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Media Statement

For Immediate Release

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Positioning Johannesburg as Africa's Gateway under the AfCFTA

The City of Johannesburg's Economic Development Department, through its Trade and Investment Unit, convened a strategic session in Sandton on Wednesday, with key stakeholders and industry experts to explore practical interventions aimed at positioning Johannesburg as a leading gateway for trade and investment under the African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA).

In a panel discussion with thought leaders including Azwindini Mulaudzi, Nomthandazo Dlanga, Marcus Baliso, and Palesa Rachidi who shared insights on strengthening Johannesburg's competitiveness in an evolving global and continental economic landscape.

Stakeholders emphasised that for Johannesburg to reclaim and sustain its status as Africa's economic gateway, the City must prioritise getting the fundamentals right. This includes improving service delivery, maintaining critical infrastructure, and addressing urban decay.

Concerns were raised about deteriorating infrastructure, inconsistent service delivery, and the visible decline in parts of the inner city. Participants highlighted that these challenges undermine investor confidence and limit the City's ability to compete globally.

Speakers underscored the importance of cultivating a high-performance culture within both the public and private sectors. A shift in mindset towards accountability, efficiency, and excellence was identified as critical to transforming Johannesburg into a globally competitive city.

The need for consequence management and institutional accountability was also emphasised, with calls for decisive action to address inefficiencies and governance gaps.

The dialogue highlighted the importance of balancing large-scale investment attraction with grassroots economic development. While Johannesburg continues to pursue international investment opportunities, stakeholders stressed the need to strengthen township and informal economies.

Innovative approaches were proposed to formalise and upscale informal businesses, including integrating small enterprises into mixed-use developments and enabling their participation in the formal economy.

A recurring theme was the lack of coordination among municipal entities. Stakeholders noted duplication of efforts across agencies and called for greater alignment in planning, budgeting, and implementation.

Enhanced collaboration across City entities is essential to maximise impact, avoid inefficiencies, and ensure a unified approach to economic development.

Participants highlighted that being a “gateway” requires Johannesburg to move beyond traditional approaches and adopt bold, forward-looking strategies. This includes developing innovative, globally competitive policies, leveraging existing infrastructure such as logistics and export hubs, strengthening trade facilitation, and enhancing Johannesburg’s value proposition to both local and international investors.

Johannesburg’s contribution to South Africa’s GDP remains significant, reinforcing its strategic importance within the African economy. However, maintaining this position requires proactive planning, innovation, and long-term vision.

Key Priority Interventions Identified

- Inner-city revitalisation and urban cleanliness
- Infrastructure development and maintenance
- Revenue enhancement and financial sustainability
- Support for manufacturing hubs and industrial development
- Entrepreneurship development and enterprise support

The importance of benchmarking Johannesburg against leading global cities and leveraging international partnerships was also highlighted. Stakeholders called for clearer strategies around city-to-city agreements, trade missions, and investment promotion initiatives to ensure tangible outcomes.

The Economic Development Department reaffirmed its commitment to collaborating with stakeholders to reposition Johannesburg as a competitive, inclusive, and investment-friendly city under the AfCFTA framework.

By strengthening governance, improving service delivery, and fostering innovation, Johannesburg can unlock its full potential as Africa’s gateway for trade and investment.

Ends

Issued by the City of Johannesburg

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