ADDRESS BY THE ETHEKWINI MUNICIPALITY MAYOR, CLLR MXOLISI KAUNDA AT THE METHODIST CHURCH OF SOUTHERN AFRICA, NATAL COASTAL DISTRICT EVENT, 15 JANUARY 2023

- Programme Director
- Leaders of the Church
- Ladies and Gentlemen

Good morning,

As the eThekwini Municipality, we are pleased to be part of this gathering and we are grateful to you for affording us this opportunity to address the congregation.

On behalf of the people of eThekwini, we would like to extend a warm welcome to all of you and express our gratitude to the leadership and members of the Methodist Church of Southern Africa, Natal Coastal District for choosing our city as your home.

We are all aware that throughout the history of struggle for change in South Africa, the church always played a critical role in galvanising society to come together to fight against apartheid. Today, we face a different challenge – and we ask the church to, once again, lead in the fight against social ills which threaten the stability of the family structure – sinking our society deeper into drug and alcohol abuse.

Our communities continue to struggle to cope with challenges of poverty, unemployment, and inequality – made worse by the advent of the COVID-19 pandemic and the civil unrest of 2021. Last year's floods have added more pressure to both the city and residents of eThekwini – leaving many families homeless and others losing their loved ones.

In this regard, we must thank various churches from across the country who extended a helping hand by providing much-needed humanitarian aid to the flood victims. The donation of food, clothes and other essential goods provided relief to many people who were housed in community halls and churches.

After having committed ourselves to move all families from mass care centres to family-friendly accommodation, we are happy that we were able to meet our target. By the 23rd of December, the last group was relocated to facilities where families could enjoy Christmas together. Again, we could not have achieved this milestone without the collaboration of all sectors of the society including the church.

Ladies and gentlemen, the cooperation between government and church is not only limited to responding to disasters. The municipality continues to participate in community structures that include interfaith, academia, business, and civic organisations – where we discuss ways to deal with social ills that are ravaging our communities such as violent crime, Gender-Based Violence (GBV) and substance abuse.

As government, we understand that we cannot defeat this scourge alone. Therefore, we value the partnership we have with the church, and we remain committed to building a united, and prosperous nation by implementing policies that support socio-economic transformation and *nation* building.

We believe the church should be in the forefront in building social cohesion between different communities, ensuring we build a strong and united nation.

Bazalwane, the task of building an equal and prosperous society remains central to the leadership of the municipality. That is why we are implementing policies that support radical socio-economic transformation so that we ensure that those who were previously excluded from participating in the economy gain access and play a meaningful role in the mainstream economy.

Therefore, we would like to call on the church to walk with us on this journey of bringing hope where there is despair. We all know that the struggle for justice and freedom in this country was supported by the church which provided spiritual guidance and offered comfort to those who were in distress.

On our part, as a caring government we have established a wide range of programmes that support young people achieve their dreams of contributing positively to the growth of this country. For example, we are

attracting young people through various skills development programmes where graduates do in-service training, apprenticeship and learnerships.

We must emphasise that our goal is to make sure we encourage your people to become job creators instead of job seekers.

We are also aware of the wonderful work done by community-based organisations that seek to bring positive change in areas where they are. To respond to some of the challenges faced by some of the organisations, the municipality is able to fund such entities through the Sundry Grant-in-Aid programme.

Through this initiative, the municipality provides support to civil society organisations, thereby, allowing them to undertake practical steps to improve the standard of living and quality of life in communities.

Ladies and Gentlemen, we remain committed to run a clean government so that we can improve the lives of our people. Corruption has negative consequences on our economy and society as it undermines the very moral and ethical fibre of our young democracy.

Lasty, we want to take this opportunity to convey our sincere appreciation for the invitation to this gathering and we are confident that you will have a fruitful engagements.

I thank you