EXCO REMARKS BY ETHEKWINI MUNICIPALITY MAYOR CLLR CYRIL XABA, 18 MARCH 2025

- Deputy Mayor
- Speaker of Council
- Whip of Council
- Chairpersons of Portfolio Committees
- EXCO Members
- City Manager and Senior Management
- Members of the Media

Good morning

Let me welcome you all to this meeting which takes place when the city is counting the cost and carrying out mopping up operations after we suffered yet another devastating floods.

Between 19 February and 15 March, the floods have claimed the lives of 15 people and caused extensive damage to infrastructure.

Once again, we would like to convey our heartfelt condolences to the families of the deceased. As a caring city, we are working with the bereaved families to ensure that their loved ones receive a dignified burial.

We want to commend our disaster management teams for responding swiftly to emergency calls and we want to thank them for their dedication as they continue to conduct assessments, clean ups, and provide humanitarian relief.

The report we have received from the Joint Operations Centre indicates that 1452 houses and 5939 people were affected. The worst affected areas in the recent floods were Inanda, Ntuzuma, KwaMashu, Pinetown, KwaDabeka and Lamontville.

Together with the Premier and the Chairperson of Trading Services, Cllr Mduduzi Nkosi, we visited the affected families in Inanda and Lamontville, including those who have been relocated to family-friendly accommodation in the inner-city.

As the three spheres of government, we are committed to ensuring that permanent houses are built for these families. However, the challenge we have been encountering in building permanent houses in identified sites is that existing community members are not cooperating either because they themselves are flood victims who have not been allocated houses or they don't want low-cost houses in their neighbourhood.

As the rains persist, we will continue to face the shortage of land to resettle flood victims considering that the city has 603 informal settlements and some of them are located in flood-prone areas.

Working together, we must intensify public awareness campaigns urging people not to settle in flood plains because the frequency and intensity of floods, as a result of climate change, poses a huge risk to human lives and infrastructure.

Since 2017, the city has been experiencing recurring floods and this has put a huge strain on our water drainage system. In eThekwini, stormwater systems are designed to handle a 1-in-10-year storm event. Our large canals and river protection works are built to withstand 1-in-50 or 1-in-100-

year storm events. In the last two months, we have been experiencing heavy downpours that we would ordinarily receive in every 20-40 years.

It is in this context that we must continue to urge members of the community to dispose waste in designated places so that during the heavy rains, the same waste must not clog our drainage system and flood our homes.

Colleagues, we welcome the declaration of the state of disaster in the province by the national government. Since 2019 eThekwini Municipality has only received a total of R 1 .7 billion out of R3.1 billion it has applied for from the national government. This effectively means that from April 2019 to June 2024, the municipality has only received 55% of the funding it applied for and as a result, we were required to fund the shortfall of about R 1.3 billion. This was over and above other financial constraints occasioned by the advent of COVID-19 and the July 2021 Civil Unrest which coincided with the flood disasters.

For April 2019 floods, the municipality made an application of R1.161 billion and only R16.4 million was approved. In 2022, we were hit by the worst floods in 100 years and we received the Municipal Disaster Recovery Grant of R185 million. An additional funding of R1.5 billion of the Reconstruction and Rehabilitation Grant to repair roads, housing and water and sanitation infrastructure was approved.

However, for the disasters of January 2024 and June 2024, the municipality has been utilising the existing budget through reprioritization to respond to the damage and provide adequate relief to the affected communities.

Although an opportunity to apply for grant funding was made available, only R8.5 million has been received for damages caused by the inclement weather conditions of June 2024. The application of R247.8m for the January 2024 disaster was not approved.

For the recent flood damages which are estimated at R1.5 billion, the request for a declaration is still being considered.

It is important to indicate that these budget shortfalls to fund disasters caused by catastrophic weather events result in the city being unable to meet its service delivery obligations.

Each time we are hit by disasters, we must reprioritise our budget which leads to service delivery backlogs in other critical areas. You will recall that for 2022 floods, we reprioritized the budget that was meant to rehabilitate our swimming pools and other infrastructure which is key in promoting tourism in the city.

Colleagues, you will also recall that this EXCO took a decision that we must convene a Strategic Budget Performance Review Session as part of our efforts to enhance performance and improve accountability by officials. We strongly believe that this is critical in delivering quality services and improving the responsiveness of the municipality.

Among the resolutions that were taken to improve organisational performance and accountability include:

- Implementation of audit action plans to address the Auditor-General's findings.
- Filling of senior management vacant posts.
- Automating the contract management system to improve service delivery
- Improve debt collection and accuracy of billing information by conducting regular meter reading

• Improving accountability
• Fast track the automation of call centres
• Fast track the procurement of water and electricity smart meters

Colleagues, we are making every effort to improve service delivery in the city, and I am pleased to report that last week we recommissioned the Buffelsdraai Landfill Site which was closed in July 2023 after being invaded by waste pickers. This resulted in riots culminating into serious violence, arson attacks, theft and vandalism of property.

We are happy that the landfill site has been refurbished and as from the 1st of April, it will resume operations. However, food and any other consumable waste will be excluded and not dumped on site.

The municipality has also established a separate sorting facility which is about a kilometre away from the landfill site where compliant waste pickers will operate. We have appointed a team of professionals who will support the waste pickers who have now been formed into cooperatives with capacity building.

We are confident that the reopening of this site will improve waste management in the city, and it will also reduce operational costs since waste from this region had to be transported to ILovu Landfill Site.

Colleagues, you will recall that at our last EXCO meeting, a water turnaround strategy business plan was presented by the city manager and his team. After thorough engagements, we resolved that it must be presented with key stakeholders to solicit their input.

I am happy to report that these consultations have begun. On the 5th of March, we met with the water and sanitation staff, particularly those who are dealing with operations. Then, on the 6th of March, we met with the ratepayers' associations who made valuable input to the plan and committed to work with us to ensure its full implementation.
In the next few days, we will be meeting with external engineers who are experts in water operations.

Let me reiterate that at the heart of this water and sanitation turnaround strategy business plan is a commitment to curb water losses and make water service efficient and financially viable.

In conclusion, eThekwini is now gearing itself for Easter Holidays and we want to assure both our local and international visitors that we are ready to roll the red carpet for them. On the first week of April, we will be unveiling our Easter Holiday Plan, detailing our state of readiness to deliver a safe and memorable Easter Holidays.

Adding more excitement to the Easter Holidays, will be the official opening of the Westown Square in Shongweni on the 27th of March. This landmark development is set to redefine retail, dining and entertainment experience in the outer west region.

With these remarks, let me welcome you all and we look forward to fruitful discussions.

I thank you.