OPENING REMARKS BY ETHEKWINI MUNICIPALITY MAYOR, CLLR MXOLISI KAUNDA AT THE ETHEKWINI ECONOMIC COUNCIL MEETING, 18 FEBRUARY 2021

- Programme Director
- EXCO Members Present
- City Manager and Senior Management of the Municipality
- Esteemed Members of the Economic Council
- Ladies and Gentlemen

Good morning

Let me take this opportunity to welcome you all to our first meeting of 2021, hoping that we are rejuvenated and ready to tackle the challenges ahead. We trust that you had a safe and joyous festive season.

As we are aware, 2020 was dominated by the outbreak of the COVID-19 virus, which became a global pandemic – costing the world millions of jobs

and forcing countries to come up with innovative ways to strike a balance between saving lives and livelihoods.

Indeed, we are meeting at a time when the country is still in the grip of the second wave of the COVID-19 pandemic. With Health Authorities warning us about the looming third and a possible fourth wave of this pandemic, we must remain vigilant and continue to spread the message of observing all health protocols to curb the spread of this invisible enemy.

The possibility of the third and fourth wave implies that it will take a while for most sectors of our economy to realise full recovery. Economic projections indicate that the city's economy is expected to lose approximately R3,59 billion in GDP during this period. The hardest-hit industries include manufacturing, trade, construction, travel and tourism.

Therefore, we have a mammoth task of continuing to assist these sectors and keep them afloat as they play a central role in the economy of the city and job creation. They are also critical in turning the tide against unemployment which is currently sitting at 14% in this municipality. Our major

concern with regards to unemployment is that 58% of eThekwini's working age population are without a job.

Therefore, we desperately need innovative, impactful and tangible measures to revive our economy as we address the high levels of unemployment. As a city, we are of the view that accelerated implementation of catalytic projects is key to the growth of our economy and creation of much-needed jobs.

The Foreign Direct Investment of R 3.5 billion we have been able to attract as a city during this difficult period has been made possible by the catalytic projects and other huge infrastructure investments that are currently being implemented.

You will recall that when we tabled our economic recovery plan last year, we undertook to waive development applications for major infrastructure projects solely to retain and attract more Foreign Direct Investment. The fact that we have been able to attract such huge investment despite the COVID-19 pandemic, is a clear indication that our economic recovery plan is beginning to yield desired outcomes.

Colleagues, it is important to note that today's meeting takes place few days after the President of the Republic, His Excellency, Cyril Ramaphosa, delivered the State of the Nation Address (SONA) which also emphasized the importance of rolling out infrastructure investment. Other SONA priorities to boost the economy include increase in local production to reduce reliance on imports, job creation and expansion of energy generation capacity.

Therefore, as we continue to develop our workstream plans, we must ensure that they are aligned to these priorities.

Ladies and Gentlemen, we want to reiterate that this economic council must be a driver for innovative and bold plans that will bolster our economic recovery strategies. It must also lead the way in building a more inclusive economy in our city, where all our citizens have access to opportunities.

In conclusion, we want to commend all members of the economic council for your continued commitment in this noble task of growing our economy and building a better life for all the people of eThekwini.

I thank you