ADDRESS BY ETHEKWINI MUNICIPALITY MAYOR, CLLR CYRIL XABA AT THE MEETING BETWEEN ETHEKWINI MUNICIPALITY AND CALIFORNIA STATE UNIVERSITY, SACRAMENTO, 6 NOVEMBER 2025

- Programme Director
- Representatives from the Gauteng Provincial Legislature
- The California State University, Sacramento (Sac State)
- Mangosuthu University of Technology (MUT) delegation, led by Professor Nokuthula Sibiya
- Distinguished Guests
- Ladies and Gentlemen

Good morning

It is a great honour to welcome you to this important engagement. We are indeed humbled by your visit, and we are excited to position

eThekwini as Africa's next hub for innovation, skills development, and sustainable urban governance.

Your visit aligns perfectly with our city's Smart Durban agenda, which envisions a globally connected, technologically empowered, and inclusive urban economy that delivers tangible improvements to the lives of our citizens.

This visit is envisaged around five key pillars that would make Durban the best city in Africa. Through your visit, we would like to follow up on the following initiatives:

1. **Establishing an African "Silicon Valley" of eThekwini**

Together with Sac State, Durban would like to pioneer the creation of an Innovation and Technology Corridor—a regional ecosystem modelled on Silicon Valley's collaborative culture between academia, government, and industry. We would like to follow up on this discussion to explore how Sac State could provide technical expertise in innovation cluster development, research commercialisation, and

entrepreneurship education. The City will offer the enabling environment—land, incentives, and policy frameworks—to attract tech start-ups, venture investors, and academic innovators. This initiative aims to position EThekwini as the digital capital of Southern Africa, fostering job creation, tech-driven public services, and export-ready innovation.

2. Developing world-class incubation centres

Through collaboration with Sac State's Carlsen Center for Innovation and Entrepreneurship, Durban could establish state-of-the-art incubation centres designed to nurture local talent and scalable start-ups. These centres will focus on green technology, AI solutions for governance, smart mobility, and community-driven social innovation. Sac State could assist with curriculum design, mentorship frameworks, and linkages to U.S.-based accelerator networks, ensuring our entrepreneurs are globally competitive. The result will be a new generation of Durban-based innovators who create solutions that respond to our city's most urgent social and economic challenges.

3. Embedding Artificial Intelligence in service delivery

Ladies and Gentlemen, Durban aims to become a service-delivery-savvy city, leveraging Artificial Intelligence (AI) and data analytics to enhance decision-making, responsiveness, and efficiency. Therefore, Sac State's expertise in AI, data ethics, and digital governance will guide the City in developing predictive service models—for example, in traffic management, water leak detection, waste management, and emergency response. Furthermore, the partnership could promote the ethical and inclusive adoption of AI, ensuring technology serves citizens equitably while building internal municipal capacity.

This will mark the transition from traditional service delivery to intelligent service management—responsive, data-informed, and citizen-centric.

4. Aligning University qualifications with real-world urban challenges

Durban's universities—working in concert with Sac State—will reimagine their academic offerings to directly respond to pressing

societal and municipal challenges. Joint curriculum development and academic exchange will focus on urban planning, digital transformation, environmental resilience, and public administration innovation. Sac State will share best practices in experiential learning and community-engaged education, helping local institutions produce graduates ready to tackle real-world problems. This will bridge the gap between education and employability, turning Durban into a living laboratory for innovation-driven learning.

5. Collaboration on water, governance, and sustainable city systems

I am sure you are all aware that Durban faces complex challenges in water security, governance, and infrastructure sustainability. Sac State brings a wealth of expertise in these areas, offering a powerful opportunity for collaboration. The City will invite Sac State experts in water resource management, governance reform, and urban policy to work alongside local universities and city departments. Together, they will develop joint research projects, training programmes, and qualifications that strengthen our institutions' ability to manage critical

urban systems. This initiative will position Durban as a continental leader in resilient city management, capable of developing solutions relevant to African urban contexts.

6. Collaboration with MUT and SANEDI in the AI summit on EnergyWaterFoodClimate, Business and Health

Ladies and Gentlemen, MUT is planning the AI summit on energy, water, food, climate and has received seed funding from the South African National Energy Development Institute (SANEDI). We would like to commit to this initiative and extend an invitation to Sac State to be a part of this programme.

This envisaged collaboration between Sacramento State University and the City of Durban is a commitment to co-creating a sustainable, inclusive, and technologically advanced city. It is a model of North-South cooperation where expertise, innovation, and shared purpose drive transformation.

Together, we will build the foundation for:

- A globally connected innovation economy,
- An empowered and employable youth population,
- A resilient and smart city administration, and
- A future where knowledge directly serves people's everyday needs.

Through this partnership, Durban will stand as a beacon of what is possible when cities and universities collaborate across borders to reimagine the future.

Thank you very much for your attention