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## Speech by the Executive Mayor of the City of Johannesburg, Cllr Dada Morero, on the Launch of the UNESCO Media and Information Literacy (MIL) City Network Pilot-26 June 2026 | Noordgesig Library

**Programme Director.**

**Member of the Mayoral Committee for Community Development.**

**Representatives of UNESCO.**

**Representatives of national, provincial and local government.**

**Members of the diplomatic community.**

Good morning.

It is a privilege to welcome you all to the launch of the UNESCO Media and Information Literacy (MIL) City Network Pilot. Today marks an important milestone not only for the City of Johannesburg but also for the African continent. We are immensely proud that Johannesburg is the only city in Africa selected to participate in this global pilot programme, alongside ten other leading cities from across the world.

This is a significant international recognition of our city's commitment to innovation, inclusive governance and citizen empowerment. Our participation is the culmination of a journey that began through our engagement at the 2024 United Nations World Urban Forum, where the UNESCO Media and Information Literacy Cities Network Guidelines were introduced. Through sustained engagement with UNESCO and our international partners, Johannesburg was identified as one of the first cities globally to test and shape this important initiative.

This is therefore not simply the launch of another programme. It is the beginning of a new chapter in how cities can empower their residents through knowledge, critical thinking, access to information and responsible digital participation. Ladies and Gentlemen, we live in an age where information moves faster than ever before. While this creates tremendous opportunities, it also presents enormous challenges. Misinformation, disinformation, digital exclusion and online manipulation threaten democratic participation, social cohesion and public trust.

Media and Information Literacy has therefore become an essential life skill. It equips citizens to distinguish fact from fiction, identify credible sources, think critically, participate responsibly online, and engage meaningfully in democratic life. Cities are where people live, work, study and interact daily. They are therefore uniquely positioned to promote Media and Information Literacy through the institutions that residents engage with most frequently—our libraries, schools, universities, community centres, museums, civic organisations and municipal services.

The UNESCO Media and Information Literacy Cities Network seek to integrate these principles into the everyday life of cities by building partnerships across government, education, civil society and local communities. The City of Johannesburg fully embraces this vision. We recognise that informed citizens make stronger communities. Informed communities make better decisions. And empowered societies build stronger democracies. This initiative provides an opportunity to showcase the important work already underway across our city while encouraging greater collaboration among institutions that share a common commitment to education, information, and public participation.

Colleagues, it is important to emphasise that this is a pilot network, not a formal UNESCO designation. Johannesburg has been selected to help develop, test and strengthen this international framework alongside our global counterparts. Our experiences, innovations and lessons will help shape how this initiative is implemented around the world.

Importantly, this programme requires no additional financial commitment from the City. Instead, it builds upon existing programmes, partnerships and institutional capacities while creating opportunities for international collaboration, knowledge exchange and innovation. The initiative aligns directly with the City of Johannesburg's International Relations Strategy, ensuring that our global partnerships meaningfully contribute to our local development priorities as outlined in the Joburg 2040 Growth and Development Strategy.

Our vision remains clear: to build a vibrant, inclusive, resilient and world-class African city that improves the quality of life for all who live, work, invest and visit here. Media and Information Literacy directly support this vision by strengthening informed citizenship, improving digital inclusion, expanding educational opportunities and fostering greater social resilience. Ladies and Gentlemen,

The City of Johannesburg Library and Information Services Department will coordinate the implementation of this pilot. Working with UNESCO's 16 Initial Steps and the Media and Information Literacy City Guidelines, the Department will bring together internal departments and external stakeholders to ensure this pilot delivers practical, measurable outcomes. Central to our implementation will be six strategic pillars. Firstly, we will promote access to reliable, credible and accurate information—both digital and printed—to empower residents with knowledge that improves everyday life and strengthens active citizenship.

Secondly, we will strengthen social cohesion by building partnerships with community organisations, educational institutions, NGOs, faith-based organisations, and community leaders to bridge divides across generations, cultures, and communities throughout Johannesburg. Thirdly, we will promote respect for the rule of law through collaboration with the Johannesburg Metropolitan Police Department, the South African Police Service and other partners. Citizens will have greater access to information about their rights, responsibilities, municipal by-laws and both online and physical safety.

Fourthly, we will celebrate Johannesburg's rich cultural diversity by recognising our city as a vibrant multicultural metropolis where all residents who live and work legally can participate meaningfully in civic life while fostering mutual respect, inclusion and social integration. Fifthly, we will improve public safety and ease of navigation throughout Johannesburg by making reliable information more accessible through digital platforms, printed materials and coordinated partnerships with Joburg Tourism, public safety agencies and other city entities.

Finally, we will strengthen Johannesburg's profile as a destination of choice for local and international visitors by ensuring that accurate, accessible and trustworthy information about our attractions, heritage, cultural experiences and municipal services is readily available. These pillars

demonstrate that Media and Information Literacy is far more than access to information. It is about building safer communities.

Creating informed citizens. Supporting democratic participation. Strengthening social cohesion. Enhancing economic opportunity. And positioning Johannesburg as a globally connected African city. Programme Director, one of the greatest strengths of this initiative is collaboration. Today we are joined by representatives from numerous City departments, educational institutions, civil society organisations and community partners. Each has an important role to play in making this pilot successful. We also look forward to working closely with our fellow pilot cities across the world. Through shared learning and international cooperation, we can exchange innovative practices and collectively strengthen Media and Information Literacy globally. Our libraries will remain at the heart of this effort.

Libraries are no longer simply places to borrow books. They are centres of learning, innovation, digital inclusion, civic participation and lifelong education. They provide trusted spaces where communities can access credible information, develop digital skills and engage constructively with one another. I therefore encourage all our residents to make full use of our libraries, information centres and municipal facilities as trusted gateways to knowledge and opportunity.

Ladies and Gentlemen, the future belongs to informed societies. It belongs to citizens who can think critically, verify information, embrace diversity and participate responsibly in shaping their communities. Johannesburg is proud to stand at the forefront of this global movement. Today we reaffirm our commitment to building a city where access to reliable information strengthens democracy, promotes inclusion, drives innovation and improves the lives of all our residents.

We are honoured to contribute to this important UNESCO initiative and look forward to sharing Johannesburg's experiences with the international community while learning from cities across the globe. Together, let us build a more informed, more connected and more resilient Johannesburg.