OPENING REMARKS BY ETHEKWINI MUNICIPALITY MAYOR, CLLR CYRIL XABA, AT THE LAUNCH OF THE BUSINESS IRELAND SOUTH AFRICA (BISA) DURBAN CHAPTER, 13 NOVEMBER 2025

- Programme Director and President of BISA: Mr. Frank Gormley
- His Excellency, the Irish Ambassador to South Africa
- Mr. Thula Mkhwanazi: SEDFA Regional Manager (Durban)
- Mr. Dave Kerr: CEO, VBT IT Solutions Ireland
- Distinguished Guests
- Ladies and Gentlemen

Good evening

It gives me great pleasure to be part of this prestigious occasion as we celebrate the launch of the Business Ireland South Africa (BISA) Durban Chapter. This marks the beginning of an exciting new chapter in our long-standing relationship with Ireland, a relationship built on shared values, mutual respect, and deep historical ties.

It is well known that Ireland stood with South Africa during our struggle against the unjust system of apartheid. We are grateful that, decades into our democracy, these bonds of solidarity have not only endured but continue to grow stronger.

The recent State Visit by our President, His Excellency Cyril Ramaphosa, to Ireland in October this year further reinforced our commitment to cooperation in trade, investment, education, science, and technology.

Ladies and Gentlemen, bilateral trade between South Africa and Ireland continues to grow steadily. Trade between our two nations increased by 12% in 2024, rising to $638 million from $567 million the previous year. South Africa's exports to Ireland grew by an impressive 40.4%, from $119 million in 2023 to $168 million in 2024. Imports from Ireland also rose by 5%, reaching $470 million.

As eThekwini Municipality, we want Durban to capture a greater share of this growing trade, given our strategic position as a gateway to the African continent and our robust transport and logistics sector. Durban is home to

Africa’s busiest container port, and we are implementing our Port Master Plan to position it as a world-class container hub and premier automotive terminal. Working closely with the private sector, we are also developing back-of-port facilities to decongest operations and facilitate the shift of freight from road to rail.

We therefore warmly welcome the establishment of the BISA Durban Chapter, which will undoubtedly strengthen business relations between South African and Irish enterprises. We also look forward to exploring potential sister-city partnerships with cities in Ireland to advance mutual interests and shared prosperity.

We note with appreciation that BISA already has active chapters in Johannesburg, Cape Town, and Gqeberha. We are delighted that you have chosen to expand your footprint to Durban, and I want to assure you that this decision will yield great rewards.

We are actively working to attract both local and international investors with a clear mission to promote inclusive economic growth, create

sustainable jobs, and empower our SMMEs to become globally competitive, innovative, and profitable enterprises.

Just yesterday, we hosted a business breakfast with the Chinese business community. Tonight, we celebrate our partnership with our Irish friends. These engagements reflect Durban's growing stature as a truly global city, one that welcomes the world and builds bridges across continents.

We are proud of the strong Irish presence already in Durban. Companies such as Kerry Group, which invested over R1 billion in a greenfield manufacturing facility, and the Digital Marketing Institute, which partnered with Vega School to train thousands of students, are making a lasting impact. These initiatives are not only creating jobs but also transferring valuable skills and strengthening our local economy.

We encourage our Irish partners to deepen their investment in Durban, particularly in sectors such as green energy, digital innovation, education, tourism, and infrastructure development. The opportunities are vast, and our city is ready to partner.

Through our International Relations Unit, we continue to strengthen Durban's global engagement, building strategic partnerships with cities such as Bremen, Guangzhou, and Windhoek, and seeking new avenues for cooperation that deliver tangible benefits for our residents and our economy.

Forums such as BISA are critical platforms for dialogue, networking, and collaboration. We value the ongoing commitment of the Irish business community to South Africa and are excited about the opportunities this new chapter will create for Durban's entrepreneurs, investors, and innovators.

In conclusion, I wish to congratulate the leadership of Business Ireland South Africa for this remarkable milestone. As the City of Durban, we stand ready to work hand in hand with you to strengthen our business and economic ties for the prosperity of both our peoples.

I thank you