

**ADDRESS BY MEC FOR TRANSPORT, COMMUNITY SAFETY AND LIAISON,
WILLIES MCHUNU DURING THE INTERACTION SESSION WITH MEMBERS
OF THE MEDIA, 16 DECEMBER 2011, KZN MUSIC HOUSE**

I would like to take this opportunity to extend a warm welcome to all of you and thank you for having honoured our invitation to this important session.

Your presence here indicates the seriousness with which you take your work and your willingness to share your ideas and views on how the government of today functions.

The main objective of this gathering is to share with you some of the developments, milestones and even weaknesses in the Department of Transport as well as the Department of Community Safety and Liaison.

It also seeks to further strengthen the partnership with you so that together, we can change our province for the better.

We view this gathering as an important platform because it gives us an opportunity to share with you what we have done in the recent past as government.

This also assists in giving you an opportunity as well to raise issues with us as government.

It is aimed at sensitizing ourselves about our constitutional obligation and mandate to provide members of the public with information that is accurate, timeous and useful to them.

As Government, we acknowledge that we are fallible beings. We make mistakes. Sometimes some of us are mature enough to admit those mistakes, sometimes not.

We respect your rights and your duty to criticize these weaknesses wherever they manifest themselves.

On the other hand, we also see things in the media that are not pleasing to us and we expect you to accept our criticism as mature professionals.

I acknowledge that the relationship between the media and government can never be too cosy, as one of your key functions as media, is to be watchdogs of the society that we all proclaim to be serving.

We hope that after this meeting today we will, together, ensure that to serve the interest of this public is always our main aim and we all have a role to play.

Ladies and gentlemen, we are now about to conclude the year and indeed much has happened since the beginning of the year.

Transport

As the Department of Transport, our core function is to ensure that people have access, i.e. roads and bridges, but more importantly, it is to ensure that people are safe on our roads.

It is for this reason that this Department has had to come up with new road safety initiatives to curb road accidents and fatalities that continue to deprive us of our children and breadwinners whom we expect to play a major role in supporting their families and building our nation.

At the beginning of this financial year, we hosted a provincial Road Safety Summit that was part of our consultation process that allows both the Department and its stakeholders to make informed decisions on how best to tackle the challenges our people face on our roads, especially those that compromise their safety.

Following the recommendations of that Summit, we then launched an Integrated Traffic Law Enforcement Committee (ITLEC) that is working towards the attainment of the goal of preventing road crashes and offences that lead to fatalities in the province.

This Committee is driving the integrated provincial traffic enforcement initiatives and programmes as well as engaging in continuous research aimed at finding new ways to curb the high levels of road accidents and fatalities that we have experienced over the past years on our roads.

In September we launched our Road Safety Operational Plan for the Summer Holidays and beyond, which we regard as a strategic move to tackle the challenge of the high number of fatalities the province has experienced on the roads during the course of the year.

We then announced the deployment of all traffic officers across the province. We said we want compulsory stops at entry and exit points of the province and in areas where drivers will have driven for 200 km without stop. Here, vehicles are checked and drivers are encouraged to rest to prevent fatigue.

We also introduced a team called the Red Spot Response Team which is made up of senior and experienced members from the Department's Special Operations Unit known as Shanela. This team deals specifically with those areas identified as red spots in the province because of the frequency of accidents occurring in the same place.

I am pleased to share with you that since this team was launched, there has been significant improvement especially around hazardous spots.

Since the team was announced it has stopped more than 8 480 vehicles. It has issued more than 4 550 charges for various transgressions on the road.

The Red Spot Response Team has suspended more than 760 and impounded more than 90 vehicles.

Members of the media, it is important to indicate to you that we are considering drastic measures against those who disregard the law.

We have therefore started to engage with the NPA in support of the necessity that those who kill innocent people on the road be charged with murder.

In Kokstad where a taxi driver made a U-turn and collided with a bus killing 12 people, the driver has since been charged with 12 counts of murder.

Another example is the incident of a taxi driver who was driving a taxi that killed 15 people in Copesville. The driver is facing murder charges and the case is in court.

I also want to welcome the landmark judgment by the Western Cape High Court to convict a taxi driver Jacob Humphreys for murdering 10 school children in an accident that took place on a railway line.

This vindicates our position that those responsible for killing innocent people on our roads must be dealt with harshly. We are waiting with keen interest for the sentence on the 20th February 2012.

I have also commissioned the integrated law enforcement committee to look into whether we can successfully confiscate vehicles of repeat offenders.

They are also working on taking to the national forums the issue of a device that will prevent, especially public transport vehicles, from exceeding the speed limit.

We know that this call has been received with mixed feelings. But as Government, we understand also that in life any proposed change can be expected to be met with resistance.

To that effect, I wish to convey my special gratitude to publications that have partnered with us in our campaign of Naming and Shaming those that have appeared in court for drunk driving in which all offenders have their full names published in our newspapers. We thank them for that.

There may have been challenges with the courts in Cape Town on the legitimacy of the Dräger as a legitimate instrument to test the alcohol content in the breathe sample of a driver, but in KwaZulu-Natal we will continue as normal as we strive to ensure that our standards and capacity to enforce traffic laws are up to scratch in the interest of the safety of all our people.

We hope you will help us achieve buy-in in the call to decrease the speed limit from 120 km/h to 100 km/h. We hope you will help us get the support of society in understanding that it is better to be late than sorry.

Operation Val'ingozi

The province of KwaZulu-Natal is rolling out the campaign dubbed 'Operation Val'ingozi'. Operation Val'ingozi seeks to revive our morals and consciences as individuals who contribute to societal safety and well-being or lack of it.

Our message is clear: 'Speak to your conscience, don't break the law, don't kill people'.

Following the official launch of Operation Val'ingozi in Durban last month, we decided to roll out this campaign so that it reaches all our stakeholders, including the media, as we engage each other in building partnerships, promoting high moral values, respect for the rule of law and educational campaigns on road safety.

At the end of the day, as government we really mean it when we say to people: ARRIVE ALIVE – arrive alive at home from work or socializing with friends or loved ones, and still be a father, mother, brother, sister and caregiver to someone. It is our common duty, you and me, to remind the society that our families have more value to us whilst we are still alive than dead.

I know that some of you here have rallied behind our move. I therefore want to appeal to all others that instead of being too critical of our Government's actions, which are in the interest of the safety of our people, rather come forward with your proposals and let us see how we can move forward together.

Community Safety

On the other hand, as the Department of Community Safety, we identified a weakness due to the manner in which we were structured previously. Hence, we have established structures at district level that will enable us to implement our crime fighting programmes closer to where people live.

This will also enable us to work closely with municipalities. We strongly believe that this process will assist the implementation of our Building a United Front Against Crime as we position ourselves to decentralize our services and operate at a local level in a focused manner.

On the 16th of August 2011, the Province of KwaZulu-Natal held a Summit on Police Killings at the INkosi Albert Luthuli Convention Centre in Durban, under the theme, "Activism Against Police Killings".

The main objective of the summit was to identify the causes of police killings so as to find solutions as a collective in addressing this scourge.

The summit effectively emerged with a pledge to create a Partnership Against Police Killings to which all delegates committed not only to be part of, but also to be activists in advancing the cause for the fight against crime. Delegates to the summit committed themselves to this pledge.

The Department is now in a position to use the resolutions of the Summit as a basis for the development of a shared strategy to fight against Police Killings in the Province under the theme, ***"if it is to be, it is up to me"***.

We want to commend the province of KwaZulu-Natal for its contribution to the decrease in crime countrywide for the period covering the 1st of April 2010 to the 31st of March 2011 as per statistics released by Minister Mthethwa on the 8th of September 2011.

Ladies and gentlemen, as I indicated earlier that this session is aimed at sharing with you some of the developments in my departments, I thought I should touch on these because they are some of the measures we can use to see how we are progressing in terms of achieving our mandate.

As a politician, I appreciate a cordial and professional relationship with the media. As a public servant, I consider honesty and professional relations to be essential with the media.

I take it as my responsibility to always provide you with the best assistance I can. In return, I hope to receive the same mutual assistance from you, my friends in the media.

We rely on sound and just relations in order to live to expectation as we pursue our common objective of being of service to the general public from our different, but complementary, points of view I referred to earlier on. Some of us treat our duties as a calling precisely because we are all passionate about nurturing our young democracy and channelling it correctly, that is, to serve the interests of society.

We are passionate because we want to build this nation and mold it in such a way that we realize the goals and ideals for which many suffered and died for during the struggle against apartheid rule.

Lastly, it is not for me to tell you how to interpret and reflect on my Departments' programmes in the media. But I can tell you this: anything that is good for society is at least worth talking about, albeit positively or negatively or with maximum objectivity or not. It is my wish that you go out of your way to interrogate government programmes constructively with the ultimate aim of achieving common good for all.

I therefore urge you to continue supporting government endeavors to create and promulgate the ideals of a stable and safe society as well as road users that do not harm or kill one another so much on our roads. A developing society prides itself on the extent to which its members can live longer and safely and it is our job as the media and government together to point society towards the right direction.

I thank you.