ADDRESS BY ETHEKWINI MUNICIPALITY MAYOR, CLLR CYRIL XABA AT THE ENGAGEMENT WITH THE KZN DIPLOMATIC CORPS, 5 JUNE 2026

- The Programme Director,
- Deputy Mayor: Cllr. Zandile Myeni,
- Mr. Alain Gringoire: Dean of the Diplomatic Corps KZN,
- Esteemed Members of the Diplomatic Corps,
- Members of eThekwini Municipality EXCO,
- Councillors,
- The City Manager, Mr. Musa Mbhele,
- Senior Managers of the City,
- Distinguished Guests,
- Ladies and Gentlemen,

Good morning

It is my singular honour to welcome you to this inaugural eThekwini Diplomatic Corps Engagement. As a leading economic hub and port city,

eThekwini plays a strategic role in advancing South Africa's international relations and economic diplomacy.

Yet, despite our established network of consulates, embassies, and international partners, we have lacked a formalised platform to engage you in a systematic and outcome-driven manner.

Therefore, this programme seeks to establish a sustained and structured interface between eThekwini leadership and your diplomatic community.

Our purpose is clear: to facilitate dialogue on economic cooperation, innovation, and development; to showcase our strategic municipal projects and investment opportunities; and to align our local priorities with national foreign policy and global agendas, including the Sustainable Development Goals and African Union Agenda 2063.

But let me begin with issues that have been on the news. Esteemed diplomats, you read the headlines. You know of the protests against illegal

immigration, led by groups such as Operation Dudula, March, and March and other similar interest groups, alongside the truck drivers' strikes.

You know of the complex realities of our homeless population, congestion at Bayhead, and persistent concerns about harbour and the recent sea pollution cause by a sewer pump failure.

In dealing with the issue of illegal immigration, we defer to our country's principled positions, which are both constitutional and commitments to the UN Charter.

Consequently, we are categorical in saying: eThekwini rejects xenophobia. We equally reject lawlessness.

The answer to immigration challenges is not violence against foreign nationals; it is order, dialogue, and justice. We have engaged national government to enforce labour laws that protect both South African workers and legitimate foreign nationals. We have also engaged – and will continue to have progressive dialogues with the concerned organisations. It is our responsibility to educate South African citizens about the fact of

our country existing in the international community, as opposed to an isolated island.

On the recent environmental challenges in the harbour occasioned by the failure of the sewer pump station, we are delighted to report that our teams have done a sterling work to restore the pump station to full functionality. To ensure the long-term reliability of this infrastructure, the city is undertaking comprehensive upgrades which include procurement of three pumps for the facility to improve redundancy and operational efficiency.

On homelessness, we are implementing transitional housing and dignity-driven programmes to provide meaningful pathways out of poverty and vulnerability. These initiatives include the construction of a homeless shelter in the south of Durban, which will accommodate up to 800 people for periods of up to two years. During their stay, residents will have access to drug rehabilitation services, life-skills training, and support to reconnect with their families and reintegrate into society.

On Bayhead congestion, we are fast-tracking a new public transport corridor to ease congestion. Working with the private sector, we are building a dry port in Cato Ridge which will assist us to move cargo from road to rail.

Furthermore, I am pleased to confirm that the Durban harbour is currently being expanded through national investments led by Transnet.

This expansion will increase container capacity, deepen berths for larger vessels, and solidify Durban's position as the premier maritime gateway to the African continent. This is a national vote of confidence in our city.

Ladies and Gentlemen, this Diplomatic Corps Engagement Programme is built on five strategic objectives.

- First, to **enhance economic diplomacy**: attract foreign direct investment, promote exports, and unlock trade partnerships.
- Second, to **strengthen city-to-city partnerships**: deepen our sister city agreements and technical cooperation.
- Third, to **promote Durban globally**: position our city as a destination for tourism, conferences, and creative industries.

- Fourth, to facilitate **knowledge exchange**: skills transfer, innovation partnerships, and joint research initiatives.

- Fifth, to **mobilise development support**: engage your agencies and international institutions for funding and collaboration.

KEY INDUSTRIES AND INFRASTRUCTURE

Despite the challenges we have, many of which were occasioned by natural disasters, eThekwini remains the gateway to Africa and the World through the Indian Ocean. Our value proposition is unmatched.

Consider our **automotive sector**: Toyota, Bell Equipment, and a growing electric vehicle component supply chain make us the hub of the African automotive sector. Our **manufacturing** industries—chemicals, clothing, and beyond—employ hundreds of thousands of people. Our **tourism** potential is rebounding, anchored by the Durban ICC, our Golden Mile, sport facilities such as Moses Mabhida Stadium, and our UNESCO Creative City status for literature.

Critically, we are investing in **infrastructure** that matters. Water network upgrades to end leaks. Electricity grid reinforcement to ensure reliability. Road rehabilitation across the metro. And transportation improvements to connect people to opportunity. These investments, alongside the Transnet-led harbour expansion, consolidate our positioning as the main gateway to Africa and the world.

OUR PROGRAMME IN ACTION

The framework we are launching today includes several key components:

- An **Annual Diplomatic Corps Summit** hosted by the Mayor, focusing on trade, infrastructure, climate resilience, and the ocean economy.
- **Quarterly Thematic Roundtables** on the green economy and climate action, maritime and logistics, tourism and cultural industries, and innovation, technology, and smart cities.
- **Investment and Project Showcases** presenting bankable municipal projects, matchmaking sessions between investors and

local stakeholders, and promotion of our SEZs, port expansion, and urban regeneration projects.

- **Diplomatic Networking and Cultural Exchange** activities, including arts and heritage aligned with our UNESCO status.
- And finally, **Site Visits and Familiarisation Tours** with Invest Durban and TIKZN to our port, logistics hubs, tourism attractions, and industrial zones—showcasing real opportunities on the ground.

EXPECTED OUTCOMES AND CONCLUSION

Esteemed members of the Diplomatic Corps, what do we expect from this programme? We aim to increase investment inflows and partnership agreements. We seek to strengthen visibility of Durban in global networks.

We also wish to expand sister city and regional cooperation programmes.

Furthermore, we are working to improve coordination between local and national foreign policy priorities. And crucially, the success of all our efforts should be measured by the tangible and demonstrable creation of jobs and economic opportunities through international partnerships.

Our brand is simple: *“Durban: Gateway to Global Partnerships.”*

Led by the Mayor as Champion, anchored by our International and Intergovernmental Relations Directorate, and aligned with DIRCO (the Department of International Relations & Cooperation), SALGA (the South African Local Government Association), and national diplomatic frameworks, we will position eThekwini as a globally connected, investment-ready city—leveraging diplomacy as a catalyst for economic growth, innovation, and sustainable development.

I am looking forward to fruitful deliberations.

I thank you.