



**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

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**KZN PREMIER AND FINANCE MEC CALL ON THE PRIVATE SECTOR TO PARTNER WITH GOVERNMENT IN THE DEVELOPMENT OF KWAZULU-NATAL AND GIVE ASSURANCE ON CORONAVIRUS**

KwaZulu-Natal Premier Sihle Zikalala and Finance MEC Ravi Pillay have called on the private sector to partner with the government in eradicating unemployment, poverty and inequality saying building a common future will require the cooperation of all social partners.

“What is important for us is to focus on growing the economy and we believe that growing the economy will come if we intensify the investment, be it domestic or foreign. Therefore, we’re continuing to ensure that there is a conducive environment for investors in KwaZulu-Natal,” Premier Sihle Zikalala said.

Speaking at the KZN Treasury’s Post Budget Business breakfast held at the Durban ICC the Premier said that as part of co-ordinated efforts to boost the economy of the province, the provincial government is prioritising the rollout of infrastructure.

“We are establishing a war room on job creation and infrastructure so that we unlock all the bottlenecks hindering progress when it comes to infrastructure development.”

The Post Budget Business Breakfast was attended by over 200 guests including captains of industry, business leaders and academics. The event is held annually as a platform for government to engage a variety of stakeholders on the provincial budget.

The R138 billion provincial budget tabled by Finance MEC Ravi Pillay on Friday breathes life to some of the commitments outlined by the Premier in the State of the Province Address, also delivered last week.

MEC Pillay said in the next financial year, the provincial government will be spending a total of R17 billion on infrastructure.

“Yes we had to deal with budget cuts but we are proud that we were able to protect our infrastructure spend and service delivery line items,” MEC Pillay said.

Premier Zikalala also used the opportunity to assure the business community that cases of COVID-19 in the province are being attended to and there is no need to press panic buttons.

“Our message to the business community is that they must not panic. All workplaces should ensure that they follow and adhere to healthy standards such as washing of hands, providing all equipment and material for people to wash their hands such as sanitary towels, soap and water.”

The Premier said plans to mitigate the spread of COVID-19 have been put in place. These include intensified checks at all entry points. He added that four hospitals in the province have been identified as sites to deal with the virus.

He concluded: “We take a strong and dim view against those people who continue to make this issue a joke. It’s not a joke. We’re dealing with a very sensitive matter and we request everyone to take this matter very seriously. We also want people on social media platforms to treat this issue with care,” the Premier said.

For the 8th year, the business breakfast was sponsored by Absa, highlighting the bank’s support for the growth of the economy in KwaZulu-Natal.

“Growth is central to Absa’s new strategy. Working with government and other stakeholders to grow the economy remains pivotal to our ambition, which is embodied in our purpose statement: ‘Bringing your possibility to life’,” said Ronnie Mbatsane, Absa’s Managing Executive for KZN and Mpumalanga.

Mbatsane continued: “It is clear that our collective responsibility to grow the economy in KwaZulu-Natal, whilst also supporting Youth Empowerment and job creation, cannot be understated. We have heeded the call in KwaZulu-Natal for SMME funding and have earmarked R500 million towards funding SMMEs working with government. To date, we have dispersed over R158 million to 51 SMMEs – 65% of the recipients are African females. To further bolster the call to empower the youth, 60% of the recipients fall into this category.”

Supporting Women Entrepreneurship remains a critical component of Absa’s Enterprise Development approach. In 2019, the bank commenced a journey of profiling women entrepreneurs through radio and print media (at their own cost). Through different guarantees, Absa also continues to assist both women and youth to navigate the start-up funding challenge by providing alternative security to secure funding.

“We have heard the call from government around strengthening Economic Development within the province,” he concluded.

ENDS

**Issued by**

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