LAUNCH OF THE BID BY HON DR WALTER MZEMBI (Phd) FOR THE POST OF SECRETARY GENERAL OF THE UNITED NATIONS WORLD TOURISM ORGANISATION
MADRID SPAIN - 19 JANUARY 2017
INTRODUCTION

Your Excellencies, Honourable Ministers
Your Excellencies, Ambassadors and Members of the Diplomatic Corps
A very special Salutation to His Excellency, Dr Taleb Rifai, Secretary General of the UNWTO
UNWTO Executive Directors here present
Distinguished Members of the Media here present
Distinguished Guests
Ladies and Gentlemen

First of all, allow me to thank you, very sincerely, for being here this evening as I officially launch my candidature for the post of Secretary General of the United Nations World Tourism Organisation.

It is an honour and a privilege that several countries and institutions have encouraged me to stand for this post, and I am humbled at the faith and confidence they have expressed in my ability, vision and passion for tourism as a vehicle for development and transformation.

I am more than convinced that, if given the opportunity to lead this important body within the broad United Nations family, and with the support of all UNWTO member states, I can forge ahead with my Ten Point Plan and will make a significant and positive impact upon global tourism.

I am resolute in my commitment to transforming livelihoods through tourism and to contributing to the attainment of some of the key goals of the UNTWO and the UN in general.

PERSONAL JOURNEY

For me, today is the culmination of an eight year journey, that began with my deployment, in February 2009, as the Minister of Tourism and the Hospitality Industry for the Republic of Zimbabwe. It was an assignment which threw me literally into the deep end of adversity at a time when, in the wake of serious disagreement with some influential members of the international community over our agrarian reform programme, my country was draped with blanket negative travel advisories and faced an unprecedented degree of isolation within the broad community of nations.

Zimbabwe was most topical in global mainstream media for perceived good and bad reasons, but, as always, it was the bad news which made the front pages.

Fast forward to the present.
After a sustained re-engagement and rebranding effort, I and my team managed to transform the Zimbabwe tourism economy from the US$ 200 million per annum which I inherited when I took office, to the US$ 1 billion plus status we enjoy today: and, we managed to achieve that with virtually nothing by way of funding. It was overwhelmingly by way of creative thinking and a collective re-branding effort.

So much so that the February 2015 Edition of the New York Times’ 52 Global Must Visit Report, ranked Zimbabwe 14 on its “attractiveness index” and anointed my country as a “once avoided, now a must-see destination”.

This is the same destination that, in August 2013 and together with Zambia, co-hosted the 20th Session of the UNWTO General Assembly.

The hosting was famously described at the time by the current Secretary General, Dr Taleb Rifai, as “the best attended ever General Assembly in the history of General Assemblies”.

As I speak, the American luxury and lifestyle travel magazine - Conde Nast Traveler - in its listing of the 17 best places to visit in 2017, described Zimbabwe as Africa’s best destination, listing us at number 13, followed by Rwanda at number 14. Canada topped this prestigious ranking - and we are proud and indeed gratified to be classified amongst the world’s very best.

This is but the latest of numerous international accolades and endorsements bestowed upon Zimbabwe in the wake of our focused and sustained re-branding thrust: a thrust which turned adversity into opportunity, negative energy into positive, and which successfully leveraged the country’s amazing tourism product to develop an infinitely more positive, more enticing narrative.

And so, as we launch my candidature, I and my team take pride in the work we have done, and in the progress we have made: and we take pride in the clean bill of travel health enjoyed by destination Zimbabwe and in our unbroken 33 year tourist-safety record. Both of which contributed to the resounding global endorsement manifested in the holding of the 2013 UNWTO General Assembly at the Victoria Falls.

On that occasion, literally the world came, saw, and experienced our breathtaking tourism product, enriched by the unparalled warmth and innate hospitality of our people.

Once again, I wish to state that, if given an opportunity to lead the UNWTO, I will direct this same energy, this same passion and this same focus into my new role. And I will bring to the table the experience I have gained in successfully overcoming adversity, in successfully navigating difficult waters and in successfully responding to the complex and challenging circumstances which lie ahead as, together, we look to the future of the Organisation.

In September 2009, during the 19th UNWTO General Assembly in Astana, Kazakhstan, Dr Taleb Rifai, then ad-interim, was confirmed as the Secretary General.

Attendant to this, it couldn’t escape our memory that the Middle East was taking stewardship of the Organization for the first time.
A chronicle of the Organization records 1957 as the year Robert Lonati a Frenchman, assumed office as the first Secretary General of the International Union of Official Travel Organisations(IUOTO).

His mandate extended to 1974. In 1975, at the conception of what is today the WTO, and as it located to its Headquarters in Madrid, he again took on the mantle of leadership as Secretary General. He is justly credited with being the Grandfather of Global Tourism as we know it today.

However, whether it is IUOTO, WTO or UNWTO, the fact is that Europe has been in the driving seat of global tourism for a record 46 years.

Thereafter, Latin America - in the form of Mexico - headed the Organisation for 8 years. Then, for the past 8 years, we have been led by the Middle East. Neither Africa nor Asia has been accorded this privilege or this responsibility.

Whilst acknowledging and expressing our sincere admiration and gratitude for the leadership and indeed the powerful legacy bequeathed by the afore-mentioned regions, we strongly believe it is now Africa’s time: and, applying the admittedly informal principle of rotational equity that prevails at the United Nations, it is not difficult to see why, to some degree, Africa has this sense of expectation: nor the appeal Africa is making, by way of my nomination and the endorsement I have received by African Heads of State and Government, for the support of all UNWTO members for my candidature.

The conviction that this is indeed Africa’s time, together with a determination to bring to the table a stronger Africa - in terms of significantly improving its current unacceptable 3 to 5% global tourism market-share performance - motivated me to begin to lobby within the Continent itself.

Today I stand before you, nominated by Zimbabwe and endorsed by both SADC and the Africa Union as its official candidate.

The endorsement of African Heads of State and Government came only after a rigorous defence of my candidature and a comprehensive presentation of my vision for the future of the UNWTO before the African Candidatures Committees, which oversees proposals for the deployment of Africans to multilateral and international systems.

Africa is therefore deploying a candidate who it knows is both tried and tested: understanding that this mandate goes well beyond tourism and into unlocking trade and investment opportunities on a win-win basis with the globe as the African Union implements its Agenda 2063, presenting the “Africa we Want”.

Casa Africa and Investur here in Spain, requires this pedigree of deployment in Capitan Haya Street to unleash the full potential of hitherto unexploited trade and investment opportunities between Africa and Spain. Europe more broadly and the rest of the world should reflect much more on what this candidature could achieve for them within the context of the “Visit, Trade and Invest” concept.
I must state however that, official endorsement as Africa’s candidate for the Secretary General post notwithstanding, you may be approached by one or more aspiring candidates from other African countries.

It is their sovereign right to break ranks with a formal decision of African Heads of State and Government. For my part, I stand by the confidence the African Union has placed in me and, recalling the powerful legacy of African international civil servants such as Dr Kofi Annan and Dr Boutros Boutros Ghali - albeit leaders of the mother UN body itself - I know that I can and will deliver and will make both Africa and the UNWTO proud.

The unilateralism we are witnessing is the same unilateralism responsible for much of the mischief and conflict in our world today. Equally an unbridled sense of entitlement that says it has to be my country or else, cannot preside over global institutions, as it points to gross intolerance.

My candidature is built on passion for tourism, tolerance, unity and transformation and it is my appeal, as I launch my bid to lead the UNWTO, that we cooperate for the common good of humanity, and that we desist from any form of discrimination or division.

We are on borrowed time and future generations cannot be disadvantaged because we have acted selfishly.

Back to my personal journey.

After successfully serving in the Executive Council from 2009-2013, Africa asked me, unanimously, to lead it as Chairperson of the UNWTO Regional Commission for Africa, and to drive the agenda for creating greater awareness at the African Union of the need for policy consummation and institutionalization of Tourism and its subsequent integration into Africa’s Agenda 2063 - the continental 50 year vision.

I recall Africa unanimously pushing for an automatic re-deployment of the current Secretary General in recognition of the bold stance he had taken to bring the General Assembly to the Victoria Falls - notwithstanding fierce resistance from some Member States, opposed to Zimbabwe being accorded the honour of hosting the 2013 General Assembly. Indeed, it was from the Zambian end of the Victoria Falls that Dr Rifai’s mandate was so deservedly renewed for another four years.

The clarion call for an African Secretary General was ignited thereon, and, being an ardent believer in sound corporate governance, I stepped down from the Executive Council so as to avoid being conflicted by remaining on the Council whilst pursuing my elective ambitions to lead the Organisation after Taleb.

The Renewal and Reform Agenda

In a very real sense, my candidature - Africa’s candidature - is premised on a commitment to bring about renewal and reform of our Organisation. It challenges, therefore, a long tradition of bureaucratic succession.
Whilst continuity certainly provides a sense of stability it does not necessarily unlock growth nor does it bring new thinking or fresh ideas. Nor does it provide adequate impetus for the renewal and reform now required.

This is a Member-States- subscribed organisation which should see more countries joining its ranks rather than opting-out. Such membership growth will only come out of dynamic value propositions and an effective response to members’ aspirations and challenges. Inward-looking organisations are candidates for corporate-incest which can deter rather than attract membership.

Equally we must disabuse the notion of an Organisation patronized by a few States, or others overloaded with key deployments. We should strive for equity all the time for the sake of inclusivity and, ultimately, for the integrity of the UNWTO.

We should even envisage a future that reviews voting rights in order to attract a fresh perspective and interest into the Organisation. This approach requires change agents, and even our host, Spain, I am sure, has an interest in seeing this Organisation transform into a bigger, more representative church and a more recognised brand- leader within the UN family.

As a candidate, I have applied my mind to this and have even engaged Federal States like the USA, Australia, Canada and the UK, amongst others, with varying degrees of interest. We want them back inside our Organisation, but we must be creative in answering their expectations. If I am given an opportunity to lead the UNWTO, I am confident that, having started the dialogue, I will be better positioned to bring those discussions to a successful conclusion.

Once again I make my case as a candidate for growth and unity.

Having been invited to attend all recent Regional Commission meetings - for which let me thank the Secretariat and, of course, Secretary General Rifai - and with the benefit of an outside - inside view arising out of extensive traveling and participation in Member countries programs over the last eight years, I believe I now have a comprehensive appreciation of the strengths, threats, weaknesses and aspirations of each geopolitical block.

That appreciation has come from personal, direct engagement - not from a desk-top study.

This is why you will find my transformation agenda includes seeking to capacitate Regional Commissions, as implementation, monitoring, supervisory and evaluation agencies of decisions taken by the Executive Council and General Assemblies.

This devolution agenda will be tabled during my tenure attendant with innovative sources of funding that will resource Regional Commissions without placing any additional financial burden on member states by way of increased subscriptions, premiums or levies. We simply have to be more creative and more pro-active in generating funds to render UNWTO more
meaningful, in practical terms, to its membership and in responding, again practically, to their expectations.

We have to take the Organisation to the people.

Regions currently operate in silos and the future should see better interaction and collaboration reflecting enhanced source market and destination relationships. I am challenging member states to embrace the development of a growth strategy that is both inclusive and progressive, and, again, I appeal to you to support me so that, from tourism, we may realise greater productivity and wealth for all nations.

The high global rate of attrition and turn-over of tourism ministers is well-known and even acknowledged. It deprives global tourism of a much needed core-continuity with informed and deep-rooted capacity for reflection, to envision and to develop coherent strategies to address the changing and ever-more complex challenges confronting our industry.

To some extent, the Executive Council and, behind it, the Secretariat, partially fulfill this role. But, in my view, more is needed.

A lean and efficient Secretariat, outsourcing a significant part of its work to the industry and academic-related think tanks, in collaboration with industry associations, will be able to place before the Executive Council much more meaningful, better-researched and more practical agendas for their consideration.

By 2020, for example, China will emerge as the single largest source market in the world, generating an estimated 600 million outbound travellers. Study groups on China for each Region will be inaugurated to plan for this phenomenon. The same applies to other major emerging markets such as India, Russia and Brazil.

The intensifying focus on migration and the urgent need to find practical solutions to an increasingly complex and sensitive issue emerged very strongly during my recent campaign visits to European capitals. I have submitted that subject to some pretty exhaustive think-tanking and it seems clear to me that some form of “Marshall Plan” is required in order to stem the flow of African migrants across the Mediterranean: a Plan which focuses on enhanced and targeted investment in tourism and tourism-related enterprises; and which creates employment opportunities across the continent so that, in future, Africa gives Europe tourists, not migrants.

Equally the same nagging question of migration in the Americas, and within Europe itself, cannot find answers in the building of walls, literal or figurative, or in reversing the gains of openness. Part of the answer, certainly, lies in recognizing and proactively promoting tourism as an effective vehicle for job-creation and economic empowerment.

The kind of vocations that migrants respond to in their host countries are to be found in the tourism sector - blue-collar jobs in the majority of cases. With such enhanced and targeted investment, such employment can be created in their home countries.
Another case in point is the scarcely-researched behaviour of currencies, and how, as a key critical success factor, it has affected the performance of global tourism. The bullish performance of the US dollar and the Japanese Yen against weaker currencies, for example: not to mention the Euro, whose future is synonymous with tourism-performance.

These, then, are some of the areas on which, going forward, an evolving and reforming UNWTO should be providing more guidance.

Similarly, greater inter-agency cooperation within the UN family will serve to enhance execution agency relationships which, in turn, will generate new and transformative work-loads for the UNWTO.

Because of the cross-cutting nature of Tourism - as evidenced by its direct specification in SDG’s 8, 12 and 14 and its relevance to all 17 Development Goals, I will strive for greater day-to-day brand visibility of the tourism pillar within the UN System and within the collective global mindset.

2017, as the International Year on Sustainable Tourism for Development is just the beginning.

Sustainability is the current buzz word, but it comes with developmental aspirations presently driving an unrealistic and, for now, unrealisable level of expectation amongst Members States.

A renewed and reformed UNWTO must be more proactive in collaborating with other, better-resourced arms of the UN family to ensure that funds earmarked for development projects across various sectors include tourism-related projects as well. This is not to imply that the UNWTO should transform itself into a development agency - merely that it must do more to insinuate itself and the sector it represents more visibly and more effectively in the practical allocation of global developmental funding. At the very least, UNWTO-endorsement of country-specific projects should enhance the bankability of those projects and their eligibility for funding - from whatever source.

Going forward to 2030, we must be able to look back at country-inspired, UNWTO-endorsed legacy projects of significant scale and repute, especially in the preferred grant, donor and multilateral funding areas of green growth and sustainable energy supply - solar being a case in point.

Still on the issue of finance: it is my intention to initiate a Global Tourism Fund from which Member States shall derive substantive value.

Tourism and Travel are inordinately taxed by national governments, and yet the sector benefits the least from the significant revenue it generates. There simply has to be some form of mechanism to claw back even a little more of that revenue and then leverage against that seed capital to establish an effective Fund.
On the basis of the 1.2 billion travelers logged in 2015, just a single dollar per traveller, passed back, could inject US$ 1.2 billion of ‘seed capital’ into such a Fund.

**The Case for Growing the Tourism Business**

Every country today boasts of a tourism economy.

Apart from reinforcing the Golden Book on Tourism concept, my tenure will include deep political conversation with Member States on creating viable national structures that can sustainably serve, enable and facilitate the development of tourism. Optimum fiscal appropriations to the Tourism and Travel Ministries at country level will be strongly advocated in order to enable those structures to perform.

Also included will be advocating for more open but secure and seamless travel coupled with incentivized intelligent taxation of the sector. I shall reassert one of the core responsibilities of this intergovernmental agency - that is the conception and mainstreaming of policies that will enable the Tourism Industry to grow, contributing at least 15% to global GDP during the course of my tenure. This to be achieved by directing favorable capital formation, and investment and export incentives aligned to SDG aspirations. Input will be sought and leveraged from existing and future partnerships and collaboration with relevant industry associations and affiliate organisations.

In order to induce a greater sense of inclusivity, collective and binding decision making, it is my intention to reach out to those UN member states which, today, remain outside the UNWTO. Apart from further enhancing the universal character of our Organisation, success in this endeavour will also strengthen the capacity of the UNWTO to more effectively and more comprehensively address contemporary challenges and threats to our sector - terrorism and insecurity coming at the very top of that list.

Incorporated in the broad definition of “insecurities”, and requiring timeous and sustainable responses and adaptation will be natural disasters, climate change, biodiversity terrorism - in particular wildlife poaching - marine and terrestrial.

Whist on the sensitive area of terrorism targeting tourism, I shall give maximum attention to mobilizing governments to protect tourism against this scourge through greater and enhanced security collaboration, intelligence gathering and sharing, standardization and certification of safety procedures, post-crisis management and capacity building of Member States alertness and response preparedness.

Equally, I shall leverage the soft power characteristics of tourism to complement the deployment of hard power by governments, by further unleashing the potential of people-to-people diplomacy inherent in travel and tourism, whose kinetic force can never be defeated by terror.

The 1.8 billion travelers forecast by 2030, are all potentially peace ambassadors, and travel will be used to secure peace through greater social interaction, tolerance and cultural understanding.
It is super-critical to drive the Organization towards a Convention on Ethics, to induce peer review, fair, moral, just practice and censure, the issue of travel advisories, child sexual abuse and responsible tourism being most topical. Again, only a universal-in-character Organization can achieve that.

Finally I do not seek your support out of any sense of entitlement based primarily on Africa’s somewhat miniscule presence within global tourism. It is also the goal of driving growth with equity for all regions that prompted my decision to run for office.

Tourism is a poverty-ending tool, a low hanging fruit and one that answers job creation - witness the 288 million already employed within the global industry.

It is quite logical to link the buoyant performance and market share of Europe, the Americas, and the Middle East to the footprint and legacy of the men who have been privileged to shape not just global tourism agendas but to bring intimacy and understanding of its significance to their respective regions.

My candidature brings with it a tried and tested craft competence, deep-seated knowledge and hard-earned experience. The wisdom and maturity born of that experience complete the set of imperatives necessary for the sound management of our Organization.

I sincerely believe I have been trained and mentored on these core imperatives by way of association, engagement and interaction with the many expert practitioners I have met along my lengthy journey.

With humility and respect, I have willed myself to learn from their example. The personal journey I have made - some of which I have shared with you this evening - and the challenges I have faced, presiding over the development of tourism in Zimbabwe and, as CAF Chairperson, in Africa more broadly, have prepared and armed me well to take up and to successfully deliver in the role of Secretary General.

For the sake of our Organisation and for the future development of global tourism, may the very best candidate prevail.

**The Ten Point Plan and Conclusion**

In summary, allow me to itemize and summarise the ten points against which I make my case to be elected as the Secretary General of the UNWTO. Those who would wish for more detail are invited to visit my website at www.waltermzembi.org:

1. **Universality** – Aim to achieve Universal State Membership aligned to UN Membership. Every country now hosts a tourism economy, making membership imperative (Current UN Membership 192, UNWTO Membership 157). Equally important is to grow Affiliate and Associate Membership to levels commensurate with sectoral growth.
2. **Inclusivity** – Tourism for all: Campaign for the right of every individual to enjoy barrier free travel and product access around the globe regardless of physical challenges, age, gender, colour or creed.

3. **Relevance** – To develop a value proposition that meets Member States aspirations beyond the current technical policy functions, giving emphasis to networking and partnerships for tourism resource mobilisation and developmental needs.

4. **Responsiveness** – Sensitivity to emerging contemporary challenges that include inter-alia; security, terrorism, political conditions, pandemics, epidemics, climate change, human trafficking, child sexual abuse and embracing ICT solutions.

5. **Fairness** – To promote policies that foster growth with equity, equal treatment and equitable resource allocation to Member States; sign-posting tourism contribution to Global GDP from 10% to 15% during my tenure.

6. **Facilitation** – Lobby and advocate for intelligent taxation, safe, secure and seamless travel through Open Skies, Open Borders and security sensitive policies.

7. **Diplomacy** – Leverage on tourism as a tool for sound inter- and intra-state relations, tolerance, citizen engagement and deployment of soft power in the resolution of contemporary challenges to create peace, social harmony and understanding.

8. **Integration** – To locate tourism in the trade and investment value chain (visit, trade, invest), harnessing its resilience, low hanging fruit and catalytic characteristics.

9. **Sustainability** – To promote sustainable tourism and green growth which expresses itself in all the SDGs, in particular SDG 8, 12 and 14.

10. **Accountability** – Member States accountability to each other on the application of travel advisories and peer review, recognising that every tourism economy doubles up as a source and destination market, including acceleration and transformation of the Tourism Global Code of Ethics into a Convention.

Excellencies, ladies and gentlemen, I have put forward my case and I hope and believe that you share my vision for a progressive and expanding UNWTO.
I thank you for listening to me and I count on your support to become the next Secretary General of the UNWTO.

*May God Bless You All.*

Madrid - Spain - 19 January 2017