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**SPEAKING NOTES FOR MINISTER FOR SMALL BUSINESS DEVELOPMENT**

**INAUGURAL PRESIDENTIAL SMME AWARDS**

Minister Lindiwe Zulu, Deputy Minister Sidumo Dlamini, Premier Panyaza Lusufi, other MECS, mayors and councillors, DGs, and government officials present,

President of the Global Entrepreneurship Network Jonathan Ortmans, EU Ambassador Sandra Kramer, UN Regional Representative Ayodele Odusola, as well as other development partners present

Board members of 22 on Sloane, Seda and sefa, leadership from business chambers, corporates, and the broader entrepreneurship eco-system,

Entrepreneurs and hustlers present,

It gives me great pleasure to be here this evening at this Inaugural Presidential SMME Awards. This evening’s awards will be followed by the 2-day SMME Summit, and the national pitching event organized by Seda which will see the finalists competing on the last afternoon of the Summit.

We have covered much ground over the past year or so, and this is a fitting culmination to the work done. Two areas stand out.

First, we travelled the width and breadth of the country, conducting roadshows in every province listening to SMMEs and co-operatives, as well as the eco-system role-players speak about their experiences. It wasn’t always pretty, and we quickly understood that things needed to change. As government, we weren’t sufficiently listening to the voice of SMMEs, which meant that our services and products were sometimes inappropriate or inaccessible. We also found that there were incredible things being done by others in the eco-system, that could add value to the work we were doing. But we weren’t mobilizing all these energies and resources in the eco-system behind what we wanted to achieve.

Second, we developed the National Integrated Small Enterprise Development Strategic Framework, which forms the overarching small business strategy for the country. The development of the NISED also saw us conducting numerus multi-stakeholder dialogues across the country, supported by the EU-funded ecosystem development for small enterprise programme (EDSE). The NISED corrects the narrow approach of government operating in its cocoon delinked from what other role-players in the eco-system are doing. The approach of NISED is rather to mobilize all available capacity and resources in the eco-system. It proposes doing this through creating an enabling environment to make the eco-system more coherent and impactful, as well as using state resources to de-risk and leverage support for underserved communities. The NISED directs us to forge practical partnerships to scale up access to markets, access to finance, and access to business development services. As DSBD we have entered into a number of strategic partnerships and are busy finalizing numerous others. Some of these will be announced on Tuesday.

Tonight is about recognising and celebrating the various partners who work tirelessly to build the SMME support eco-system. Tonight is about recognizing exceptional talent and excellence in our SMMEs and co-operatives. It is about celebrating entrepreneurship and innovation.

The Awards are the brainchild of the President who unfortunately had to attend the G20 Summit in Bali, and has deployed the Minister in the Presidency, Minister Gungubele, to be here on his behalf.

It is no accident that the Inaugural National Presidential SMME Awards coincides with the start of Global Entrepreneurship Week, and we are very honoured to have the Global Entrepreneurship President Jonathan Ortmans with us tonight as we celebrate our entrepreneurs and those who enable them. Tomorrow we travel to Cape Town to launch the city as the host of GEN Africa to be held in September next year.

There are numerous award categories for which we will announce the three shortlisted nominees, and the ultimate winner. These include excellence awards for township SMME, youth-led SMME, Start-Up business, home-grown SMME, woman-led SMME, breaking ground SMME, social enterprise, rural-based SMME, one for SMMEs owned by persons with disabilities, and for best fintech. We will also recognize excellence among ecosystem enablers, and business development service providers.

There are also discretionary awards for innovation in the agri space, for innovation in ICT, awards for sustained support for SMMEs and entrepreneurship, for informal sector support, for SMME financing, and for eco-system champion of the year.

An Awards Event like this couldn’t be done without gracious sponsors who shared our vision and passion from the outset, and without whom we genuinely would not be here tonight. These sponsors have provided both financial prizes to the winning SMMEs, as well as various packages of small enterprise support.

I would also like to thank our incredible adjudication panel who worked tirelessly and with absolute dedication.

There are also our strategic partners who worked together with us on these Inaugural Presidential SMME Awards from concept right the way through until tonight. I would especially like to single out the 22 on Sloane team under the leadership of Kizito Okechukwu. Thanks also to my ministry team, departmental officials, and board members and staff from Seda and sefa.

Finally, there would be no awards without the SMMEs and entrepreneurs. To the runners up and winners who are about to be announced, my huge congratulations. You deserve it. To those who entered but did not make it onto the shortlist, please keep up the amazing work you are doing for our country and people. You give us hope that there is a new and better world on the horizon.