ADDRESS BY ETHEKWINI MUNICIPALITY MAYOR, CLLR CYRIL XABA AT THE MOA SIGNING CEREMONY WITH TERTIARY INSTITUTIONS, 26 SEPTEMBER 2025

- Programme Director and Executive Director in the Office of the City Manager: Mr. Sipho Cele
- EThekwini Municipality City Manager: Mr. Musa Mbhele
- Chairperson of the Governance Human Capital committee: Cllr Nkosenhle Mdlala
- Executives from each of our partnering Research Institutions - Durban University of Technology; Mangosuthu University of Technology, University of KwaZulu-Natal, University of South Africa and Stellenbosch University
- Executive Directors, Directors, Senior management from eThekwini Municipality,
- Academics in our midst
- Members of the Media
- Esteemed guests,
- Ladies and gentlemen

Good Morning and a warm Durban welcome to all of you.

It is my distinct honour and privilege to address you on this significant occasion of the signing of the new three-year partnership between eThekwini Municipality and its academic partners.

It is important to note that this partnership dates back to the historic signing of the first Memorandum of Agreement (MOA) in February 2011.

When we initiated the formation of the first-ever local government-driven, practitioner-based Municipal Institute of Learning (MILE), it was partly in response to our national government's turnaround strategy which sounded the call for municipal collaboration to improve service delivery, enhance the skills of local government practitioners, curate municipality's knowledge management framework and position Durban as a centre of learning.

I am proud of the decision we took to invest in this partnership. Through this programme, we have indeed made the city of Durban a better place

to live, work and play. However, I am convinced that we can improve further as we work towards more effective, inclusive and sustainable socio-economic outcomes.

As a forward-thinking city, Durban is one of the few cities in the world to have established its very own municipal academy (EMA) led by Prof. Mpilo Ngubane. Under his directorate, the eThekwini's Municipal Institute of Learning (MILE) is internationally recognized as a dedicated knowledge management and capacity enhancement vehicle aimed at positioning Durban as a centre of learning.

So it is significant that we continue to work alongside our academic partners in ensuring that we support their research focus and contribute to the developmental agenda of our continent. It is worth noting that in positioning Durban as a learning city, our political and administrative leadership have come to realise the value of partnering with institutions of higher learning and can relate to similar experiences elsewhere of the economic, social and other benefits for cities that work closely with the academia.

Similarly, the academia have come to appreciate that cities need the ideas, energy and outside view represented by universities communities, staff and student. Research institutions, as I understand their role, should be in the business of responding to societal challenges, contributing to solutions and identifying innovations for everyday problems. I am optimistic that as we work together to foster sustainable partnerships between the academia and the city, we can, in the long term, build a brighter future not only for the residents of eThekwini, but also for our country and the continent.

Reflecting on the last 15 years of this strategic partnership, I am deeply encouraged by the range and growth of the collaborations between our city's line departments and specific faculties across the partnering institutions. All these initiatives are geared towards ensuring that evidence-based research influence our policy making, programming and visioning. Whilst some of these historic relations are now part of established programmes and projects, numerous new synergies have spawned into pipeline projects over the last 5- 10 years and relate directly to us jointly finding local solutions to key challenges facing our city.

It is for these reasons that we have a long-term view and strategic position that our partnership with academia must remain intact, serviceable and well sustained – as we work together towards a common purpose for Vision 2060. The new three-year MOA) indicates our serious intent to work together to improve the quality of life for the communities we serve.

I also want to take this opportunity to acknowledge all city officials in our midst who have secured doctoral and master's degree qualifications. EThekwini Municipality has the highest number of city officials holding Ph.D qualifications in the country, with 53 graduates. This number excludes those who have recently graduated.

We acknowledge with great honour and excitement such exquisite intellectual capital that no other City has ever had. I believe you have a very significant role to play in practicalising this intellectual capital and the City should not only retain you through its policy imperatives, but also avail opportunities for personal and career growth and promotion to senior positions where you will continue to add more value. It is an opportune time for you to showcase your hard-earned knowledge production and I

have no doubt that all of you have that urge to actualise this new knowledge you have added.

I therefore want to take this opportunity in wishing all our partners well in their respective roles as we work together towards activating this new three-year MOA.

I thank you

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