"Positive messages from Africa start here. There is no negative incident that happens in Africa alone. Conflicts, disease, disasters and the like are also prevalent on other continents, but business people and tourists travel to these destinations," said Zambia's Minister of Foreign Affairs (MP), Kabinga J. Pande. He also challenged the audience to visit Africa to have their own personal experiences. "Don't listen to discouraging messages. Listen to ATA and to the people who have been in Africa and have seen it all."

Malawi's Minister of Tourism, Wildlife and Culture Callista Chapola-Chimombo said that most African countries have limited resources to promote tourism to their country. "By working together, African countries can pool their political, human and financial resources to bring the world to Africa in a way that everyone can benefit," she said. "ATA has a key role to play here."

Director General Francis Gatere of the Rwanda Investment & Export Promotion Agency said that Rwanda's Virunga region has brought tourist dollars and a new awareness to the country as a travel destination, rather than as a war torn nation. He also highlighted the importance that the tourism industry can play in shaping the country's future socio-economic agenda, noting that eight new hotels, a conference center, and a leisure park will be built by the end of the year.

Benin's Jean-Francois Zinsou, Minister Conseill of Benin's Permanent Mission to the U.N., spoke about the country's emphasis on "tourism of returning Africans" and Benin's position as the "cradle of voodoo." He also emphasized Benin's position as an emerging economy and as a reliable partner for investments and tourism.

ATA presented the inaugural ATA Presidential Forum on Tourism Award to Professor Alpha Oumar Konare, Chairperson of the African Union Commission, whose outstanding efforts to integrate the African continent have inspired ATA and shaped its global campaign devoted to marketing "Destination Africa." Salem Matug, Advisor, Political Affairs at the Observer Mission of the African Union to the U.N., accepted the award on Konare's behalf.

ATA launched a 90 second commercial produced by The Africa Channel (TAC) as part of the May 2007 ATA-TAC Memorandum of Understanding. The commercial is a call to action to travel and tour operators serving Africa to promote travel and tourism to Africa.

Last year's inaugural forum was launched by His Excellency Jakaya Mrisho Kikwete, President of the United Republic of Tanzania, and His Excellency Olusegun Obasanjo, President of the Federal Republic of Nigeria, who sent his Minister of Culture and Tourism.

About the Africa Travel Association (ATA)

The Africa Travel Association is the premier global travel association promoting tourism to Africa and intra-Africa travel and partnership since 1975. ATA members include ministries of tourism and culture, national tourism boards, airlines, hoteliers, travel agents, tour operators, travel trade media, public relations firms, students, NGOs, individuals, and SME's. Upcoming ATA events include ATA's 2nd Annual Presidential Forum on 28 September at New York University in New York; ATA's 11th Annual Eco and Cultural Tourism Symposium in Djibouti City, Djibouti from December 3-7; ATA's first Africa Sports and Tourism Market from 27-28 February at the Jacob K. Javits Center in New York, and ATA's 33rd Annual Congress in Arusha, Tanzania from 19-23 May 2008. For more information, visit ATA online at www.africatravelassociation.org or call +1.212.447.1357.

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(Photo by Jim Lopes for ATA)

(From left): Tanzanian President Jakaya Mrisho Kikwete, ATA President and Ghanaian Minister of Tourism and Diaspora Relations (MP) Stephen Asamoah-Boateng and ATA Executive Director Edward Bergman at the Africa Travel Association's Second Annual Presidential Forum on Tourism at New York University on September 28, 2007.



(Photo by Jim Lopes for ATA)

(From left): Director General Francis Gatare of the Rwanda Investment & Export Promotion Agency, Malawi's Minister of Tourism, Wildlife and Culture Callista Chapola-Chimombo, Advisor of Political Affairs at the Observer Mission of the African Union to the U.N. Salem Matug, ATA President and Ghanaian Minister of Tourism and Diaspora Relations (MP) Stephen Asamoah-Boateng and ATA Executive Director Edward Bergman at the Africa Travel Association's Second Annual Presidential Forum on Tourism at New York University on September 28, 2007.