**CLOSING REMARKS**

Let me start by saying that the Inaugural Presidential Awards on Sunday evening and the National SMME and Co-operatives Summit over the past two days have been a resounding success.

The Awards recognised excellence among entrepreneurs and eco-system enablers. The President of the country, His Excellency Cyril Ramaphosa has committed to have dinner with the award winners in January or early February before his State of the Nation Address.

The Summit itself sought to unpack the recently Cabinet approved NISED and identify short term priorities which the department needs to implement in partnership with stakeholders.

On the new economy high growth start-ups – focusing especially on tech and the green economy - developing new instruments for early-stage funding and addressing regulatory challenges that impede venture capital and skills. Key also will be building greater synergy between the innovation system work of DSI and the entrepreneurship work of DSBD.

On refuelling incubators and accelerators, the Summit resolved that that given the critical role that incubators and accelerators play in successful start-ups and scale ups, increased public and private resources must go towards incubators that are having impact. Incubators must be better linked to other aspects of the eco-system, such as market access through, for example, enterprise supplier development, as well as financial products through sefa, banks and other intermediaries. Incubators and entrepreneurship programmes that target youth are especially prioritized.

The panel of township and rural economic development found that much more deliberate measures are needed to overcome the dormitory status of townships and marginalised rural communities. Key to this is for the state and private sector to open up market access, as well as to provide finance and business development support to service these markets. The Gauteng Township Economic Development Act is a useful model that can be scaled countrywide.

The access to finance panel identified access to finance gaps across the SMME segments. Credit guarantees that derisk bank finance are working and need to be scaled, especially where linked to markets for example through ESD. Also prioritized was wholesale lending to retail financial intermediaries, micro-finance intermediaries, and developmental micro finance intermediaries who have presence and networks in local communities together with specialised capabilities in the markets they serve. This will for example help close the gap in funding informal enterprises.

The ESD panel showed the impact that well targeted supplier development initiatives can have. The panel resolved to move away from ESD as a tick-box compliance drive programme, to one makes business sense and at the same time build sustainable capabilities in new entrant black suppliers. Fundng and incubation/acceleration partnerships with the DSBD portfolio and other eco-system players are key to making ESD more impactful. A public private platform is being established to achieve this.

The red-tape panel resolved that institutional capacity across government needs to be strengthened. This includes establishing red-tape offices in Provincial Governments, following the Western Cape model. Also identified was the need for a clear set of doing business indicators that can hold the whole of government to account. The idea of mainstreaming red-tape into performance agreements of all DGs. HODS and Municipal Managers was suggested. Special focus needs to be on enabling red-tape reduction for small businesses and co-operatives in townships and rural areas.

The co-ops and social economy panel resolved that the solidarity economy is critical to the country’s future prosperity but remains a sleeping giant. A new and focused eco-system needs to be developed. Alreadysome elements such as co-operative banking are beginning to work, but other aspects such as access to markets (including state markets) and business development support are lacking and need to be urgently attended to. The DSBD will assemble partnerships in this regards.

The Africa Agenda panel resolved to create an accessible knowledge base and strengthen networks to for SA SMMEs and co-ops to access new market opportunities associated with ACFTA. Also key is creating business networks and clusters to enable scale to access markets and value chain opportunities.

In all of these areas, the need for implementation and partnerships was emphasized, as well as effective monitoring to hold everyone to account. Digital platforms will be prioritized. The days of talking are over. As DSBD we are entering into partnerships with numerous eco-system partners in each of the game-changer areas we have identified. These partners include Yoco, Mastecard, Lulalend, PicknPay, JSE, Sasol, Telkom, Tigerbrands, Google, African Bank, among others. Key role-players like BBC, BMF, informal trading associations and other representative structures will be included to leverage their networks across the country. These and other partnerships will be formally announced in the build up to SONA 2023.

I thank all those who organized this Summit, 22 on Sloane for hosting, and all those working behind the scenes, and all the stakeholders who have made this Summit a dynamic event.

I thank you.