**Address by the MEC for Cooperative Governance, Traditional Affairs and Human Settlements, Paul Mashatile, at the Provincial Lecture on Resilience and Disaster Reduction, Wits School of Governance, Johannesburg, 15 February 2017**

***Programme Director, Prof Anne Mclannen***

***Head of Department of Gauteng CoGTA, Mr Nhlakanipho Nkontwana***

***Panelists, Ms Sandiswa Tshaka, Mr Darlington Mushongera, Dr Johan Minnie and Dr Duarte Goncalves***

***Head of the National Disaster Management Centre, Dr Maphaka Tau***

***Head of Gauteng Provincial Disaster Management Centre, Dr Elias Sithole***

***Senior Officials from Government Departments and Municipalities***

***Distinguished Guests***

***Members of the Media***

***Ladies and Gentlemen***

It is both an honour and priviledge to have been invited to address this august event that will look at the critical topic of disaster risk reduction and resilience. Before I share some thoughts on this important topic, indulge me to express, on behalf of Gauteng CoGTA and myself, our appreciation for the role that the Wits School of Governance have played and continue to play in developing a new crop of public servants.

Since its inception, the School of Governance has distinguished itself through developing academic courses and programmes that are relevant to needs of our ever-transforming public service. These interventions of training and developing public representatives and civil servants have assisted in no small measure to the transformation of our public service.

I am aware that just last week, a number of CoGTA officials – Community Development Workers (CDWs) to be precise – graduated from one of your programmes. We appreciate the efforts you are making in contributing to making our country work. We hope that the relationship between our department and yourselves will grow from strength to strength.

Programme Director, whilst human resilience is an amazing phenomenon, the disasters that have struck over time have given rise to a need to continually enhance resilience. We are aware of disasters - be it floods, wild fires, tornadoes, etc - that have struck throughout history but the human race survived and is still aiming at conquering nature. Probably, this lecture is an opportune moment to look back and reflect on exactly what has made this amazing resilience possible in the midst of extreme destruction, suffering, pain and death. The human race have survived calamities of one nature and the other mainly due to it being able to study the patterns of disaster and how to adequately respond in an event of a catastrophe. We are still standing because we are able to adapt to different situations and circumstances including disasters.

Although the resilience of individuals and communities may be readily recognized after a disaster, it is currently rarely acknowledged before a calamity happens, making the “payoff” for resilience investments challenging for individuals, communities, the private sector and all levels of government to demonstrate.

It is also a truism that no person or place is immune from disasters or disaster-related losses. Disease outbreaks, acts of terrorism and social unrest in addition to natural hazards can all lead to large-scale consequences for the country and its people. Hence, the need to build a culture and practice of disaster resilience. Even though it is not inexpensive, we have to invest in increasing resilience both in the short and long term. The investment decisions must be informed by the social and environmental factors including the fact that, arguably, half of the world population lives in cities and a third of those living in cities reside in informal settlements.

This situation often increases the exposure of people and economic and social assets to hazards whilst creating new patterns of risk that makes the management of disasters in urban areas particularly complex.

On the other hand, urban areas can also provide opportunities for reducing risks since cities are usually the economic drivers and centres of political, intellectual, business and financial activities. And this needs to be harnessed.

Programme Director, in order to better understand the complexities that we are confronted with and how to respond adequately, may I provide some context. There is global consensus that the Disaster Risk Reduction agenda has become a key development priority. Recent disasters all over the world such as the Italy's and Myanmar's Earthquake highlight the vulnerability of communities in both developed and developing countries to disastrous incidents. These disasters remind us that while we cannot prevent certain hazardous phenomena from occurring in our communities, we can at least reduce the vulnerabilities of our societies to such hazards through sustained and targeted multi-sectoral Disaster Risk Reduction initiatives that are driven by all spheres of government.

In an effort to ensure coordinated and uniform responses to the disasters faced across the globe, the United Nations (UN) has developed an cction plan to guide our work in mitigating against disaster risks. The revised UN Plan of Action on “Disaster Risk Reduction for Resilience: Towards a Risk informed and Integrated Approach to Sustainable Development” is the contribution by the UN to ensure the implementation of the Sendai Framework. The Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction 2015-2030 (SFDRR) is the first major agreement of the post-2015 development agenda, with seven targets and four priorities for action. It aims to ensure the substantial reduction of disaster risk and losses in lives, livelihoods and health and in the economic, physical, social, cultural and environmental assets of persons, businesses, communities and countries.

It further calls for multi-stakeholder engagement, working closely together to create opportunities for collaboration, find solutions to complex problems and integrate disaster risk reduction strategies across sectors.

The Four Priorities for Action for the SFDRR are understanding disaster risk, strengthening disaster risk governance to manage disaster risk, investing in disaster risk reduction for resilience and enhancing disaster preparedness for effective response and to “Build Back Better” in recovery, rehabilitation and reconstruction.

The increase in disaster risk means there is a need to strengthen disaster preparedness for response, take action in anticipation of events and ensure capacities are in place for effective response and recovery at all levels. The recovery, rehabilitation and reconstruction phase is a critical opportunity to build back better, including through integrating disaster risk reduction into development measures.

The SFDRR places a strong emphasis on disaster risk management as opposed to disaster management. This approach is informed by the seven targets to reduce disaster risk and strengthen resilience as part of the objective to prevent new risks, reduce existing risks and improving resilience whilst defining a set of guidelines that include the primary responsibilities of countries to prevent and reduce disaster risk. In addition, the scope of disaster risk deduction has been broadened significantly to focus on both natural and man-made hazards and related environmental, technological and biological hazards and risks.

The SFDRR is built on elements that ensure continuity with the work done by various countries and stakeholders under the Hyogo Framework for Action. All these instruments are geared to contribute to a risk-informed and integrated approach to the achievement of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. It addresses the need for coherence and mutual re-enforcement of the UN’s resilience building efforts, and it seeks to more effectively integrate operational preparedness and response capacities into national operational and capacity development arrangements. The Plan has added emphasis on country and local level engagement and ensuring the UN system is responsive to the different country needs and contexts in regards to disaster risk reduction.

It is important that countries take whatever steps necessary to ensure that this Framework remains on top of the global agenda by amongst others promoting a continuous paradigm shift and inclusion of disaster risk reduction measures into assistance programmes related to poverty reduction, sustainable development, natural resource management, environment, urban development and adaptation to climate change.

It is also important to understand vulnerabilities in order to better respond to disasters and minimize risks. Hence, CoGTA will continuously invest in disaster risk assessment projects in order to contribute towards a better understanding of risk and vulnerability in our province in order that disaster risks are mitigated.

By aligning to the scope of hazards, as reflected in the Sendai Framework, the revised Plan recognizes that the implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development will rely on measures to manage a broad spectrum of risk with a wide range of stakeholders, and accountability across all sectors.

In addition to the UN plan of action, The International Strategy for Disaster Reduction continues to reflect a major shift from the traditional emphasis on disaster response to disaster reduction, and in effect seeks to promote a "culture of prevention".

Ladies and gentlemen, Gauteng Province is vulnerable to various hazards. The Disaster-macro risk assessment conducted by the North West province in 2016 revealed that the most prevalent risks for the Gauteng province identified during the disaster-macro risk assessment process are flooding, dolomite and ground subsidence, structural fires in both formal and informal settlements, severe weather events and road accidents.

As part of the macro-disaster risk assessment process, various risk drivers that could in the future worsen existing risks or emerge as additional risk to the population of Gauteng were identified Climate Change, Acid Mine Drainage, rapid urbanization, water and air pollution and water infrastructure failure.

Given our province’s proneness to disasters, it is vital that we put in place structures and measures to mitigate the potential and actual risks especially given that there seems to be an indistinct understanding of trends (for example through climate and weather related evidence), that demonstrate how the impact of disasters caused by natural hazards and vulnerability will continue to intensify, presenting an increasingly significant challenge to development. In view of this, it is critical that monitoring mechanisms are formulated to identify the development or possible impact of these risk drivers on the municipalities in the province.

It is against this backdrop that disaster risk reduction (DRR) and resilience therefore require a more central consideration in the development agenda if the objectives of sustainable development are to be achieved. As Gauteng Province moves closer to becoming a City Region, it is undisputed that disaster risk –such as Rapid Urbanisation will be exacerbated. In view of amongst others – the relationship between disaster and development - it is important that disaster risk reduction and resilience receive sufficient emphasis in the Province.

We need, as CoGTA, to galvanise and coordinate all stakeholders towards a significant mindset shift from disaster management towards disaster risk management. We must engender a sense of collective responsibility for resilience especially given the increasing regularity and severity of natural disasters. Government has recognised that a coordinated and cooperative effort is required to enhance Gauteng’s capacity to withstand and recover from emergencies and disasters. A disaster resilient community is one that works together to understand and manage the risks that it confronts. Disaster resilience is the collective responsibility of all sectors of society, including all levels of government, business, the non-government sector and individuals.

If all these sectors work together with a united focus and a shared sense of responsibility to improve disaster resilience, they will be far more effective than the individual efforts of any one sector.

Government, at all levels, have a significant role to play in strengthening the nation’s resilience to disasters by developing and implementing effective, disaster risk reduction arrangements and mitigation strategies. We should also establish effective arrangements to inform people about disaster risks and reduce their exposure and vulnerability to hazards, ensure that there is an effective, well-coordinated response from our emergency services and volunteers when disaster hits and work collectively to incorporate the principle of disaster resilience into aspects of disaster management, including preventing, preparing, responding to, and recovering from, disasters.

In order to improve our readiness, the Gauteng Provincial Disaster Management Policy Framework and the Disaster Management Plan must be updated and aligned to the Disaster Management Amendment Act 16 of 2015, the Provincial Macro-Risk Assessment outcome (Risk Profile) must form integral part of or be integrated into the existing level 1 Disaster Management Plan, ensure that all disaster management plans include expected climate change impacts and risks whilst our institutional Capacity of Disaster Management is increased.

Government must also reexamine the role of planners in redefining our spatial transformation agenda to ensure that we establish resilient and sustainable cities and communities.

It is therefore critical that municipalities build capacity in this area and that CoGTA should strengthen oversight around building plans.This will assist in reducing building of houses that are prone to any form of disaster.

Our Disaster Management Centres should be adequately resourced by specialists such as meteorologists, health and environmental specialists and ICT savvy people to ensure that as the Gauteng City Region we are ready to meet any disaster that may strike. This approach is informed by the emphasis that the Disaster Management Amendment Act of 2015 places on disaster risk reduction with specific focus on ICT tools to reduce risks. It also calls upon all of us to pay special attention to vulnerable groups like women, youth and persons with disabilities when there are disasters.

For this to succeed, we should also upscale our stakeholder participation programme that will serve to strengthen partnerships with important stakeholders in disaster management including institutions of higher learning.

The role of business cannot be overemphasized as it is acknowledged that businesses perform a fundamental role in supporting a community’s resilience to disasters. They provide resources, expertise and many essential services on which the community depends. Businesses, including critical infrastructure providers, make a contribution by understanding the risks that they face and ensuring that they are able to continue providing services during or soon after a disaster.

Individuals must also play their part since disaster resilience is based on individuals taking their share of responsibility for preventing, preparing for, responding to and recovering from disasters. They can do this by drawing on guidance, resources and policies of government and other sources such as community organisations. The disaster resilience of people and households is significantly increased by active planning and preparation for protecting life and property, based on an awareness of the threats relevant to their locality. It is also increased by knowing and being involved in local community disaster or emergency management arrangements, and for many being involved as a volunteer.

Non-governmental organisations and volunteers should not be left out of the equation as they are in most instances at the forefront of strengthening disaster resilience. It is to them that most residents often turn for support or advice and the dedicated work of these agencies and organisations is critical to helping communities to cope with, and recover from, a disaster. The Gauteng government will continue to partner with these agencies and organisations to spread the disaster resilience message and to find practical ways to strengthen disaster resilience in the communities they serve. Hence, it is critical that the Memoranda of Understanding between Government and NGO`s such as the SA Red Cross are concluded.

Strengthening disaster resilience is not a stand-alone activity that can be achieved in a set timeframe, nor can it be achieved without a joint commitment and concerted effort by all sectors of society. But it is an effort that is worth making, because building a more disaster resilient nation is an investment in our future.

As stated in the Global Assessment report on Disaster Risk Reduction of 2015: “Most disasters that could happen, have not happened yet”.

It is therefore important that all of us contribute to the disaster risk reduction and resilience efforts in order that the human race continue to not only survive but thrive.

I thank you!