WELCOMING REMARKS BY ETHEKWINI MUNICIPALITY MAYOR, CLLR CYRIL XABA, AT THE KWAZULU-NATAL PROVINCIAL TOURISM CONFERENCE, 7 NOVEMBER 2025

- Programme Director
- MEC for Economic Development, Tourism and Environmental Affairs, Rev Musa Zondi
- All MECs present
- Heads of Departments
- CEOs of Government Entities
- Tourism Industry Leadership
- Delegates
- Members of the Media
- Ladies and Gentlemen

Good morning

It is indeed an honour and a privilege to welcome you all to the KwaZulu-Natal Provincial Tourism Conference. On behalf of the people of

eThekwini Municipality, I wish to extend our gratitude to the provincial government for choosing Durban to host this important gathering, which brings together industry leaders, policymakers, and experts in the tourism sector.

Held under the theme ***"Tourism in Transition: Confronting Challenges, Cultivating Tomorrow, Connecting Through Collaborative Partnerships,"*** this conference provides a vital platform for key stakeholders across various sectors to reflect on industry developments, share best practices, and chart a sustainable growth path for tourism in KwaZulu-Natal.

For us as a city, this conference is especially significant as it coincides with our preparations for the festive season, during which we expect close to 1.3 million visitors to descend upon Durban. This gathering sends a clear message to both tourists and investors that we are deeply committed to strengthening and expanding the tourism industry in our city and our province.

MEC Zondi, this conference follows closely on the engagements we held with tourism stakeholders in September, where we discussed strategies for building a sustainable and robust tourism sector in Durban. During that engagement, we reaffirmed our commitment to creating a conducive environment for the industry to thrive. We also recognised that government cannot achieve this goal alone. Hence, we continue to call for strong partnerships with the private sector to drive innovation, investment, and inclusive growth.

Ladies and gentlemen, I wish to express my sincere appreciation to all stakeholders in the sector for your tireless efforts to revive tourism following the devastating impact of the COVID-19 pandemic. Thanks to your dedication, the sector is now firmly on an upward trajectory. According to recent data from Stats SA, total international tourist arrivals in South Africa reached 8.92 million in 2024, representing a 5.1% increase over 2023. This follows a sharp rebound from 2.7 million in 2021 to 7.3 million in 2022. Our shared goal is to return to pre-pandemic levels of over 10 million international tourists, and we are confident that this milestone is within reach.

In Durban, we have also witnessed encouraging growth in both domestic and international visitor numbers. Between January and May this year, Durban welcomed 2.8 milion domestic trips and over 186,000 International visitors. According to data released by South African Tourism, this influx generated a combined spend of over R750 million — reaffirming Durban's status as one of South Africa's most attractive and dynamic travel destinations.

To sustain this momentum, we continue to work with private investors to upgrade infrastructure and enhance the visitor experience. A key development in this regard is the R1 billion redevelopment of the Elangeni and Maharani Hotels through our extended partnership with Southern Sun. This forms part of our broader inner-city and beachfront revitalisation initiatives aimed at improving the Golden Mile and elevating Durban's appeal as a world-class tourism destination.

Equally important is the safety and security of our visitors. To this end, we have established the Coastal and Tourism Policing Unit, which patrols 100 kilometres of our coastline. This pioneering initiative — the first of its kind in the country — underscores our commitment to ensuring that both

residents and visitors can enjoy our beaches and attractions in a safe environment. We are determined to strengthen and sustain this unit's capacity as part of our broader tourism safety strategy.

Ladies and gentlemen, these initiatives reflect our unwavering commitment to ensuring that Durban and KwaZulu-Natal remain premier destinations for both tourism and investment.

With these remarks, I once again welcome you all to our beautiful city and wish you productive and fruitful deliberations over the course of this conference.

I thank you.