

**SPEECH DELIVERED BY THE KWAZULU-NATAL MEC FOR
TRANSPORT, COMMUNITY SAFETY AND LIAISON, HON. WILLIES
MCHUNU DURING THE COP 17 ROAD SHOW IN UTHUKELA DISTRICT -
28 OCTOBER 2011**

Programme Director;

Members of the Provincial Legislature present;

All Amakhosi aseNdlunkulu present;

Her worship the District Mayor Cllr Mazibuko;

His worship the Mayor of Umtshezi Cllr Dlamini;

Mayors of all other Local Municipalities under Uthukela District;

All Councilors present;

Officials from various Government Departments;

Members of the Media;

Ladies and Gentlemen;

I wish to start by thanking you for attending this important event organised by the KwaZulu-Natal Provincial Government, of which I am the official representative today. This event in the Uthukela District marks an important day in which we discuss measures that need to be taken in order to raise awareness of the much talked about climate change.

As we all readily know now, from 28 November to 9 December this year, South Africa will be hosting the 17th Conference of the Parties to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC COP17), we take this opportunity to congratulate the province of KwaZulu-Natal on being chosen to host this historic event.

Once more the world is descending on our province to participate in one of the world's biggest conferences. It is our duty to ensure that South Africa is proactive about responding to the global challenge of climate change.

I am saying once again because as you all know, this province is internationally recognised for successfully hosting a number of major international events over the past years.

I know that so much is being said about this climate change. But what is it really? Climate change is the alteration of the earth's general weather conditions. Climate change is different to weather changes in that weather can change continuously from day to day and even from hour to hour whereas climate change is the average change over a longer period of time.

In other words, when we have too much heat on earth it is because the ozone layer that protects the earth from the sun is destroyed by excessive smoke from the earth – the factories, households, vehicles, veld fires etc. The excessive direct heat from the sun is not healthy for human beings, animals and plants on earth. It is this too much heat which also causes moisture up there in the atmosphere. That moisture turns to water and that is why we are getting too much rain and floods on earth.

You and I know what happens when there is too much of heat and the sun. Our river water dries out and animals and plants and human beings have no river water with which to wash their clothes, swim in Summer and livestock suffers when there is not enough water to drink in our rivers.

We all know how threatening and painful it is when farmers who supply retail shops with food paint a gloomy picture of a drought. Even if some of us may not have livestock and green fields, it is painful to watch poor crops in the fields and livestock losing weight. We do not want to see cattle and goats and sheep and products die. Moreover, we all know that when food supplies are scarce, the prices go up in the shops. Petrol price increases make the situation of food price increases even worse.

So these extreme weather conditions called climate change are not good for earthly life.

One day we have too much heat and the next day we have too much rain. There must be a healthy balance – extremes are not good – so we are killing the natural environment whether we are conscious of it or not. So climate change includes changes in rainfall patterns and changes in extreme weather conditions leads to natural disasters such as floods and droughts.

That is why we as government we are encouraging communities to plant trees. Trees produce oxygen and if the world has many trees that means that human beings and animals and plants have more oxygen to use in order to live.

Now, if you look at how often we have experienced these patterns in the recent years, you will realise that Climate Change is indeed already with us. We are told that in South Africa, surface air temperature has warmed significantly over much of the country since the 1950s.

The atmospheric concentrations of gases known as greenhouse gases are emitted when fossil fuels like coal, oil, petrol, diesel and natural gases are burnt. Human activities such as chopping down of forests are also reducing the earth's natural ability to absorb greenhouse gases.

You and I know that it is difficult to control factories because they depend on coal power to run their business, and we see smoke going up from the factories and this to us seems to be a way of life. Unfortunately, whilst we welcome factories that give us jobs and manufacture finished products for us to wear, eat or use, we must also be aware that the smoke from our factories and homes and forest fires is not good for us because of the reasons I have explained.

We are pleased however, that the COP17 comes just after the National Cabinet has approved the country's National Climate Change Response Policy earlier this month of October. This policy provides a clear indication of how we must respond to the apparent climate challenge.

Like other countries, the number one threat to our sustainable development, economic growth and quality of life is related to the impact of climate change. As I was saying, the impact of this climate change is being felt in poor agricultural production patterns, food price increases which undermine food security, all of which will have disastrous social and economic consequences. Needless to say, we do need to take bold steps to address challenges pertaining to climate change.

The KwaZulu-Natal Government is therefore committed to playing its part in ensuring that we take active and bold steps to respond to this threat that is posed by the climate changes. We also call on all Government departments, state owned enterprises, municipalities, the private sector and civil society formations, and ultimately all individual citizens of this province to embrace climate-friendly lifestyles and habits.

It is high time that we start communicating with all citizens about climate change to inform and educate them to influence their behavioural choices. This must include setting up and maintaining early warning systems so that our people can take specific actions to reduce risk to themselves, their households and property and to future generations.

Let us continuously plant our indigenous trees that absorb carbon dioxide from the air and produce oxygen for us to breath. There is nothing as painful as watching an asthmatic person trying to breath. Imagine a world in which it would be a struggle to find fresh air because of excessive heat.

In order to protect our earth from the climate change we therefore need to recycle things like paper, glass and tin products so as to save our precious indigenous trees. Recycling helps to reduce the energy used in their manufacturing and this contains air pollution, that is, the excessive smoke that damages the ozone layer which protects us from excessive heat from the sun.

On transport, you must make a concerted effort to reduce the amount of journeys you make by car by using public transport, joining a car-pooling club and/or walking, in order to reduce gas emissions.

As I indicated earlier that we are the host province of the COP 17, therefore the eyes of the world are once again upon us. This has provided an opportunity for the people of KwaZulu-Natal to further position itself favorably as a province of choice in the international community. We expect you to bring back the spirit of the FIFA World Cup, where everybody was determined to show the world that we are a better deserving province. We all know that for the duration of the tournament, we had none of the gruesome incidents relating to road accidents and crime in general.

In fact, one has always wondered why our people could not sustain that beyond the World Cup because that is exactly how we should be conducting ourselves. During the World Cup we did not have new traffic or criminal laws to guide us specifically for that period.

It is therefore that today we make a clarion call to all of our citizens in the province to join hands with Government to fight against road carnage and crime in general, during and beyond the COP 17.

We know that all this coincides with the festive season and scholars will soon finish their exams. In fact, it starts alongside most matric dances. Some of the matriculants will party and forget about behaving themselves.

Some will be driven in their friends' cars who will have indulged in alcohol. They forget about ensuring that there is a designated driver, one amongst them who will not drink because he or she will be driving them home after partying all night.

Furthermore, this is the time of the year when our young people, due to intoxication and irresponsible behavior e.g. engaging in unprotected sex leading to unplanned pregnancy and HIV infection.

It is even more unfortunate that our young girls are the most affected by this situation. They go out with older men who tempt them with money, jobs and material wealth. These are all the things you must guard against as you grow up.

But on the other hand, we also need to take into serious consideration the cultures and/or customs that are demeaning and belittling to us as a nation. I am referring here to the culture of *ukuthwalwa kwezintombi* where young girl children are forcefully taken from one family or neighborhood to another to be married, frequently against their will.

In most cases these children are made to marry men that are three or four times older than the girl. Some of these elderly men are even widowed and no one knows if they have diseases such as HIV and AIDS that can be transmitted to the young girls or not.

It is very important for us as a nation to stand together and that our customs are not counter-productive and destructive in so far as the modern context is concerned. As a government, traditional leaders and civil society, let us hold each others' hands for the sake of our children.

As with the issues of climate change being addressed today, dealing with these behavioural patterns are a cross-generational challenge. The effects of action or inaction may not be felt immediately, but may have significant consequences for future generations.

As our theme for Climate Change says: "Let us save tomorrow, today"

I thank you.