



# **SOAD LAW 0014**

**Melvin Brown  
President of the Parliament**

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## **Tourism and Development**

**A Law Introduced by Ms Meshella Woods,  
Minister of Tourism**

**SOADPLLAW 0013**

## Preamble

This law hereby establishes a comprehensive legal and strategic framework for tourism development, mobility, hospitality standards, cultural and memorial initiatives, and Pan-African partnerships under the authority of the State of the African Diaspora (SOAD).

Africa and its global diaspora are bound by deep historical, spiritual, cultural, and political ties forged through shared civilizations, forced displacements, survival, resistance, and creativity. Tourism, particularly heritage- and memory-based tourism, constitutes one of the most powerful instruments for restoring these bonds. When structured with intention, tourism can become a space for historical truth, collective healing, reconnection, dignity, and sustainable economic transformation. When left without a coherent legal and ethical framework, however, tourism risks fragmentation, exploitation, emotional consumption, and missed opportunities for long-term development.

International projections consistently indicate that travel and tourism are poised to become one of the leading global industries of the twenty-first century. In 2024, the travel and tourism sector accounted for more than ten percent of global GDP and supported more than 357 million (1 in every 10) jobs worldwide. According to the World Bank, Africa is the region of the world that is the least prepared for this challenge, yet it is also the one with the greatest potential in this sector. However, structural barriers, historical inequalities, and policy fragmentation continue to restrict mobility, access, and participation for both Africans and members of the African Diaspora.

Members of the African Diaspora encounter persistent and systemic obstacles when traveling to the African continent. These include prohibitively high airline ticket prices, the scarcity or absence of direct flight routes, multiple and exhausting transit connections, opaque and inconsistent visa regimes, insufficient access to reliable travel information, and the absence of unified diaspora travel rights or heritage-based facilitation mechanisms. Such conditions discourage travel, reduce tourism revenue, weaken Africa–diaspora exchange, and transform what should be a journey of reconnection into an experience of exclusion.

Similarly, Africans traveling within Africa face non-harmonized immigration policies, high intra-African airfares driven by limited competition, inefficient or underdeveloped regional transport networks, border delays, inconsistent treatment, and weak coordination of tourism infrastructure. These barriers undermine regional integration, suppress intra-African tourism, and restrict the circulation of people, ideas, and capital across the continent.

Beyond mobility constraints, tourism across Africa and the diaspora remains structurally underdeveloped due to fragmented hospitality standards, weak institutional partnerships between African and diaspora tourism actors, insufficient investment in tourism-related infrastructure, limited public support for cultural events and heritage initiatives, the absence of a coordinated digital tourism ecosystem, and restricted avenues for diaspora-led investment and cooperative travel models. These deficiencies limit tourism's capacity to function as a lever for unity, economic sovereignty, and cultural empowerment.

The necessity of a new tourism paradigm is not merely economic; it is also historical, ethical, and political. Cultural works have long revealed the profound stakes of tourism as memory, power, and mobility. In *Sankofa* (1993), directed by Haile Gerima, a visit to a former slave fort in Ghana becomes a confrontation with embodied history, demonstrating that heritage sites are not neutral destinations but spaces where the past demands responsibility. In such contexts, tourism is not merely observational or recreational, but functions as a form of lived historical encounter, memory transmission, and ethical engagement with the past.

Without clear ethical frameworks, certain forms of tourism risk reducing histories of violence, resistance, and survival into consumable experiences detached from accountability, historical context, and long-term community benefit. This law affirms tourism as a practice grounded in dignity, responsibility, and reciprocal exchange. Such works underscore the importance of framing memorial tourism not as spectacle, but as encounter, dignity, and transmission.

Other contemporary narratives interrogate the ambivalence of tourism itself. The consumption of African suffering as “experience” often detaches trauma from accountability and structural context. Documentary and hybrid works such as *The African Who Wanted to Fly* by Samantha Biffot explore how mobility, imagination, and desire are constrained by visas, borders, and costs—portraying Africa not as immobile by nature, but as systematically immobilized.

Recent African and diasporic initiatives demonstrate both the potential and the limitations of existing approaches. Ghana’s “Year of Return” initiative in 2019 marked a historic moment in heritage tourism, welcoming significant numbers of visitors from the African Diaspora and generating substantial economic impact (1,9 billion USD), while symbolizing the possibility of large-scale, structured diaspora engagement.

Similarly, the law adopted in Benin in 2024 establishing a pathway to citizenship for eligible members of the historical African Diaspora, following advocacy led by Maître Germany and Dr. Louis-Georges Tin, represents a major legal breakthrough. The engagement of cultural figures such as Spike Lee, elected officials including the deputy from Guadeloupe Mr. Servat, and media personalities such as David Smeralda, publisher of *Rolling Stone Africa*, who then became citizens of Benin, illustrates the growing convergence between citizenship, memory, and tourism. In the same spirit, proposed legislation by the Republic of Congo about return and repatriation, to which SOAD contributed, explicitly recognizes the role of return based tourism as a driver of development.

Beyond these cases, recent policy and legislative initiatives in multiple African states addressing return, reconnection, cultural heritage, and diaspora engagement further demonstrate a growing recognition that tourism, citizenship, memory, and development are increasingly interconnected. These examples, while significant, remain too few and too isolated. They demonstrate what is possible, but also highlight the urgency of coordination and institutionalization. Without a unifying legal framework, such initiatives risk remaining symbolic rather than transformative.

The absence of coordinated and institutionalized frameworks has limited the scalability, durability, and transformative impact of existing initiatives, underscoring the urgency of collective action at an institutional level. This law therefore establishes an integrated and flexible framework enabling SOAD to structure tourism governance, promote hospitality and accommodation development,

support cultural events, festivals, and heritage initiatives, facilitate diaspora partnerships and cooperative tourism enterprises, advocate for reduced travel barriers and improved mobility, stimulate tourism-related infrastructure, foster digital innovation and data platforms, and create secure investment pathways for the diaspora and the private sector.

This law is deliberately broad in scope. It does not limit itself to named programs or predefined enterprises, in order to accommodate future initiatives such as maritime routes, aviation partnerships, diaspora cooperatives, memorial circuits, cultural capitals, and large-scale Pan-African tourism platforms. Its ambition is to transform tourism from a fragmented activity into a strategic instrument of reconnection, sovereignty, and shared prosperity between Africa and its global diaspora.

## PART I — PRINCIPLES, DEFINITIONS, AND OBJECTIVES

### Article 1 — Definitions

For the purposes of this law:

1. “Tourism” refers to cultural, economic, educational, and heritage-related activities, including travel.
2. “Hospitality sector” includes hotels, guest houses, eco-lodges, homestays, and short-term accommodations.
3. “Tourism Infrastructure” includes ports, airports, cultural venues, heritage sites, transportation hubs, and other facilities supporting tourism.
4. “Cultural events” include festivals, exhibitions, performances, and heritage programs.
5. “Diaspora-led tourism initiatives” include cooperative travel networks, maritime or aviation partnerships, and cultural tourism enterprises led by African-descendant communities.

### Article 2 — Guiding Principles

This law is guided by the principles of unity between Africa and its Diaspora; respect for cultural diversity and heritage; inclusive and sustainable tourism development; empowerment of youth and women; environmental and cultural preservation; digital innovation; strengthened mobility and access; cooperation among nations, institutions, and communities; and accessibility for persons with disabilities.

### Article 3 — Objectives

The objectives of this law are to establish unified tourism governance within SOAD; develop hospitality standards; improve tourism infrastructure; support cultural events and heritage programs; facilitate diaspora participation; promote partnerships; advance digital tools for tourism; advocate for simplified visa systems and equitable mobility; promote affordable and direct travel routes; and empower diaspora-led and cooperative tourism initiatives.

## PART II — TOURISM GOVERNANCE AND COOPERATION

### Article 4 — SOAD Tourism Council

A SOAD Tourism Council is hereby established as the advisory and coordination body for tourism policy. The Council shall provide policy recommendations, oversee tourism standards, support partnerships and infrastructure planning, coordinate mobility initiatives, and review cultural event proposals.

### Article 5 — International and Regional Cooperation

SOAD may cooperate with African Union institutions, Regional Economic Communities, tourism ministries of African states or Diaspora countries, UNESCO, UN Tourism, and diaspora-led tourism initiatives.

## **Article 6 — Mobility and Travel Facilitation**

SOAD shall advocate for simplified and harmonized visa processes, improved intra-African mobility, expanded direct flight and maritime routes, fair airline pricing, and cooperative travel corridors. The diaspora shall be recognized as a distinct travel category eligible for heritage-based facilitation.

## **PART III — HOTEL AND HOSPITALITY DEVELOPMENT**

### **Article 7 — Hospitality Standards**

SOAD shall internally establish and externally recommend hospitality standards aligned with sustainability, safety, cultural integrity, and quality assurance.

### **Article 8 — Support for Hospitality Development**

SOAD may facilitate partnerships, encourage diaspora investment and cooperative ownership, support training programs, and collaborate with host nations on culturally aligned hospitality zones.

## **PART IV — INFRASTRUCTURE AND PUBLIC–PRIVATE PARTNERSHIPS**

### **Article 9 — Tourism Infrastructure**

Tourism infrastructure includes ports, airports, cultural and heritage centers, museums, performance venues, and transportation links connecting tourism destinations.

### **Article 10 — Public–Private Partnerships**

SOAD may enter public–private partnerships with governments, cities, private entities, and diaspora organizations to develop and manage tourism infrastructure in accordance with transparency and public benefit.

## **PART V — CULTURAL EVENTS AND HERITAGE**

### **Article 11 — Cultural Events**

SOAD shall support heritage festivals, Africa–Diaspora cultural exchanges, creative industry showcases, and educational tourism initiatives.

### **Article 12 — Heritage Trails**

SOAD shall identify and support Pan-African Heritage Trails linking Africa and its Diaspora, including historical, cultural, maritime, and memorial routes.

## **PART VI — DIGITAL TOURISM AND INNOVATION**

### **Article 13 — Digital Tourism Platform**

SOAD shall establish a digital tourism platform providing destination promotion, mobility information, booking tools, data collection, and support for innovation hubs, including facilitating travel services.

## PART VII — FUNDING AND IMPLEMENTATION

### Article 14 — Funding

Tourism programs may be funded through public–private partnerships, diaspora investment, grants, international cooperation, cooperative financing models, and SOAD tourism funds.

### Article 15 — Implementation

The Ministry of Tourism shall draft implementing regulations, coordinate with partners, oversee execution, advocate for reduced travel barriers, and report annually to SOAD leadership.

## PART VIII — FINAL PROVISIONS

### Article 16 — Amendments

This law may be amended only in accordance with SOAD parliamentary procedures.

### Article 17 — Entry into Force

This law shall enter into force upon adoption by the Parliament of the State of the African Diaspora.