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Government urged to step up safety and security efforts

THE Tourism Business Council of South Africa (TBCSA) calls on government to step up efforts to uphold the rule of law and address the scourge of crime in the country.

The Council believes this will go a long way in creating a safe travel and tourism environment. The Council makes this call following the recent, unfortunate incident, of a business burglary at a hotel situated in the Magoebaskloof. Whilst it is suspected that tourists were not the main target, one tourist from Peru was affected by the burglary.

Based on feedback received through the Council’s Tourism Safety Initiative (TSI), three suspects entered the hotel premises in the early hours of Thursday September 28.

The suspects managed to steal two plasma TV screens from two rooms which were unoccupied at the time. Regrettably, the third room they entered was occupied by a tourist. However, they managed to steal a third plasma TV screen and the tourist’s bag. The affected tourist was not physically harmed during this incident and most of her belongings were later recovered, except for some cash and a laptop. Police are currently investigating the incident and no arrests have been made as yet.

Expressing his dismay at the incident, TBCSA Board Chairman, Tito Mboweni says “We are utterly shocked by the brazen manner of these attacks against our tourism businesses, which ultimately have an impact on tourists and our sector as a whole.

“This is a situation we can ill afford given the fact that travel and tourism growth is interconnected with the entire South African economy. Swift action must be taken by the authorities to arrest the perpetrators of these crimes. More significantly we certainly need to do more as a country to step up efforts to root out the scourge of crime. We need to work harder to make South Africa a safe place to live, do business in and to visit.”

The Council is concerned about the repercussions of these crimes on the sector. In particular the traumatic impact it has on the affected tourists and staff in the affected businesses; the overall disruptions in business operations; the lost economic opportunities for trade (direct and indirect) and most significantly the harm these incidents (and the reporting thereof by word of mouth, on social media and other media

platforms) poses to South Africa’s international reputation as a world class and safe tourist destination.

“South Africa has always enjoyed a reputation of having warm, friendly and welcoming people. However recent media coverage of the airport follow-home robberies, the incident involving tourists from The Netherlands, and the recent incident in Limpopo are putting a damper on this reputation and will require urgent attention by all the relevant parties,” Mboweni said.

Reiterating the Council’s stance on the recent spate of distress incidents involving tourists, Mboweni cited the outcomes of South African Tourism’s annual brand-tracking research which indicates that the top reason potential visitors don’t convert their awareness, interest and desire into action (to visit South Africa) is due to a concern for their personal safety.

“The challenges of crime are not unique to South Africa. However, we should still strive to make our country livable for our own people, and thus improve our prospects of the country being visitable. Our success as a country in addressing issues of safety and security, not only for tourists but for locals as well, would be both a symbolic and a practical demonstration that the rule of law, order and mutual respect are both desired and achievable. In addition, if not swiftly addressed, this situation poses a major threat to the growth and sustainability of a vital component of our economy.”

The TBCSA appreciates recent efforts made by both the Tourism and Police Ministers to condemn the incidents of the past week involving tourists, but believes the authorities need to review their tactics as measures which are currently in place have not yielded the desired results.

The Council remains committed to working with the authorities and all relevant stakeholders to ensure that issues of tourist safety and security are prioritised, swiftly addressed and that structures are in place to facilitate a more coordinated approach to proactively manage tourist distress cases.

All tourism businesses are encouraged to report incidents of crime against tourists and their businesses to the TSI portal www.tbcsa.travel/tourismsafety and to contact the TSI office for more details of how they can access relevant information and support in distress situations.

