**MININSTRY OF TOURISM WILDLIFE AND ANTIQUITIES**

**LAUNCH OF EKKULA TOURISM AWARDS 5TH EDITION**

**PRESS RELEASE**

**Venue: Media Centre.**

Greetings from the Ministry of Tourism, Wildlife and Antiquities.

Tourism is a weighty field of consumption and a powerful service sector that contributes about ten percent to the world’s GDP. Sustainable consumption and production patterns are central to sustainable tourism. It is one of the world's fastest growing industries and an important source of foreign exchange and employment, while being closely linked to the social, economic, and environmental well-being of many countries, especially developing countries.

This is our subsequent justification of this year’s theme of Rethinking tourism.

However, there are numbers of unsung heroes who have lifted our flag so high and hence promoted our beautiful nation to levels of being among the most sought-after tourism destination.

These include Sportsmen and women who directly or indirectly paint promote Uganda; the music artists using music as a medium of tourism promotion, Writers, Photographers, and Investors, the guides who interface with tourists, and the journalists like you who are here among others. Indeed tourism is everybody’s business.

 Recognising and appreciating such stakeholders will motivate more to be patriotic and promote the pearl of Africa in different styles that appeal to different people globally.

The Ministry of Tourism, Wildlife and Antiquities therefore strongly supports private sector initiatives that intend to promote tourism. Such initiatives will increase the quality of service and encourage healthy competition in the industry.

It’s from this background that welcome Africa Tourism and Environment Initiatives quality assurance project ,Ekkula Pearl of Africa Tourism Awards is set to recognise the best performing stakeholders of the tourism industry.

Ekkula Pearl of Africa Tourism Awardsis a Private Sector driven tourism initiative passionate in promoting tourism through Training, Recognising, Awarding and Subsequently Motivating key stakeholders in the Tourism Industry annually.

Currently, the awards are running on their 5th Edition after a spell of two years due to COVID 19 restrictions. Like earlier said, The coordinators of this initiative have shared the set categories and criteria of the Ekkula awarding process.

Even though the country is yet facing another trial, of the Ebola Outbreak, Iam rather delighted to inform you that the ministry of health through the permanent secretary Dr. Diana Atwiine recently announced that;

The Government of Uganda and Partners have put measures to control the disease. The number of cases have since the announcement of the outbreak on 20th September 2022 decreased. All the contacts within Mubende which has been the epi-centre of the disease and the neighbouring districts have been identified and isolated and are being followed on a daily basis.

The Ministry of Health reiterates that Uganda is SAFE for all National and International travellers within the country. All places for conferences, workshops, tourist attraction including national parks are safe for both local and international tourists.

The current Ebola Virus Disease (EVD) outbreak in the Country is under control and anybody with a plan to travel to Uganda are encouraged to continue with their travel plans.

The Award ceremony whose theme is ***‘******Rethinking Tourism and Promotion of Green Initiatives.*’** Will take place on 1st December 2022 at Sheraton Hotel, with special focus on the **Sustainable Development Goals** – Journey to 2030 on how tourism sector can contribute towards the implementation and achievement of the **17 SDGs**; aiming to inspire governments, policymakers and tourism companies to incorporate relevant aspects of the SDGs into policy and financing frameworks as well as business operations and investments.

 Unlike the previous awarding ceremonies, this years’ Ekkula Tourism awards will involve regional quality assurance and sustainability training workshops, intended to improve service delivery by impacting basic tourism skills across the value chain. The first regional expo will take place on the 14th of October 2022 in Mbale, moving to Gulu on the 21st of October 2022, and then on the 28th 0f October in Fort portal the tourism city and wrapping the regional workshops in Kampala on the 04th of November. Top participants from each region will then be invited in an in-depth national tourism training hub.

As we pride ourselves in our country’s natural endowments, we look forward to celebrating together networking and forging better ways of improving where we have not performed to the fullest.

I am pleased to announce therefore; The Launch of the Fifth Edition of Ekkula Pearl of Africa Tourism Awards 2022.

Ladies and gentlemen, I officially declare nominations for the Categories open as per the set criteria and I Look forward to seeing more of you participate in the Tourism Industry as the opportunities are endless and enormous.

For God and My Country,

Thank You.

**Martin Mugarra Bahinduka,**

**State Minister of Tourism Wildlife and Antiquities**.