**MESSAGE OF SUPPORT BY Mr. THABANI BUTHELEZI, AT THE INTERNATIONAL DAY OF COOPERATIVES UNDER THE THEME “COOPERATIVES BUILD A BETTER WORLD”**

**07 - 08 August 2025, Sun City Resort, North West**

**Topic: Building Alliances**

Programme Director, I would like to begin by acknowledging and expressing appreciation for the presence and support of the Minister of Small Business and Development, Honourable Ms Stella Ndabeni. Her leadership and commitment continue to set the tone for the recognition and championing the critical role that Cooperatives play in sustainable development, managing resources effectively and in promoting inclusivity by integrating diverse members and addressing inequalities within communities.

I would like also to acknowledge the Deputy Minister Mme Rasetja Sithole, Chairperson and Members of the Portfolio Committee, the Executive Mayor, the Councillor amongst us, Executives and Senior Managers from many government departments, Partners in Development and mostly leaders and representatives of various Cooperatives gathered here today and those participating virtually, good afternoon.

It is with great sense of gratitude that I stand before you this afternoon and a privilege that on behalf of National Development Agency, I share this message of support during this year’s celebration of International Co-operative Day, anchored in the spirit of ***“Cooperatives Build a Better World.”***

The NDA is founded on the principle that partnership/Alliance is paramount to achieve inclusive and sustainable development. Section 4(1)(c) of the NDA Act mandates us to act as a key conduit for funding from the Government of the Republic, foreign governments, and other national and international donors for development work to be carried out by civil society organisations.

This provision defines our core business. But it also challenges us that no single institution neither the NDA nor the government fiscus alone can eradicate poverty and its causes. We must build alliances. We must work together. NDA is very clear and adamant that, at the forefront of pushing the frontiers of poverty, are the mighty and dynamic Cooperatives. For they remain much closer to our people, and they are about our people. Cooperatives can access even the most difficult areas and access those that we as government find it difficult to reach.

Through the NDA’s Community Owned Enterprises approach (which is founded in the aggregator model the Honourable Minister referred to sharply in her Keynote Address, we identify and profile CSOs of which the majority are cooperatives. As NDA we support and facilitate their formalisation, establish linkages, strengthen their institutional capacities through capacity building interventions with our key partners. These are not short-term interventions, they are long-term and sustainable investments with recorded evidence of their significant impact in local economic development and in creating self-reliance.

Building sustainable cooperatives requires deliberate efforts as well as strategic partnerships. I am proud to say that the NDA has strengthened its alliances across multiple sectors, too many to name in the time allocated to me. But allow me to highlight a few that demonstrate the depth and diversity of our collaborative efforts that benefit and strengthen the capacity of Cooperatives:

* SETAs, DGRV, and SEDFA, we are co-developing capacity building models tailored for co-ops and other community-based enterprises.
* With academic institutions and government research institutions like the HSRC, to generate evidence-based insights that inform development policy and create a conducive environment for civil society organisations, cooperatives, and social enterprises to participate meaningfully in the economy.
* Through collaboration with FinMark Trust, SASSA, DSD the BRAC International Graduate Programme, we are piloting in KZN, pathways to graduate Child Support Grant beneficiaries into cooperative enterprises shifting households from dependency to self-sustenance.

Hon Minister, Ladies and gentlemen, these are not isolated efforts! They are a blueprint for building a better world through meaningful alliances.

The NDA also targets three key development pillars in its work:

* **Early Childhood Development**, working through registered NPOs to support foundational human development,
* **Income generation**, with a focus on cooperatives as engines of local economies, and
* **Food and Nutrition Security**, promoted through both NPOs and cooperatives to fight hunger and malnutrition at the community level.

These initiatives are only possible through shared responsibility, co-investment, and strategic coordination.

As we celebrate this International Day of Cooperatives today, let us renew our collective commitment to strengthening development alliances across the public sector, private sector, civil society, and academia.

Hon Minister and colleagues, while cooperatives hold significant potential to drive inclusive economic growth, foster community participation, and enhance livelihoods, especially in rural South Africa, their survival is often threatened by challenges such as limited business skills, access to finance, market entry barriers, regulatory constraints and weak internal cohesion. This is why building and strengthening strategic alliances remains essential to ensure cooperatives are not only formed, but are supported, sustained, and empowered to thrive long after initial interventions.

Before I conclude, I want to congratulate you Minister and the Department together with your Agencies for having organised this very successful event which coincides with the important role of women in the struggle for a free, equal and prosperous South Africa. It is no coincidence that the multitudes of Cooperatives are led by women and must I say, very strong women. **Malibongwe igama lamakhosikazi!**

In closing, let us build a future where every cooperative is backed by strong alliances, where they can access sustained financial support, targeted training, and an inclusive and equitable environment. Because when we build alliances that work, we don’t just support cooperatives, but we also build stronger communities.

Kea Leboga! I thank you