

SPEECH DELIVERED BY THE KWAZULU-NATAL MEC FOR TRANSPORT, COMMUNITY SAFETY AND LIAISON, HON. WILLIES MCHUNU AT THE LAUNCH OF THE 2010 EASTER HOLIDAY ROAD SAFETY PROGRAMME & THE OFFICIAL OPENING OF THE ALCOHOL EVIDENCE CENTRE (AEC) IN UMDLOTI .

31 March 2010

Programme Director;

Members of the Provincial Legislature;

eThekweni Mayor;

Councillors;

Head of the KwaZulu-Natal Department of Transport, Mr. Chris Hlabisa;

Senior SAB Executive, Dr Vincent Maphai;

All senior SAB Executives;

All Senior Officials from the Department of Transport and other various departments;

Distinguished Guests;

Members of the Media;

Ladies and Gentlemen;

An estimated 1.26 million men, women and children were killed around the world in the first year of the 21st century - not by wars or diseases or natural disasters, but by and in traffic accidents.

In fact, the World Health Organization (WHO) estimates that 25 percent of all deaths due to injuries are the result of road traffic injuries. The leading causes of traffic and traffic-related deaths include drunk driving, speeding and improper or lack of use of safety or seat belts.

WHO projections suggest that by 2020 road traffic injuries could rank third among causes of death and disability, ahead of such other health problems as malaria, tuberculosis and HIV/AIDS, if motorists, governments and traffic authorities continue with the ineffective strategies and suicidal motorists' behaviour that we witness daily.

South Africa's road related deaths are higher than the bleak global figures outlined here. If you consider that some 900 000 road accidents were reported to the South African Police Service in 2008 alone. Of this, at least 150 000 people were injured – and about 60 000 required hospitalization. Sadly, 14 500 died. During the 2009, Easter Weekend, 31 crashes resulted in 37 deaths in KZN alone.

It's clear that the breaking of laws on our roads continues with arrogance every day, and every year. The arrogance seems to derive from the knowledge by these law breakers that they will be fined and not jailed. After paying their fines they will continue to drive their cars freely. They may even be involved in more law breaking, and, if caught, the process will be the same – arrest, & fined. It is about time that we found extra-ordinary measures to deal with this extra-ordinary situation of lawlessness, and accidents on our roads. Research indicates that an estimated 50% of people who die on South African roads have a blood alcohol concentration level above 0.05g per 100 milliliters, which is the maximum legal blood alcohol limit for a private motorist, for the drivers of "public" vehicles, i.e. taxis and buses the limit is 0.02

It is within this context that today we are calling for an end to this senseless carnage. As per the advice of the Technical Committee on administrative revoking of drivers' licences, (a committee I formed in December 2009), Today, we are calling for an amendment to the national law so that drivers' licence removal becomes mandatory for all drunken driving conviction. The process is now at the advanced stage to spearhead a national campaign to amend Section 35. (3) of the National Road Traffic Act, 1996, Chapter IV: under the section Fitness of drivers. We want to make life very tough for drunkards and make our roads much safer.

In effect this means suspension, endorsement or cancellation of one's drivers' licence becomes a compulsory part of the sentence if an accused is found guilty of drunken driving. As we move towards mandatory sentencing for drunken driving, we must also move away, province wide, then country wide, to breath testing for suspected drunk driving suspects, effectively leaving behind blood testing and all its attendant problems. We will need an activist judiciary to claim victory in this regard. I take this opportunity to salute the

Scottburgh Magistrate who convicted a Mr. Amith Sookraj for drunk driving to a whopping R70 000 fine and suspended his drivers' licence forthwith. As part of the interventionist packages, we must have more judiciary officers taking a hard stance on this drunken driving scourge.

In this regard, credit is due to the South African Breweries for setting the trend with the Alcohol Evidence Centre technology we are unveiling today. The Alcohol Evidence Centre we are opening today is second for KwaZulu-Natal.

We firmly believe that this partnership will assist SAPS stations, local authorities and RTI to accelerate our zero-tolerance approach to drunken drivers. And its proximity to the new King Shaka International Airport is indeed a bonus.

As part of the new Alcohol Evidence Centre, the SAB has given us tools including Dräger Alcotest breathalysers and a closed-circuit television network to monitor the testing process. The breathalyzer machines are able to take an instant and accurate reading of the amount of alcohol in an individual's breath by sampling deep lung air bloodstream - this can be used as evidence to secure a conviction for drunk driving.

The new system is expected to be used in conjunction with regular roadblocks around the province, if a breathalyzer detects more than 0.24mg of alcohol per liter of oxygen on someone's breath (equivalent to the maximum legal blood alcohol limit of 0.05g per 100 milliliters of blood), a driver will be arrested, detained in a SAPS facility and charged with a criminal offence.

However, the SAB, and the Department cannot win this war alone. Road safety is everybody's business. I, therefore call upon the private sector to invest resources in arresting this scourge on our roads, especially in the area of technology.

For these amendments to be effected and ready for the 2010 festive season we need all the help we can get. I am told that the Western Cape Traffic authorities already support us in this matter. As part of this package towards developing extraordinary measures, a Road Safety Summit is envisaged for this year.

In the meantime, all RTI officers have been instructed to be relentless in their pursuit of drunkards. We will arrest and throw their car keys away.

For the 2010 Easter Holiday Road Safety Programme, all traffic officers will be on active duty. Our plan seeks to reduce accidents, fatalities and injuries. To achieve this there will be regular roadblocks throughout the province. In these roadblocks, we will give our motorists a full service – prosecute for seat belts, vehicle roadworthiness, drivers' licence, number plates, discs, drugs, alcohol, tax and home affairs related offences. I am pleased to announce that the South African Police Service will be part of these roadblocks to ensure that all mobile crimes and criminals are brought to book.

As a precautionary measure we have launched a Free Vehicle Inspections service, made available to the public to encourage motorists to drive vehicles that are in a roadworthy condition.

Other measures include:

- ✓ All traffic law enforcement vehicles will patrol with "Blue Lights" on.
- ✓ We urge all motorists to drive with their headlamps on during the day so as to create more visibility.
- ✓ There will be a traffic patrol vehicle every 20 km along national routes, while Help Centres will be spread evenly to encourage motorists to rest every 2 hours.
- ✓ We appeal to pedestrians to desist from crossing national roads. Operation "Phepha Ndoda" will focus on these road users, who often walk drunk on the highways. Phepha Ndoda, Don't Drink 'n Walk.

Our own research indicates that many fatalities also arise from a high percentage of drivers, and passengers not wearing seat belts, and the transportation of people in inappropriate vehicles such as bakkies. We are making an earnest appeal to all motorists and passengers, Please buckle up! And, as for people being conveyed on bakkies and other inappropriate vehicles, do not do it. It is risky. It is illegal. It costs lives, including those of other innocent road users. Our traffic police will keep a close eye for these transgressions.

Public Transport is always a special category. If you drive a minibus taxi/and or a bus, you are carrying with you - hopes and dreams of many. You ought to take personal responsibility that far exceeds that of a private motorist. We will therefore be ruthless in dealing with this category. No Mercy! No room for bribery! No Negotiations!

In conclusion, we take this opportunity to thank the SAB for their concern about the safety of our road users. The KwaZulu-Natal Department of Transport is fully equipped and ready to deal with any form of misbehavior on our roads.

If you think of breaking traffic laws, particularly drinking and driving, please bid your family farewell and start preparing for your long night in prison. You may run but you cannot hide.

Finally, let me echo the words of one of the famous thinkers, one Abraham Lincoln, who once said and I quote: "I do the very best I know how - the very best I can; and I mean to keep on doing so until the end". I therefore ask each an every motorist, traffic officer, police officer (SAPS) and all road users to do their best, the very best, and keep doing so. (till the end.) A special word of thanks also goes to many emergency services workers who forgo most of their Easter Holiday to look after our motorists and holiday makers.

I thank you.