



CITY OF JOHANNESBURG
METROPOLITAN MUNICIPALITY



11th Floor A Block, Metropolitan Centre
158 Loveday Street, Braamfontein, JHB, ZA



Tel +27(0) 11 407 7356



khathutshelomul@joburg.org.za



www.joburg.org.za

SPEECH BY THE EXECUTIVE MAYOR OF JOHANNESBURG COUNCILLOR DADA MORERO AT THE GAUTENG SPAZA SHOP AND INFORMAL TRADERS SUMMIT & EXPO

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Programme Director

Premier and Members of the Gauteng Provincial Government, Members of the Mayoral Committee, Councillors, leaders of business and organised commerce, representatives of trader associations, spaza shop owners and informal traders, our partners in development finance and the private sector, distinguished guests, ladies and gentlemen

Good morning.

I want to depart from convention this morning and ask a different question, the one I think is the real elephant in this room. Why is it that in Johannesburg — the epicentre of this country's economy, the city we call the heartbeat of South Africa — we are still, 32 years into our democracy, struggling to answer the basic question of economic transformation? And why does that struggle land hardest here, in our townships and at the counters of our spaza shops?

I do not believe the answer lies primarily in red tape, or compliance, or which fund a trader can access. I believe the answer lies in what a developmental local government must do to resolve what I call the political economy of space in Johannesburg — the way our land, our infrastructure and our urban geography were shaped by, and continue to reproduce, unequal relations of economic power.

This city's built environment was never neutral. It grew out of a mining economy that needed cheap black labour close at hand but never close enough to share in its wealth, and it hardened under apartheid planning that engineered townships, hostels and buffer zones to secure exactly that arrangement. Democracy ended the legal architecture of that system. It has not yet undone its geography. Market-led development and gentrifying inner-city nodes now sit beside informal settlements and peripheral townships still carrying the shape apartheid gave them, so that where you live in this city still tracks, too closely, who you are and what you can access.

That is why this Summit cannot only be about permits and funding cycles, as important as those are. It has to be about who gets access to land, infrastructure, and economic opportunity in this city — and who is still, today, pushed to its margins.

This year, the City will approve the Township Economy By-law, building on our 2022 Informal Trading Policy, to start closing that gap—not by managing traders, but by giving them the standing, the space, and the support to grow. As of this month we have processed 4 043 spaza shop registration applications across all seven regions, led Gauteng in our Spaza Shop Fund drive with SEDFA with 39 beneficiaries already approved, and issued more than 500 of over 2 000 smart permit cards printed. Through our High-Rise Markets of the Future, we are turning sites like Kwa

Mai Mai, Faraday and Yeoville from neglected buildings into modern trading infrastructure over the next five years. The Gauteng Legislature has already passed the Township Economic Development Act, which compels the state in Gauteng to use its procurement capability to benefit township businesses and localise special economic zones.

These are real steps. But if we are honest, they are steps within an old spatial map, not yet a redrawing of it. That redrawing is the harder, longer work of this administration and the ones that follow it — and it is work government cannot do alone.

Every major employer in this country started as someone's small idea, in someone's township, on someone's corner. Our task is to build a city whose geography no longer decides how far that idea can go. Together we grow Johannesburg.

Thank you.