

Nedbank Soweto Marathon

19 October 2009

Statement by the Executive Mayor of Johannesburg, Councillor Amos Masondo, at a media briefing on the 2009 Nedbank Soweto Marathon, Mayoral Parlour, Braamfontein – Johannesburg

MMC for Community Development: Clr Bafana Sithole

Members of the Mayoral Committee

City Manager: Mr Mavela Dlamini

President of Athletics South Africa: Mr Leonard Chuene

Representatives from Nedbank

Managers and Officials of Council

Athletic South Africa Managers and Officials

The Media

Ladies and Gentlemen

The annual Nedbank Soweto Marathon has become an outstanding feature on the South African national sporting calendar. The "People's Race" - as it has become known among participants, residents and the media will be held on Sunday, the 01st of November 2009.

The race will start at MTN Expo Centre at Nasrec at 06h00 in the morning and finish at the same point. Prize giving is expected to take place at 12h30.

The City of Johannesburg is, indeed, proud to be associated with this great sporting event. Not only are we showcasing the talent of our country's top long distance runners but we are also showing South Africa – and the rest of the world – a picture and an image of a changing well known human settlement, Soweto. Now a vastly different place from the stereotype of the past.

What makes this race unique is that it enables both elite athletes to display their running prowess as well as provide opportunities to the so-called "weekend-runners" to participate in a big race.

Sports provide a uniquely effective medium for inculcating national pride and patriotism. It unites communities and enhances nation building, bringing together people from all walks of life. It contributes to better health and builds some comradeship.

I would like to believe that a nation's health and its status in development are also measured by the extent of its sporting activities and achievements. Sports is therefore a platform through which we can measure ourselves and our society.

The City's sport projects are conceptualised in a way that seeks to promote, facilitate and encourage the development of sport. We are aiming at positioning Johannesburg a sporting destination of choice. We will always endeavour to further broaden the City's involvement in the different sporting codes. This includes Cricket, Rugby, Athletics, Cycling, Soccer and many others.

Johannesburg intends to attract and host more and more sports events. We recently and successfully hosted the Confederations Cup, a tournament that went a long way to indicate that we were on course regarding the preparations for the 2010 FIFA World Cup.

Johannesburg has an established track record:

We recently hosted the important matches of the Twenty-Twenty Cricket World Cup following on the strong reputation we built during the 2003 Cricket World Cup;

The 1995 Rugby World Cup;

The 1999 Africa Games;

The Joburg Open is now a firm fixture on the European Golf circuit and we hope to attract some of the biggest names in golf to next year's event;

This year, 2009, we hosted the Soweto Tennis Open; and

Both the 702 Walk the Talk and the 94.7 Cycle Race are amongst the biggest events of their kind in the world and have rightfully earned a good reputation for attaining a high professional standard.

And then, there is the Big One – the 2010 FIFA World Cup.

Most of the big names in the South African road running will compete for the R807 000 in prize money. We are also expecting some entries for the 42, 2 kilometre race from other parts of Africa.

And for those who prefer a less punishing event, there are options of a twenty (20) kilometre walk, a five (5) kilometre fun run for athletes of all ages and a ten (10) kilometre wheelchair race for people with disability.

The Soweto Marathon also presents a unique opportunity for Johannesburg to showcase some of the developments that are taking place in this township:

The record number of 20 000 expected participants will see these changes for themselves along the 42, 2 kilometre standard marathon route.

This is equally true of a much wider audience that will, through the direct TV broadcasting and other forms of the media, enable audiences to see more.

It is important, perhaps to once again indicate that the entire race will be broadcast live on SABC 2 – from the starter's gun at 06h00 to the prize giving at around 12h30.

Soweto is, without a doubt, one of the best-known places in South Africa and events such as this marathon confirms and re-affirms its reputation.

An estimated quarter of a million visitors from both South Africa and abroad, come to Soweto every year to savour the unique experience of life in the country's most famous township. This reinforces the position of Soweto as one of the top-ten tourist destinations in the country with a future growth potential second to none.

Among the many features to note along the route are the Legacy Projects that have started to take shape as part of our hosting of the 2010 FIFA World Cup:

The refurbishment of the Diepkloof Hostels into family units;

The BRT Rea Vaya stations and buses;

The greening and the development of open spaces; and

The various economic development projects.

The City of Johannesburg together with other partners, is actively promoting the growth of tourism through the marketing of our unique heritage sites such as Vilakazi Street, the only street in the world where the houses of two Nobel prize laureates, Nelson Mandela and Archbishop Tutu's homes are located.

The Hector Petersen museum, Oppenheimer Tower, Kliptown and Walter Sisulu Square of Dedication, Morris Isaacson High School and Chris Hani/Baragwanath Hospital are some of the well known sites.

We also note with interest that participants of the "People's Race" since it came back to its rightful place Soweto, 4 years ago – 2006, have been able to run this showpiece event on properly tarred roads. This intervention is a result of R385 million investment by the City of Johannesburg. This project to tar all untarred roads in Soweto was completed within budget and ahead of the December 2005 scheduled deadline.

I trust that this 18th running Marathon (started in 1991) will inspire more and more young people in Johannesburg to become involved in sporting activities – be it athletics, soccer, swimming, tennis, or any sporting code of their choice.

I would also like to thank Athletics South Africa for being a competent organiser, the athletes, and every other stakeholder that is not mentioned by name.

Let me conclude by assuring all of you that the City of Johannesburg is ready to play its role and make its contribution to improve the quality of life of all our people and leverage whatever resources that are available to ensure that this becomes a reality.

Join the Soweto Marathon! Every effort count!!!

Thank you