

**WELCOMING ADDRESS BY COUNCILLOR RETIEF ODENDAAL  
THE HONOURABLE EXECUTIVE MAYOR OF THE NELSON MANDELA BAY  
MUNICIPALITY  
TO: CIVIC DINNER IN HONOUR OF JACKSONVILLE, LOWER SAXONY & MIRAMAR  
MONDAY, 27 FEBRUARY 2023, NELSON MANDELA BAY STADIUM AT 18H00**

**Programme Director: Mr Lulamile Moolman**

- *Ms Brenda Frinks: Former President of the Jacksonville Sister Cities Association (JSCA)*
- *Ms Felice Franklin: Vice President NMB Committee JCSA*
- *Ms Shaun D. Gayle: Assistant City Manager - City of Miramar*
- *Mr Axel Brockmann: State Police President - State of Lower Saxony*
- *The Delegations from the City of Jacksonville, State of Lower Saxony, City of Miramar & Jacksonville Sister Cities Association*
- *Honourable Councillors (NMBM)*
- *Distinguished Guests*
- *Media Representatives*
- *Ladies and Gentlemen*
- *All Protocol Observed*

**Good Evening! Guten Abend! Goeienaand! Molweni!**

Thank you for your warm and gracious introduction and for the opportunity to welcome the delegations from our Sister City Jacksonville-Florida (USA), the City of Miramar-Florida (USA), State of Lower Saxony (Germany) as well as the Jacksonville Sister Cities Association (JSCA).

This is exciting times for my city and its renewal agenda, embracing the opportunity for cooperation and partnership with the aforementioned cities in our province and in my city, the Nelson Mandela Bay.

I am immensely conscious of both the unique opportunity and responsibility in undertaking this task as first citizen of the only city in the world that bears the iconic name of Nelson Rolihlahla Mandela, to address you and this distinguished audience. Thank you!

Before I begin, I want to express my heartfelt thanks to each one of you for your active participation and for giving your time, your commitment, your energy, and your expertise in consolidating and establishing partnership and cooperation with my city. My colleagues and I are hugely honoured, appreciative, and humbled. Thank you!

With your indulgence Programme Director , allow me to extend the warm greetings of the Nelson Mandela Bay Metropolitan Council and the people of the Nelson Mandela Bay, as well as that of my councillor colleagues representing my city here today.

Allow me to single out the City of Jacksonville because since our partnership in 2000, it has been pivotal in the wellbeing of both our cities and speaks volumes of its role in the phenomenal promotion of both our cities. On behalf of the Nelson Mandela Bay Metropolitan Council, I commend you and want you to know how much my City appreciates it.

I say so because over the years our sister city relationship has steadily grown and the bonds between us have certainly strengthened. This is an important relationship for us linking Jacksonville, Florida's largest and a leading business city to the world's biggest economy in the USA with that of the Nelson Mandela Bay in the RSA.

Yes, there have been several exchanges between the peoples of our two cities and each one has strengthened the bond just a little bit more. No doubt, relationships like this one need nurturing to flourish and with this visit we are showing our inveterate commitment to you, to consolidate our relationship, our friendship, and the bonds between our cities.

The example of cities such as ours, who have the courage to reach out across the barriers of distance, culture, language, and nationality, are an example of genuine good will to share in the future and spirit of a global community.

Ladies and Gentlemen:

On this visit we hope to bring home the lesson and legacy of Nelson Mandela, from whom we have learnt that similarities are more powerful than differences to people of good intent.

It is also worth noting that the history of the development of our cities, in very different lands, and lengths of time, bears many physical and geographic similarities. This is indeed a real opportunity for our cities, in the face of so much change.

It is a time where the more demanding route is to embrace change, while also making sure we celebrate our differences and our points of similarity. This choice is the choice our cities have pledged.

It is a choice we will give substance to with a range of activities between our cities. A relationship that spells out identified areas for cooperation and exploration. These and others will indeed cement our relations and develop lasting friendships between our peoples.

It is a great range of activities that will add so much value to our common and mutual development and understanding. I sincerely hope that through our efforts we can learn better understanding and respect for each other as we journey along.

We are reminded that ultimately, we are all merely custodians of the past, present and future for our cities – when we get to look past the daily demands of our roles and to look instead, at where our cities have been, are now and are hopefully going in the future.

As you know, cities are the economic engines that drive the country's economy. Just like your beautiful cities, the Nelson Mandela Bay is a great and wonderful city to live, work and enjoy. It is a place that is full of energetic companies and a port city endowed with natural beauty and magnificent attractions that will return you to the Bay time and time again.

We have a diverse economy that is perfectly suited to withstand and weather the good and the not so good periods. We have a diverse population that lives together, I believe, in a caring way. And I know that through our sister city relationship with your great cities we will continue the positive path to make a difference, and importantly for our communities.

Ladies and Gentlemen:

When we take stock of our City since taking office in September 2022, we find ourselves in a positive mood coupled of course with the continued challenges and opportunities we are faced with.

A fundamentally strong city economy and a refocused city government in the Nelson Mandela Bay envisions and embraces an unprecedented investment surge both foreign and domestic in nature, and this phenomenon we strongly believe will incrementally increase the overall value of investment and inspire an unprecedented wave of enthusiasm in our city for partnership and cooperation.

Today, our challenge is to keep up that momentum. I believe that it is well within our capabilities to create opportunity and thereby add many more jobs to the Metro employment base over the next five years and boost our local economic development agenda.

The point is to become a self-sufficient city – a city that generates enough revenue to provide quality basic services for everyone and render quality services and value for money to our citizens, investors, and tourists. And we remain fully cognizant that to become a self-sufficient city we need to use incentives to build investor, business, and consumer confidence!

As local government, we have limited resources. It is your participation and partnership that will play a major role in the sustainable development in our city and generate the necessary resources. As I said, we are working with all our partners on several initiatives, in particular our business chambers, that will equip us better to attract and retain businesses and keeping in place many economic incentives that have brought us this far.

One of the key pillars of economic regeneration in our City is the effective use of tourism as among the key economic drivers. It is against this backdrop that the NMBM; the private sector, local structures and communities need to work together towards tourism development in our city. As the potential largest sector for economic growth, it is important that we remind ourselves of its impact and what could happen if it realizes its full potential.

Undoubtedly, within the ambits of our initiatives and plans, there will be a need for highly skilled and effective human capital. We have identified that these can be attained through an integrated approach involving public, private and stakeholder partnership in skill and human resource development. Our initiatives seek to empower the previously disadvantaged, the disabled, youth and women within communities on which projects will be taking place.

There is no doubt that we as the Nelson Mandela Bay are well within the loop of the investor confidence and tourism loop in South Africa, considering the increasing arrival numbers entering our ports, coupled with our overall increasing foreign exchange earnings of the preceding years and post-covid. We welcome and urge our Sister City Jacksonville and envisaged partners to become an integral part of our development and success!

However, we are conscious that we cannot rest on our laurels and be complacent. It remains our responsibility and development strategy to use our limited resources to leverage much larger investment both public and private. We will turn our efforts, capacities and incentives toward attracting more jobs, bigger business, and bigger employers throughout the Nelson Mandela Bay Metro.

Our vision has created great excitement and anticipation about our future, and has generated an elevated level of interest and activity in the economic development arena, much greater than what has been seen in the history of this city. However we must still deal with difficult decisions in the road ahead.

The implementation of our vision and its impact can also be gauged in other areas. It has garnered recognition for the metro on a number of fronts. It has also attracted interest from outside investors who are responding to our investment in the metro's economic infrastructure.

These spin-offs, gives us gives us new luster and life. Especially our reputation as a sports capitol have attracted much attention and recognition that have in turn attracted investment, events, visitors, and creating economic spin-offs and opportunity for enterprise development.

Ladies and Gentlemen:

In the Nelson Mandela Bay, we have the strong belief that we must act together and muster the courage to be bold when it comes to action necessary for the growth and prosperity in our city. We will always listen to our residents and to partners like yourself who understand how critical growth is to our city's future.

We remain confident and steadfast that we must continue to create conducive conditions and an enabling environment that will enhance socio-economic prosperity and opportunity, by fostering a genuine partnership of people-centred governance, through building partnerships and providing economic opportunity for residents to contribute positively and productively to their city.

We also believe that without togetherness, partnership and unity of purpose, we can never achieve and fulfill all our good intentions for our city and all our people. In the Nelson Mandela Bay, we do not allow our differences to overwhelm our shared concerns and common destiny but allow the Nelson Mandela Bay's greatest asset, that of our rich diversity to become a melting pot of togetherness and united responses to the needs of all our people and partners.

Yes indeed, we are immensely proud of this significant progress in our relationship and the culmination of a renewed and substantive mutual partnership. A relationship, in the case of Jacksonville, which have spanned for two decades now. A relationship, which is surely gathering momentum and maturity.

It also gives me the opportunity to express our gratitude and appreciation to the City of Miramar and State of Lower Saxony for showing interest in my city. At this juncture, allow me to express my gratitude to all the respective former mayors and various other counterparts in Jacksonville and the Nelson Mandela Bay for their profound contributions to see this relationship grow in strength and substance over the years.

As pointed out, the Nelson Mandela Bay is in a current phase of renewal and re-engineering given the stark reality of the huge gaps in our communities and the economy. We are committed to reverse this anomaly of skewed development in our city and we know that our partnership with your cities will add so much value to our local agenda for sustainable development.

The USA-South Africa partnership would serve as a further stimulus and catalyst for citizens of both our countries, and particular between Jacksonville, Miramar, and the Nelson Mandela Bay, to learn meaningfully about and from each other, with the help of cultural, community, academic and business organization, with the emphasis on increased trade between our cities and countries.

This Sister City relationship further illustrates, in a very real way, the outcomes of positive interaction and fusion between cultures and civilizations for the benefit of humanity and expresses our deep resolve and commitment to facilitate and promote enhanced dialogue between our cultures and civilizations.

It is my strong believe that our relationship would offer and encourage co-operation and dialogue based on the mutuality of interest and benefits, shared responsibilities and a genuine strengthening of our partnership.

Yes we are in the process of finding new ways of growing our local economy in a manner in which all our people can benefit, especially those from marginalized and disadvantaged backgrounds. We are committed to growing and developing this beautiful city of ours in a manner, which embraces the spirit and legacy of Nelson Mandela.

We are confident that our relationship with your cities will continue to be at the forefront of those working with us as partners in sustainable development. Former President, Nelson Rolihlahla Mandela, said: *"The world is one stage and the actions of its inhabitant's part of the same drama" so "each one of us as nations should begin to define the national interest to include the genuine happiness of others, however distant in time and space their domicile might be"*.

In conclusion:

Allow me to extend our gratitude and appreciation to the delegations from your magnificent cities for honouring us with your outreach for further partnership in identified areas for cooperation whilst at the same time learning from and contributing to the experiences and challenges from our respective cities.

Programme Director, there can be no doubt that the Nelson Mandela Bay is a great city brimming with opportunity. A world city in every sense. Its combination of economic and cultural strengths makes the Nelson Mandela Bay a huge attraction for businesses, workers, and tourists from all over the globe. However, no one here would question that the Nelson Mandela Bay is also facing a number of serious challenges. The challenge for all of us is to make the most of our strengths and opportunities in order to keep it at the forefront and cutting-edge of the world economic, in a way that benefits all of our citizens and partners.

We jointly share the responsibility of celebrating the fact that our sister city links are expectant and holds much promise. And at the same time, I would also like to acknowledge the dynamism and role of the Worldwide Sister Cities movement.

Our relationship, I know, will continue to thrive, and open many new opportunities for us all. I look forward to the outcomes of our future interactions. So together, we will continue to look out for the people who most need our help: the jobless, the homeless, the elderly, women, the disabled and, most of all, our children.

Our partnership clearly demonstrates to us that which can be done to revive our sports, arts, and culture industries through offerings and in a way that is guided by our diverse cultures and traditions. We should use sport, poetry, music, the arts, research, and teaching to ensure that all the history of our people is renewed and preserved.

The point I am driving home is that true, reconstructed, common heritage, must expedite our endeavors for nation building. We expect that through the restoration of our sports, arts, culture, and heritage many of our communities will find cause to unite in the spirit of nation building.

Your visit forms an integral part of our renewal and should serve to deepen the consciousness among our people in terms of nation-building and promoting social cohesion.

Our future relies heavily on our togetherness, hard work and kindness and living out the dream and making it a reality for all our residents *“One City One Future”*.

So let us work together as the City of Jacksonville, City of Miramar and State of Lower Saxony and the Nelson Mandela Bay with renewed energy and vitality, with faith and discipline, and let us do it out of love and compassion.

In conclusion allow me to invite you to share in our vibrant city whilst learning and contributing to the experiences and challenges. Come and experience our efforts to create a livable, safe, well managed and welcoming city. A city that is people centred, accessible and celebrating cultural diversity.

To our guest we say enjoy the evening and wish you a great stay in the Nelson Mandela Bay!

We thank you.