

**SPEECH (NOTES) BY KWAZULU-NATAL MEC FOR TRANSPORT,
COMMUNITY SAFETY AND LIAISON MR. WILLIES MCHUNU DURING THE
LAUNCH OF THE ROAD SAFETY OPERATIONAL PLAN IN EMPANGENI, 27
SEPTEMBER 2011.**

Programme Director;

Honourable Members of the Provincial Legislature present;

His worship the Mayor;

Councillors present;

AmaKhosi AseNdlunkulu;

Head of Department;

Officials from various Government Departments;

All community structures who are our stakeholders;

All our law enforcement personnel;

Members of the Media;

Distinguished Guests;

Ladies and Gentlemen;

I take this opportunity to express my sincere gratitude to all of you for having honoured our invitation to this important gathering, the launch of the Road Safety Operational Plan from today to the Summer Holidays and beyond.

This event coincides with the unveiling of our 2011 October Transport Month Programme where we will have a strong focus on all areas of transportation, namely the user, operator and infrastructure, with a strong emphasis on Road Safety.

On Thursday last week, we were here in Richards Bay when the National Minister of Transport, Dr Sibusiso Ndebele, officiated the National October Transport Month. We as a province pledged ourselves at the national launch to support all programmes brought to us by the National Department of Transport.

Programme Director, the Government of KwaZulu-Natal is deeply concerned about the increase in the number of fatalities the province has experienced during the past few months on our roads. And, with the festive season at our doorstep, it is even more worrying now.

In fact, I find it very unfortunate indeed that when we have to be here today talking about ways of moving forward as a province in terms of development, we still have to deal with the road carnage that continues to draw us back in the province and the country as a whole.

As an important part of our young democratic government, the Transport Department is generally credited as having led the way in matters of road safety and transport over the past years. Nobody would have thought that by 2011 we would still be losing so many people on our roads.

From April this year, the start of the financial year, until yesterday we had lost 1309 people on our roads. If we look at the total number of fatal accidents where three or more persons were killed, in terms of Regions in the same period, Region One had 54 fatalities; Region Two had 18; Region Three had 13 and Region Four had 45 fatalities. Now, you can see what we are talking about here.

To that effect, we have decided to use this launch to roll out our Road Safety Operational Plan which under normal circumstances, would have waited until the start of the festive season to be launched.

We are now moving away from the trend that as Government, we step up our road safety campaigns around particular times of the year when traffic volumes are at their peak such as the festive season and Easter holidays.

We have started to implement the recommendations that were made by delegates who took part in our road safety summit earlier this year. That summit was a very important initiative and the very first of its kind in the whole country.

It was a platform where communities and various stakeholders had an opportunity of engaging with us on ideas, possible solutions and methods of curbing road carnage which continue to undermine the family support system as the bereaved lose their loved ones.

Some of the resolutions that emerged from the summit were as follows:

- The youth must become champions of driver-behavior;
- Laws and enforcement strategies need to be harsh because perpetrators are penalised too lightly;
- The Department is to design roads and bridges with safety in mind. For example, necessary signage, markings, speed humps, fence etc.;
- We need to intensify road safety education and campaigns around road safety within communities;
- There is a need to be more vigorous about regulating and standardizing services of driving and learning centers;
- There must be monitoring of the implementation of traffic laws;
- There must be recognition and training of traffic personnel;
- We need to develop an anti-corruption strategy within the transport industry;
- We must come up with a vigorous pedestrian safety strategy.

Some of us are aware that a significant milestone was recorded in the history of traffic law enforcement in KwaZulu-Natal in July this year. We saw the formation of the 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 on our roads.

Having been supported by the Justice Crime and Prevention Security (JCPS) technical cluster, and endorsed by the Provincial Cabinet, this Committee was created as a permanent sub-committee of the JCPS, under the leadership of Advocate Simo Chamane of the KZN Department of Transport.

This Road Safety Plan we are launching today will serve to measure the effectiveness of this Committee that comprises, as major role players, the Provincial Department of Transport, EtheKwini Metro Police and the various Municipalities in the province of KwaZulu-Natal.

Programme Director, as part of our plan, the ITLEC will ensure that all traffic officers are deployed across the province. There will be high visibility and patrol as well as random checking of vehicles.

There will be 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 will be checked and drivers will be encouraged to rest to prevent fatigue.

For the first time now, we have introduced a team called Red Spot Team. This team is made up of senior members from the Department's Special Operations Unit. They will deal specifically with those areas identified as red spots in the province because of the frequency of accidents.

At the end of the day, we want to see a sustained vigorous enforcement of traffic laws on our roads, including both the rural and urban areas, that is, townships and cities. We want to ensure that we focus our attention on road safety 24 hours a day, 7 days a week, and 365 days a year.

This ITLEC 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.

To the effect, when I was making my welcoming remarks at the national launch on Thursday, I indicated to Minister Ndebele that in fact, it was a coincidence that he made public his call for a speed reduction from 120km/h to 100km/h on our roads when I had just commissioned the ITLEC to look into the possibilities of achieving this objective.

They are also looking into whether we can successfully confiscate vehicles of repeat offenders. They are also working on taking national forums the issue a device that will prevent, especially public transport vehicles, from exceeding speed limit.

We have also come out in support of the National Prosecuting Authority (NPA) in the province for changing their attitude towards cases involving fatalities on our roads.

As a province, we have always maintained that culpable homicide cases must be treated as murder when people die as a result of sheer carelessness and recklessness or even ignorance that is informed by under-preparedness to use the road.

But we still want to engage the Department of Justice some matters that still concern us such as an unequal application of the legislation pertaining to drunk driving.

Furthermore, notwithstanding the AARTO developments and point system coming into operation countrywide, we believe it could be of significant value to road safety in general if the suspension or cancellation of driving licences were to become a automatic penalty with the amendments of the legislation so that court no longer has the prerogative of suspension or not, but rather that it is an automatic disqualification upon conviction.

We know that this call has been received with mixed feelings. But as Government, we understand that we will always encounter opposition as we try to come up with solutions that will benefit our people. We understand also that in life any proposed change can be expected to be met with resistance.

We have been pleased however, to hear some of our stakeholders coming out in support of the proposal to treat drivers who kill people on the road as murderers. Maybe our appeal to all of you here is that instead of being too critical of our Government's proposal in the interest of your safety, rather come forward with yours and let us see how we can move forward together.

I indicated earlier that we have already had a summit on roads safety and we are currently implementing the recommendations thereof. I have also pointed out that acting on the Government's mandate, the Provincial Department of Transport started long ago to embark on an initiative to encourage safe driving habits. But we continue to lose so many people on our roads.

Now, why don't you tell us what your proposal is? Remember, no matter how small you think your idea is, the Department of Transport is keen to hear that. Also, do not forget that your ideas are to be crafted into our programmes that can make meaningful contribution to our communities.

Furthermore, the launch of our October Transport Month this year is aimed at highlighting the need to assist families and victims of the road accidents with their social needs, counseling and services from the Road Accident Fund (RAF), under the Department's initiative called "Healing of the Wounds".

This initiative was launched last year and has since seen many road accident victims, particularly in rural areas, benefitting from the compensation fund. We have formed partnerships with our stakeholders including religious bodies, Amakhosi and other government departments to assist the victims.

Ladies and gentlemen, it is important that each one of us show our commitment to road safety by supporting these campaigns. Government is making a clarion call to traffic law abiding citizens because safety on the road begins with you. Let us all agree that today as we launch Transport Month, we are reviving a partnership that will take us to the festive season and beyond.

Lastly, I want to take this opportunity to introduce the new Department of Community Safety & Liaison Head, Mr Ronald Bhengu, to all our stakeholders in the transport family. We know that the Department of Transport has had structures at district level for a long time now.

The Department of Community Safety & Liaison has already started to establish such structures at district level. So, it would be ideal for you to have a good working relationship with the Department of Community Safety & Liaison team to achieve one goal of having a safe KwaZulu-Natal.

The team leader of Uthungulu District is Ms Hlophe.

Programme Director, allow me to thank everyone who has come to this event and wish you safe journey home.

I thank you.