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PRESS RELEASE: Metropolis - How To Create Safer Cities

For immediate release

Johannesburg: The Executive Mayor of Johannesburg, Parks Tau, has told how technology and greater citizen participation can be used as effective tools to create safer communities and better safeguard citizens.

The mayor was speaking at the Global Network for Safer Cities session, hosted by the United Nations' UN Habitat, on the opening day of the annual Metropolis general meeting.

Metropolis is a global network of 150 cities from across the world that, for almost 30 years, has provided support to cities, interconnects local leaders and academia with civil society and business and set benchmarks on how cities can be effectively managed and run.

Today the mayor, talking on how to create a safer city, said the city was working towards building capacity to enhance technology to complement its general policing.

"For example, we need a data intelligence capacity to respond to trends and to identify certain interventions ... to improve public safety."

He added: "How does modern technology involve the community ... this is an integral part of our city safety strategy. Our (comprehensive) approach is to build partnering, build policing, use technology and mobilise people as active participants."

The mayor also spoke of one of the city's more successful anti-crime initiatives, the Joburg Plus10 programme, that sees at least ten police officers being allocated to each of the city's 130 wards.

Also speaking at the session was Aisa Kirabo Kacyira, the Deputy Executive Director of UN Habitat, who said the organisation was working with 77 cities around the world to enhance safety and security and ensure long-term sustainability.

She said: "We need to identify adversity as an opportunity. Safety should not just be looked at in terms of policing but what goes on in the mind of a person. For example do they feel safe? Do they feel secure?"

Fellow panelist, the CEO and executive director of the United States Conference of Mayors, Tom Cochran, said the issue of safety and security was a much broader one that cities need to reflect on.

"We need to understand there's a larger conversation, for example, that we're having on e-governance. This is not just for crime-fighting but also to provide information and to be used positively for the city."

He added that basic necessities such as good lighting and transportation were also key in the move to create safer cities.

In a parallel session run by the South African Cities Network, newly-appointed Deputy Minister of the Department of Co-operative Governance and Traditional Affairs, Andries Nel, said urbanisation had necessitated government to resuscitate the Integrated Urban Development Framework (IUDU).

He said Metropolis provided an ideal opportunity "for various role-players to share experiences, celebrate achievements and develop road-maps for dealing with challenges confronting all of us".

He said rapid urbanisation was a growing global concern and cities needed to swiftly look at ways in which to cater for the needs of a growing society that put a massive strain on infrastructure.

In his state of the nation address in February this year President Jacob Zuma said Census Statistics revealed that 63% of the population are living in urban areas, with the figure likely to increase to over 70% by 2030. He also called for the development of a national integrated urban development framework saying: "As part of implementing the National Development Plan, all three spheres of government need to manage the new wave of urbanisation in ways that also contribute to rural development."

Nel, meanwhile, said the Metropolis event gave cities a chance to make "conscious choices and take conscious actions".

He said there were "three undeniable truths that the dawn of the new millennium has brought to our attention as South Africans".

The first was the triple challenges of poverty; unemployment and inequality. The second was the phenomenon of urbanisation in least developed countries with more than half of the world population living in towns and cities. The third, he said, was that "apartheid spatial patterns still persist in our towns and cities; emitting and discharging the type of social ills that municipalities can never be able to overcome, on their own".

He said an integrated approach to urban development was therefore needed and that cities should:

- assume a transformational outlook,
- provide sustainable conditions for economic development, and,
- be deliberately inclusive, especially of poor and vulnerable communities.

"The South African reality is that a greater portion of our population is experiencing poverty and yet, a number of South Africans are continually accessing services and wealth at greater proportions compared to poorer communities," he said.

He added: "While rural development remains a priority of government, it is crucial that we develop a national integrated urban development framework, and consciously assist metros and other urbanising municipalities to effectively manage rapid urbanisation ... it is also essential that our social partners and private business must contribute to our growth and development strategies."

He concluded: "I firmly believe that if we commit ourselves to the foundational principles of cooperative governance as we develop both policies and instruments for urban development, we will collectively, achieve a great deal to advance our objectives."

About Urbanisation in South Africa

South Africa is becoming largely an urban society. According to the most recent World Bank survey released by the South African Institute of Race Relations (SAIRR) on 24 January 2013, two-thirds of South Africa's population now live in urban areas. The United Nations estimates the figure will rise to 71,3% by 2030 and 80% by 2050

About Metropolis

The Metropolis annual meeting takes place at the the Hilton Hotel in Sandton on 138 Rivonia Rd Sandton from July 16 to 19, 2013. For a full programme visit Joburg.org.za or www.metropolis.org

Media Contacts

Should you or your news organisation require accreditation, interviews, live streaming content, uploads and further information please contact those listed below.

Ms Michelle Gololo

Vuma Reputation Management

W: +27 (0) 87 941 3497 | M: +27 (0) 74 975 4475 | E: michelle@vumareputation.com

Ms Jean Robertson

Vuma Reputation Management

W: +27 (0) 87 941 3497 | M: +27 (0) 82 9947744 | E: jean@vumareputation.com

Ms Georgina Lefifi

Group Head: Communications and Tourism Group Communications

City of Johannesburg

W: +27 (0) 11 407 7413 E: georginal@joburg.co.za

Nthatisi Modingoane

Deputy Director: Media Relations

City of Johannesburg

W: +27 (0) 11 407 7354 E: NthatiseM@joburg.org.za