

Newsletter

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Building Bridges: Leveraging International Relations for City Growth

FOREWORD

In an increasingly interconnected world, cities play a critical role in shaping global partnerships and advancing shared development goals. Johannesburg continues to strengthen its position as a leading African city by deepening its engagement with international stakeholders and expanding its global footprint.

This edition of Marang highlights the City's strategic efforts to consolidate and elevate its international relations. From strengthening long-standing partnerships, such as its engagement with Chengdu, to actively contributing to global platforms like the Urban 20 (U20), Johannesburg is reinforcing its role in international urban diplomacy and ensuring that its voice—and that of African cities—is represented in global dialogues.

These engagements are not merely symbolic; they create real opportunities for investment, knowledge exchange, and inclusive growth. As Johannesburg continues to build meaningful global partnerships, it remains committed to leveraging these relationships to deliver tangible socio-economic benefits and drive sustainable development for its residents.

Enjoy the read.

***Editor in chief:
Hlompho Mphanje***

"This is your City. And together, we are building the Johannesburg of our hearts' desire."

EM Cllr. Sello Dada Morero



Johannesburg Participates in Global Urban Diplomacy: U20 Engagement in Los Angeles

Following the successful hosting of the Urban 20 (U20) Mayors Summit in 2025, Johannesburg has continued to strategically position itself as a leading voice within global city networks. This milestone reinforced the City's growing influence in international urban diplomacy and strengthened its role in shaping global urban policy agendas.

In line with its International Relations Strategy and its commitment to active participation in global city networks, Johannesburg participated in the Urban 20 (U20) Sherpa Meeting held in Los Angeles between 11 to 12 May 2026. The U20 is a key international city diplomacy platform that brings together major cities to influence global policy processes linked to the G20, with a strong focus on advancing urban priorities such as climate action, sustainable development, and inclusive economic growth.

At the 2026 Sherpa Meeting, discussions were structured around three interconnected priorities:

- Access to affordable housing
- Climate action and urban resilience
- Migration and inclusive urban communities

Johannesburg's participation ensured that African urban perspectives are represented in shaping global policy dialogues, particularly on issues that directly impact rapidly growing cities. The City also contributed to the development of the U20 Communique, which articulates the collective priorities and commitments of participating cities.

A notable highlight of the engagement was the recognition of Johannesburg's leadership in global city networks. Following the City's successful role as host of the 2025 Urban 20 (U20) Mayors Summit, Johannesburg was requested by both New York City and London to provide strategic advice and support for upcoming U20 engagements. This reflects growing international confidence in the City's ability to convene and lead in complex global urban dialogues. The meeting further underscored the importance of city-level diplomacy in an evolving geopolitical landscape, with emphasis on strengthening multilateral cooperation and ensuring that the voices of cities are reflected in global decision-making processes.

Looking ahead, Johannesburg is expected to continue its active participation in the U20 cycle, including preparations for the U20 Mayors Summit scheduled for September 2026 in New York City.

Through platforms such as U20, Johannesburg is not only reinforcing its position as a global city but also ensuring that its development priorities, challenges, and innovations contribute to shaping international urban agendas.



Strengthening Strategic City Partnerships: Johannesburg-Chengdu Engagement

Johannesburg continues to deepen its global footprint through targeted city-to-city partnerships, with a key milestone being its recent engagement with the City of Chengdu, People's Republic of China. This was formalized through the signing of a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) on further deepening friendly exchanges and cooperation, alongside participation in the 2026 Chengdu International Friendship Cities Cooperation and Development Conference which took place from the 13th to the 16th May 2026.

The MoU builds on a longstanding relationship, which was established in 2010 and reinforces cooperation based on mutual benefit, equality, and shared development objectives. It provides a formal framework to expand collaboration across priority sectors including economic development, healthcare, culture, and people-to-people exchanges, while also facilitating ongoing institutional coordination between the two cities.

Johannesburg's delegation, led by MMC for Economic Development Cllr Nomoya Mnisi, participated in high-level engagements at the Conference, which convened 37 cities from 28 countries and multiple international organizations. The platform served as a strategic opportunity to position Johannesburg as a leading African economic hub, while strengthening diplomatic and investment ties.

A key highlight was the Mayors Roundtable Dialogue, where Johannesburg showcased its economic strength and investment offering, emphasizing its contribution to national and continental growth, as well as its commitment to inclusive, innovation-driven development. The City further promoted its Special Economic Zones, infrastructure-led growth strategy, and investor-friendly incentives aimed at unlocking sustainable economic activity. The Conference also enabled Johannesburg to engage with emerging global best practices, particularly in areas such as sustainable urban planning, smart city innovation, and technological advancement. Site visits to initiatives such as the Tianfu Park City model and the Chengdu Humanoid Robot Innovation Centre provided valuable insights into integrated urban development and future-focused technologies.

Importantly, the signing of the MoU represents more than a ceremonial commitment—it creates a platform to unlock trade opportunities, knowledge exchange, and cultural collaboration, while strengthening political goodwill between the two cities. It also positions Johannesburg to leverage international partnerships in advancing its own development agenda and service delivery objectives.

During the recent State of the City Address (May 2026), Executive Mayor Morero highlighted that the City has attracted approximately R26.6 billion in investments. In addition, the City successfully hosted more than five international conferences, generating an estimated R2 billion in economic activity. These achievements underscore the importance of strategically positioning Johannesburg on the global stage and demonstrate how strengthening international partnerships continues to yield tangible socio-economic benefits for the City.



MMC Mnisi making her inputs at the Mayoral Roundtable Dialogue



Participants interacting with a humanoid robot during the Conference

Inside Joburg's International Footprint: Quick Facts

- Johannesburg has hosted and co-chaired the Urban 20 (U20) Summit in 2025, marking the first time the U20 was held in Africa.
- The City is part of at least 7 major global city networks, including C40, UCLG, Metropolis and U20—connecting Joburg to hundreds of cities worldwide. Through these networks, Johannesburg helps shape global policy discussions on issues like climate change, urban resilience, and inclusive growth.
- Globally, cities account for more than 70% of economic activity and over 50% of the world's population—which is why city diplomacy is so important.
- Johannesburg has formal relationships with cities across the world, including Shanghai, Birmingham, and Addis Ababa.
- The City once served as President of United Cities and Local Governments (UCLG)—one of the most influential global city networks representing billions of people.
- Johannesburg is currently President of FMDV, a global network focused on financing sustainable urban development.
- Through its international partnerships, the City supports knowledge exchange—from urban farming in Birmingham to smart city solutions in Shanghai.
- Johannesburg is recognised as a leading global city in Africa and a key gateway for trade and investment into the continent.
- Johannesburg was the first city in Africa to review its Climate Action Plan (CAP)—joining global leaders like Paris and Tokyo.
- Johannesburg's libraries are internationally recognised and have been invited to contribute to UNESCO's global Media and Information Literacy (MIL) Cities initiative.