ADDRESS BY THE ETHEKWINI MUNICIPALITY MAYOR, CLLR MXOLISI KAUNDA AT THE TOURISM IMBIZO, 3 MARCH 2021

- Programme Director: DCM Philip Sithole
- The leadership of Community Tourism Organisations and Product owners
- Senior Management of the Department
- Members of the Media
- Ladies and Gentlemen

Good Morning

We are pleased to meet with the tourism industry players today, just a few days after the President announced the easing of lockdown regulations from level three to level one.

While this presents us with an opportunity for increased economic activity in all sectors of our economy, it also places a huge responsibility on our

shoulders to remain vigilant and ensure we minimize the spread of this pandemic.

Colleagues, we are all aware that COVID-19 has had a devastating impact on the economy, with tourism being the worst affected industry. As a result of this unprecedented economic crisis, many businesses in this sector have struggled to stay afloat and many jobs have been lost.

Ladies and Gentlemen, the ANC government remains committed to creating a conducive environment for businesses to thrive and we have identified the tourism industry as one of the catalysts for economic growth and job creation.

To this end, the fifth administration, led by His Excellency Cyril Ramaphosa made it clear that government is going to invest more resources in this sector by increasing support to industry players and establishing new tourism corridors in rural and township communities.

Creating new tourism corridors in rural and township communities is a socio-economic imperative for our city. The fact that 68% of our geographic space is constituted by rural areas, eThekwini has an important task of ensuring that the economic opportunities available in the tourism sector reach these communities.

We appreciate the fact that in this gathering today we are also joined by the leadership representing tourism product owners in township and rural areas who will share with us the challenges they are confronting in their businesses, especially during this difficult period of the COVID-19. We also look forward to their input as we seek possible solutions on how we can collectively assist them to run viable business where they are located.

Ladies and Gentlemen, you will recall that when COVID-19 hit our shores, we were the first city to develop an economic recovery plan, anchored on eight pillars. We agreed that the safeguarding of jobs and provision of adequate support to the tourism industry were key to the city's economic recovery.

It is against this background that during the hard lockdown, the city implemented the following relief measures to cushion and boost the tourism industry in the face of this pandemic:

- Bed and breakfasts were allowed to pay residential instead of commercial rates for a limited period;

- The city embarked on an aggressive campaign to get more beaches awarded a blue flags status. We are pleased that 12 beaches in our city have been awarded a blue flag status and this has resulted in over 70% of visitors in Durban flocking into our beaches in December.

- We also increased funding provided to Community Tourism Organisations from R250 000 to R500 000 to market their areas and create new tourism packages.

Colleagues, despite the losses we have suffered during last year's Easter and December Holidays, our interventions have indeed saved the tourism sector as we continued to attract both local and international visitors in our city during this difficult period.

During the 2020 festive season, the city achieved the following milestones:

- 2.56 million visitors coming to Durban;
- 1.7 million overnight visitors;
- 800,000 visitors a day;
- Domestic visitors stayed an average of 3.7 nights;
- Foreign visitors stayed an average of 4.5 nights.

Even though we lost 50% of visitors compared to the 2019 festive season, the total economic impact of our interventions resulted in the following achievements:

- Total direct expenditure – over R 4 billion by visitors;
- Contribution to City's GDP – over R 9 billion;
- 19 000 total annualized employment created and sustained;
- Total Government taxes – R 67 million.

The decline of visitors to the city during the 2020 Festive Season could be attributed to the following factors:

- Lockdown restrictions
- Beach closures and early restaurant closures
- People generally afraid of travelling and booking cancellations.
- School holidays starting later in December and companies closing later;
- Lack of disposable income due to job losses.

Therefore, the question that should be uppermost in our minds is what are we doing to regain the lost ground and bring visitors back to Durban? At the same time, we must be thinking about post COVID-19 tourism outlook and ensure we are prepared for when the world has overcome this virus.

Colleagues, our city has a great deal of competitive advantages that can help us revive the tourism sector. These include our Golden Mile (clean and safe beaches), state-of-the-art conference venues, cultural heritage, outdoor adventure and sport tourism.

Our task as the city, working with all role players in this sector is to tap into these competitive advantages and reimagine tourism post COVID-19.

We must agree that this pandemic has laid bare the existing inequalities in our country. As participants in this important sector of the economy, we must spare no effort in bringing new players, particularly those who were previously prevented from playing a meaningful role in it, Blacks in general and Africans in particular.

It is only when we allow greater participation into this sector that we can realise its full potential.

As an interim measure, we will continue to promote Durban as a premium destination, a must visit leisure and business tourism destination through our Marketing campaigns.

We will also accelerate our efforts to promote the city as a safe tourism destination in the context of COVID-19 and measures we have put in place

to turn the tide against this invisible enemy. And, more importantly, we want to keep Durban top of mind throughout the lockdown period as well as encourage visitors to imagine a holiday in the city post COVID-19.

In conclusion, we would like to reiterate government's commitment in working will all the partners to revive and support the tourism industry. We therefore urge you to continue to work with us in ensuring that this industry gets back on its feet and contributes towards addressing broader socio-economic challenges confronting our city.

I thank you.