



Johannesburg Rising: Leadership, Vision, and the Courage to Build a Great City



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A City at Crossroads

Johannesburg — the City of Gold — stands once again at a defining moment in its history. Ours is a city forged in resilience, innovation, and struggle. It has endured the booms and busts of the global economy, the tensions of urbanisation, and the inequities of its history. Yet, despite its contradictions, Johannesburg remains a place of extraordinary potential — a city whose destiny is not fixed by circumstance but shaped by courage and leadership.

To speak of a world-class African city is not to indulge in rhetoric; it is to articulate a profound belief in Johannesburg's capacity to lead the continent into a new urban century. Our vision is one of progress rooted in equity, ambition rooted in service, and leadership that dares to confront the city's most difficult truths while inspiring collective purpose. For Johannesburg to become the city it was meant to be, it must do so through the determined will of leaders who act not for applause, but for posterity.

Leadership Amidst the Ebb and Flow

Cities are living organisms — they breathe, pulse, and evolve. Their success and failure oscillate with the quality of leadership that guides them. True leadership is tested not in times of comfort, but in moments of uncertainty — when the challenges of infrastructure decay, financial strain, and social division seem insurmountable.

In Johannesburg's story, each era of progress has been shaped by those who saw beyond crisis toward renewal. Today, we stand at such a juncture. My agenda calls for leaders across all sectors — from the city's administration to communities and the private sector — to rise above short-termism and build institutions capable of enduring the turbulence of urban transformation.

Leadership, therefore, is not a title. It is an act of stewardship — of guiding a city through its ebbs and flows with clarity, honesty, and courage. Johannesburg's leaders must be bold enough to disrupt stagnation and compassionate enough to heal the fractures of inequality. This is the essence of progressive leadership — pragmatic in execution, visionary in intent.

A Progressive City for a Progressive People

The aspiration to become a world-class African city must not be measured by skyscrapers or highways alone. It must be defined by the inclusivity of our economy, the dignity of our communities, and the creativity of our people. A progressive city is one that turns adversity into invention — where every informal trader, young innovator, and entrepreneur finds a place within the city's economic story.

My tasks and agenda are to redefine growth not merely as a Gross Domestic Product (GDP) expansion, but as shared prosperity. The city's renewal is bound to the creation of decent work, the nurturing of small and medium enterprises, and the deliberate empowerment of local talent. This calls for a new social compact — one where government enables, business invests, and citizens participate. The future of Johannesburg lies in the collective imagination of its people, turning policy into purpose, and plans into progress.

Reimagining Urban Transformation

To transform Johannesburg is to reimagine what a city can be — resilient, inclusive, and sustainable. The Growth and Development Strategy (GDS) 2040 remains our long-term compass, but vision alone is insufficient without a will to act decisively. The city must lead Africa's urban transformation through evidence-based planning, environmental consciousness, and digital innovation.

Our infrastructure must become a canvas for the future — energy systems powered by renewables, transport networks that connect rather than divide, and housing developments that restore dignity to urban life.

The city's streets and skylines must tell a story of renewal — not only through bricks and mortar, but through social cohesion and community empowerment.

As I have often said, the city's greatness will not be measured by how high it builds, but by how deeply it includes.

Building Resilience Through Innovation

In the 21st century, great cities are not those with the most resources, but those that use their resources most intelligently. Johannesburg must become a smart city with a soul — where technology enhances, rather than replaces, the human experience. From digital service delivery to participatory governance platforms, innovation must serve equity, accessibility, and accountability.

Leadership here means daring to modernise: automating systems, digitising processes, and embedding sustainability at every layer of decision-making. Our smart city initiatives — digital transformation, free Wi-Fi, data-driven management, and partnerships with research institutions — are not gadgets of convenience, but tools of transformation. They enable citizens to see, engage, and shape the future of their city in real time.

Safety, Governance, and the Ethics of Care

A great city is also a safe and ethical one. Governance reform is not about compliance checklists; it is about rebuilding public trust. The city's vision recognises that without integrity in governance, no strategy can succeed. Safety, too, is not the absence of crime alone — it is the presence of justice, opportunity, and belonging.

Johannesburg's approach to safety and law enforcement must therefore combine firmness with fairness, restoring the rule of law while addressing the social roots of instability. We must govern with empathy and act with precision. Leadership in this context means holding oneself to the highest standard — leading by example and ensuring that every public action strengthens the bond between city and citizen.

The Spirit of Johannesburg: A City That Never Gives Up

The city's strength lies not in perfection, but in perseverance. Johannesburg is a city that has learned to rise from its own contradictions. In its people — entrepreneurs, artists, engineers, and dreamers — resides an enduring spirit that refuses to be defeated.

My clarion call is for this spirit to become our collective project — a shared determination to build a city that is inclusive, just, and prosperous. The path will not be easy. Progress never is. But through unity of purpose and moral clarity in leadership, Johannesburg can once again become the city that leads Africa's future — not only as an economic powerhouse, but as a symbol of what cities can achieve when vision meets will.

Towards a New Social Imagination

To be a progressive leader in a progressive city is to believe that tomorrow can be better — and to act on that belief, relentlessly. Johannesburg's challenges are real, but so too are its opportunities. We are not building for comfort; we are building for continuity.

The next chapter of this city's history demands leaders who think long-term, citizens who act collectively, and institutions that endure. This is how Johannesburg will not only reclaim its greatness, but redefine it — as a city of courage, creativity, and compassion.

Johannesburg calls on all of us to move forward — with resolve, integrity, and imagination — to make it not just a world-class African city, but a world-leading African city: bold in vision, progressive in action, and unstoppable in spirit.