



transport

Department:
Transport
Province of KwaZulu-Natal

MEDIA LIAISON AND PUBLIC RELATIONS

MEDIA STATEMENT

TO: ALL MEDIA
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ATTENTION: Editors, News Editors & PR Wires

MEC MCHUNU CONDEMNS BARRICADING OF N2 IN MANDENI BY PROTESTING TAXI OPERATORS

The KwaZulu-Natal MEC for Transport, Community Safety and Liaison, Mr. Willies Mchunu, has strongly condemned the barricading of N2 and R102 in Mandeni by taxi operators, and has stressed that there were no grievances that warranted disruptions of traffic – and therefore citizens and economic activity – on national, provincial and local roads.

A group of taxi operators from various parts of the province, who are mainly using the N2 allegedly came together to barricade the N2 along the UThukela Bridge near Mandeni and started barricading the road.

This caused unnecessary mayhem and affected the movement of goods and people, including emergency vehicles, which depend on this road to connect to important towns in the province.

After interventions by the South African Police Service and the government, the illegal protest was suspended and traffic was open in both directions of the freeway.

The MEC has also assigned a team from Department of Transport's Provincial Regulatory Entity (PRE), the Department of Community Safety and Liaison, working with the South African Police Service and the leadership of Mandeni Local Municipality to address the matter.

Among some of the complaints raised by protestors is the demand to have their vehicles released after they were impounded during the Easter long weekend as part of the heightened law enforcement campaign. They have also raised issues about slow processes of issuing operating licences by the Department of Transport.

Commenting on the protest, MEC Mchunu voiced his deep concerns at the behaviour of taxi operators, saying there will be no "untouchables" in applying the law, and that all those who are transgressing will be dealt with severely.

"We condemn in the strongest terms possible the decision to barricade and burn tyres on the highways, provincial and local roads when people have issues to raise. This tendency is unfortunate and we should nip it in the bud, because it disrupts movement of people, goods and therefore hinders the economic activity that our province and country so much need to remain competitive. In fact, the issues raised by protesting taxi operators do not warrant any protest, especially because the licensing processes and the law are very clear. We have assigned a team to engage with them and resolve this matter with the parameters of the law.

We emphasise that government will not be held to ransom by people who deliberately violate the law. Enforcement agencies will continue to apply the law without fear or favour. It is through our maximum enforcement and zero tolerance approach to road traffic infringements that KwaZulu-Natal managed to reduce road fatalities by 49 percent to 28 during the Easter holidays, gains that we should build upon instead of being distracted by a few individuals, who portray themselves as above the law," said MEC Mchunu.

During the Easter holidays, more than 96 000 vehicles (all modes) were stopped, out of which in excess of 20 000 charges were written for various defects and violations. In addition, 246 drivers were caught driving under the influence of alcohol, 37 were arrested for speed, 1 802 did not have driver licences, 1 631 were unlicensed vehicles and 207, mainly taxis were impounded for not having operating licences, across the province.

MEC Mchunu also refuted claims that the Department was not issuing operating licences, saying working with the SANTACO leadership, three new offices have been opened across the province to fast-track issuing of operating licences.

"All deserving applicants have their operating licences processed within reasonable time. We have opened new offices in Empangeni, Ladysmith, and Port Shepstone, which are already operational in addition to the Head Office and Pietermaritzburg regional offices. We will soon be opening another office in Jozini, and all of these are aimed at bringing the services closer to the people.

We note, with disgust, that whenever a few, recalcitrant operators, in the taxi industry want to cause havoc they resort to the oft-told and incorrect scapegoat of non-issuance of operating licences. Even on areas where they may be challenges due to unviable routes, we are engaging with SANTACO on the issue of the operators who have never applied, but who were illegally recruited or given access to routes, actions that have caused incessant conflict and killings. Beyond this, department has undertaken to conduct a public transport industry economic visibility study, which will help ensure that overtrading, where supply exceeds demand, is addressed," said Mchunu.

Ends.

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