



CITY OF JOHANNESBURG
METROPOLITAN MUNICIPALITY



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KEYNOTE ADDRESS BY THE EXECUTIVE MAYOR OF JOHANNESBURG, CLLR DADA MORERO, AT THE MAYORAL TREE PLANTING IN REGION D

18 SEPTEMBER 2026

**Programme Director, Ms Mmamoleme Rakosa;
Ward Councillor for Ward 39, Cllr Lefa Modise;
Johannesburg City Parks and Zoo leadership and regional management;
Community organisations and residents;
Members of the media;
Ladies and gentlemen.**

It is an honour to join you today as we celebrate Arbour Month and mark the planting of 500 trees across Orlando West, Meadowlands and Senaoane.

This year's theme, "My Tree, My Oxygen. Plant Yours Today," reminds us of a simple truth: trees sustain life. They provide oxygen, cool our communities, support biodiversity and contribute to healthier, safer and more liveable neighbourhoods. Today is about more than planting trees. It is about investing in people and building a better Johannesburg for future generations.

I congratulate Johannesburg City Parks and Zoo, its employees, partners, donors and community volunteers, whose efforts have once again earned our city international recognition. Our Greening Soweto: Bridging the Green Divide initiative, led by former Mayor Amos Masondo, was named a Highly Commended Finalist in the Living Green for Health and Wellbeing category of the AIPH World Green City Awards 2026 in Bari, Italy. This follows the World Urban Parks Awards 2026, where the City will receive 6 of the 19 global awards to be presented in Istanbul, Türkiye — for Kloofendal Nature Reserve, the Zoo Lake Precinct and Johannesburg Zoo, The Wilds Nature Reserve, Beaulieu Sanctuary and Little Falls Reserve.

Programme Director, the significance of today becomes clear when we consider how far Soweto has come. Those of us who lived through the pre-1994 era remember a very different Soweto — no Maponya Mall, no FNB Stadium, no Rea Vaya, no landscaped Chris Hani Road. Today, Soweto is one of the country's most vibrant urban centres: an economic hub, a tourism destination and a centre of culture and heritage. Greening has been part of that transformation.

We often treat trees and parks as an afterthought — something added once development is already done. Our experience shows greening can catalyse development, not merely result from it. When Greening Soweto launched in 2006 to address the historic green divide between formerly advantaged and disadvantaged communities, over 200 000 trees were planted, parks were improved, and green corridors were developed. The EPWP itself started here. Jobs were created. Skills were transferred. Small businesses were supported through landscaping and maintenance work. It strengthened social cohesion. It improved property values. It attracted investment. For communities long neglected, trees and parks became symbols of dignity and pride.

That is why the 500 trees we plant today matter. They represent an investment in economic development, environmental sustainability and community wellbeing, and our continued commitment to bridging historical inequalities. But our success, Programme Director, must be measured not by how many trees we plant, but by how many survive. Planting a tree takes minutes; growing one takes years.

Government must keep investing in greening and protecting public spaces. Communities must embrace ownership — caring for new trees, protecting mature ones and guarding against vandalism. Every tree is a public asset for present and future generations.

Johannesburg is home to one of the world's largest human-made urban forests. That forest is ageing and needs constant renewal. Let these 500 trees be part of a movement that inspires every resident, school and business to grow Johannesburg's green future — a greener, healthier, safer and more inclusive city that offers a better quality of life for all who call it home.

My Tree. My Oxygen. Plant Yours Today.

Let's plant. Let us protect. Let us grow.

Thank you.