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NORTH WEST AND LIMPOPO JOIN HANDS TO DRIVE MINING, MINERAL BENEFICIATION AND BIODIVERSITY ECONOMY

The MEC for North West Province Economic Development, Environment, Conservation and Tourism (DEDECT), Ms Bitsa Lenkopane, together with the Limpopo MEC for Economic Development, Environment and Tourism (LEDET), Mr Tshitereke Matibe, have announced the establishment of a joint inter-provincial Beneficiation Task Team.

This decision follows a high-level engagement at Sun City Resort, where experts, industry leaders, and senior officials from both provinces gathered in response to the national government's call for stronger collaboration across spheres of governance where mineral beneficiation and biodiversity economy are concerned.

The partnership seeks to reposition Limpopo and the North West—two of South Africa's most mineral and biodiversity resources-rich provinces—from being mainly exporters of raw minerals to becoming regional beneficiation hubs for greater economic benefits and job creation.

The beneficiation strategy will prioritise minerals, fauna, and flora with high potential for downstream industries. These minerals include Platinum Group Metals and associated metals for catalytic converters, electro-chemical applications, smelting, and refining, chrome, ferrochrome, and manganese for ferroalloys, stainless steel inputs, and others. Whilst on biodiversity economy, the focus is on bioprospecting and biotrade, Wildlife Ranching, Eco-Tourism, Medicinal Plants, Game meat, and Forestry.

The MECs committed to examining policies and infrastructure that support beneficiation. This includes preferential procurement for locally beneficiated products, expediting permits and environmental approvals, and partnering with industry to expand logistics, power, and water infrastructure. A co-funding model with industry will also be explored for pilot projects, research, and training hubs.

The partnership also endeavours to investigate ways of effective collaboration with research and training institutions to drive Research & Development, advanced manufacturing, and skills development.

The meeting concurred to a phased approach to the implementation of the framework, with the first two years focusing on designating land within SEZs for demonstration plants, tap into the already existing National Transformation Fund for beneficiation, and piloting two sites—one chrome hub in Steelpoort, a PGM-linked training centre in Rustenburg among other activities.

Concluding the session, MEC Lenkopane stressed that the initiative will directly benefit communities in both provinces. “Our goal is to create jobs, new industries, and a sustainable economy driven by beneficiation,” she said. MEC Matibe echoed this, adding, “The minerals of Limpopo and North West must no longer be exported as raw commodities because this is essentially exporting jobs. Through beneficiation, we can build industrial capacity, empower local SMMEs, and position our regions as global players in value-added mineral products.”

The two provinces will reconvene later this year to finalise the Beneficiation Task Team’s terms of reference and accelerate the rollout of the pilot projects.

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