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[Breaking News:ATA to Bring The World to The Gambia](#)

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Mr Aliou Secka

As the aim and vision of Africa Travel Association (ATA) is to bring the world to Africa and Africa to the world, the association in May 2010 wants to bring the world to The Gambia and take The Gambia to the world.

As the world's premier Travel Industry and Trade Association in terms of promoting tourism in Africa, ATA provides services to bind a range of members including tourism, culture, sports, ministries, tourism boards, airlines, hotels, trade and travel agents, tour operators, travel trade, media, public relation firms (not for profit of organisation), small and medium size enterprises and other organizations/stake holders in tourism development and promotion in Africa.

Participants gathered at the Kairaba beach hotel on Wednesday 16 December in urging stakeholders in the country to come up with practical solutions, particularly on how to cost-effectively promote The Gambian industry, as well as foster cooperation among all stakeholders (including policy makers, development planners, investors, volunteers, operators and the public at large) with the view to addressing specific development issues in the tourism sector of The Gambia.

The Minister of Trade, Industry and Employment, Mr Yusupha Kah, at the highly-organised business forum, said since the last hosting of ATA twenty-four years ago, the country witnessed a lot of developments globally and at local level. He said ATA's mission and vision will seek to bring about the promotion of the industry in the African continent. This will strive to enhance African integration, which according to Minister Kah, is very important.

Kah said that in the process, they have realised that globally there are developments and challenges particularly in the last year or two. 'The trend calls for rethinking of the various strategies and policies globally, and more importantly at the national level, in terms of what we do to re-sustain, if we cannot attract but to sustain what we have achieved in terms of numbers and quality', observed Kah. In his view, the hosting of ATA's 35th annual world congress in The Gambia would not only bring numbers, but also give GIPFZA the opportunity to promote the Gambia.

The Chairman of the Gambia Hotel Association (cum General Manager Golden Beach Hotel) Mr Alieu Secka, said the purpose of the business forum is to talk about, listen, and hopefully share what to do about Africa Travel Association(ATA). He said twenty-four months earlier, the world was very different and that one could not find a house in Dubai eight hours after it was available; real estate was growing three hundred percent; an African-American had dreams to become the U.S President and the world certainly was moving toward three hundred and sixty dollars as the price for crude oil. He asked how much the world has changed in the past twelve months?

Secka revealed that ATA, as the name implies, has many challenges and is about travel and tourism; its aim is to promote travel and tourism to and from Africa. He said sixteen percent of the Gambia's Gross Domestic Product (GDP) comes from tourism, while expressing delight that the Minister of Trade Industry and Employment and other stakeholders in government, were present at the gathering to support the African Travel Association congress to be held from 17th – 20th May 2010, in the Gambia.

Tourism he said, is the bread and butter of countries around the sub-region; one of the fastest way of registering growth (at about five percent annually). He indicated that Gambia is in the region that receives nine hundred million tourists a year, and over nine hundred billion dollars in travel and tourism. He described the sector as one that touches all sectors and spheres of life. According to Secka the Gambia has a wide choice of tourism, and it has been in business for some forty years, hoping that the country would not only double what it has today, but to become a top state not only in this part of the world, but in Africa.

This Secka added, is one of the reasons why they have the Africa Travel Association coming to the hope to host next year, visitors will not only spend sometime in the hotels but would also experience the culture and the hospitality that we have in the Gambia that so many hundreds of thousands come yearly to experience; and also that one-third comes annually as repeat visitors to enjoy the same as well as to share the experience with others.

'We consider challenges not only for those that do not have out-of-pocket revenue or money to go and travel elsewhere, but also with increase costs whether it is security, airport, taxes and the alike, have meant that we all have to review our strategies; of course the continuing environmental cost also', hoping that the environment summit in Copenhagen at the moment shows that in the next few days, we will eventually have some thing positive that we all can celebrate', Secka remarked.

According to Secka, they certainly want a share of not only with what tourism and travel brings but surely with the whole of the Gambia. He said it is important that the business community

comes on board and knows within these four or five days, to have experience with travelers. Secka urged all to per-take in these activities saying that he felt thrilled by the presence of the business community in support of the hosting of ATA Africa 2010. 'We are grateful to the Gambia government for having put in the commitment and money to bring ATA to the Gambia', said Secka.

According to him, this commitment from the Gambia government is just the tip of the iceberg, adding that in the next six months the industry would continue to work with the Gambia government and other stakeholders to make sure that ATA 2010 is memorable. He told participants that ATA last came to the Gambia some twenty four years ago, when the country hosted the association at the Atlantic hotel in Banjul. He said travel and tourism in Africa have grown substantially, although still behind growing at a steady rate of four to five percent, so that

He said during this challenging times, there is less money now available. Luxuries, travel and tourism should now start looking for a job, adding that the banking sector and the telecommunication sectors are striving very well. According to Secka, with ATA they would raise continuous awareness about Africa and particularly The Gambia both in Africa, the U.S and other destinations as well. He said other opportunities to be brought in by the ATA are to bring in between five and six hundred travel and tourism professionals from all over the world.

These people he added, would leave with a better experience of the Gambia and would also be better Ambassadors so that they can tell more people about The Gambian experience. This he said, would provide them with the opportunity to network as well as discuss on various panels with professionals about what the travel and tourism trend of the world is. According to Secka it would also be an opportunity to collect, compile and disseminate information to targeted groups. Tourism he said, contributes to the economy and cuts across every sector of society, be it the vegetable grower, the garden woman, the tax man, among others.