

**SOLIDARITY MESSAGE BY KWAZULU-NATAL MEC FOR TRANSPORT,
COMMUNITY SAFETY AND LIAISON MR WILLIES MCHUNU DURING THE
PRAYER ORGANISED BY COSATU ON FRIDAY, 28 OCTOBER IN
DURBAN.**

Programme Directors;

Honourable Premier: Dr Zweli Mkhize;

Honourable MEC Meshack Radebe;

His Worship the Mayor of Ethekewini: Cllr James Nxumalo;

Provincial Chairperson: Cde John Dlamini;

Provincial Leadership of Cosatu;

Religious leaders present;

Distinguished guests;

Ladies and gentlemen.

Let me take this opportunity to express my sincere appreciation to you for allowing me to join you here this evening to show our solidarity with Somalia's Humanitarian Crisis and to have a platform to share with you some of my views on the issues of safety in our province, be it on the roads or crime in general.

The fact that as the people of KwaZulu-Natal we have decided to host this gathering clearly indicates how much we value the lives - not only of ourselves as citizens, but also of our neighbours and the rest of the world.

If it was right for the world to demonstrate the kind of support that was given to us during our war against the apartheid regime, then it is right for us as leaders of a democratic South Africa to be one with our comrades and brothers and sisters in distress – whether they are in Somalia or anywhere in the continent.

As it happened during apartheid where our neighbouring countries and the rest of the world was affected by instability in this country, the instability and insecurity on the coast of Somalia which is a reflection of the political instability inside that country is also affecting us here.

It is always encouraging to know that as the ANC-led Government we are not alone. In fact, our alliance partners are committed and willing to ensure that together we fight crime against humanity. We come out as whistle-blowers against human rights violations to women and children and to the whole of Somalia.

It is precisely because of the negative and destructive impact road carnage and crime have on our people that our government has prioritised the fight against these social evils. These are some of the challenges we must confront without any compromise.

As the political head of the Department of Transport in the province, I am pleased that we have been able to make several important interventions in the light of the increase of road fatalities over the past few months.

But I find it appropriate that I should also give necessary recognition and praise to all other formations that are now coming on board so that we fight the scourge together.

Today we see our organised labour taking a stand. This is highly commendable indeed. We thank you comrades. If as organised labour you stood up and fought until the demise of apartheid, what can stop you now from winning the battle against road carnage and crime that continue to ravage our nation?

It is not normal that in the past three months our province alone lost more than 1 000 people on our roads. This is an unacceptably high number of people to die in three months. Even the political violence that once engulfed our province did not claim such a number in a short space of time.

Road accidents and crime in general have a far-reaching impact on victims. People who die on our roads are normally workers, learners, students and breadwinners. The same applies to people who fall prey to crime. Most of these people are economically active members of society who contribute to the growth and development of this country.

Furthermore, due to road accidents and crime, the government spends billions of rands on medical care, compensation for claims as well as social welfare grants. These are the monies which could have been used to deliver services and improve the lives of the citizens of this country through developmental projects.

I know that some of our comrades here represent workers in the road freight transport industry. We have realised that the developments and opportunities in this sector since the inception of democracy in our country have led to tight competition in the trucking industry.

The vehicle population has increased and companies have become profit-driven, tending to overload vehicles, neglect vehicle maintenance and promote working conditions that compel drivers to speed on the road.

We want to take this opportunity to appeal to our shop-stewards in this industry to play their part in ensuring that they engage employees on the issues of safety on our roads and particularly the safety of the drivers.

To that end, we want to salute the COSATU affiliate POPCRU KwaZulu-Natal for partnering with the Departments of Transport, Community Safety and Liaison in ensuring that road users realise that lives are at stake and that reckless and irresponsible behaviour on our roads can no longer be tolerated.

The Department of Transport has isolated the driver as our main focus in dealing with road carnage. Whether through enhanced enforcement or driver education, we are calling upon COSATU to help us impress upon their members to head the call to safe driving, especially amongst heavy vehicles and public transport.

Hence, next Friday, together we will be launching a massive operation dubbed "Operation Val 'Ingozi". Our mission here is to stop unnecessary loss of innocent lives of passengers and drivers and to ensure that we have legal operators in the public transport industry.

This will be achieved by applying a multi-disciplinary approach and vigilant law enforcement on permits/ operating licenses, vehicle roadworthiness, driver fitness and driving behaviour.

The Department of Community Safety & Liaison is calling upon you comrades to join hands with us in strengthening community safety structures like Community Policing Forums (CPFs), street committees, etc. Collaborating with the police in isolating criminals in society is the only way we can hope to achieve social stability in our communities – communities that will be free from murder, robbery, house-breaking, rape, and other forms of violence.

But having said all that, I strongly maintain that the success of campaigns depends on whether as individuals we are prepared to change our mindset.

Comrades, as organized labour, it is important that each one of us show our commitment to safety by supporting these campaigns which promulgate community safety and traffic law-abiding citizens. Safety on the road and in our communities begins with you. Let us all agree that tonight we are forming a partnership that will take us to the festive season and beyond.

We thank you comrades for also dedicating this Prayer Festival to students who are writing exams, particularly the matriculants. We know that these are our hope for the future of this province. But our wish would be that prayer messages go hand in hand with proper guidance from us as parents or guardians.

We know that the problem usually starts with matric dances. Some of the matriculants go to party and forget about behaving themselves. Some are driven in their friends' cars who 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.

You and I know about news reports that we usually receive after that – our children whom we send to tertiary institutions to acquire crucial skills end up in rows of coffins that we must bury due to road fatalities caused by drunken driving, over-speeding, fatigue, overloading, vehicle defects etc.

Furthermore, this is the time of the year when our young people, due to intoxication and irresponsible behaviour. They engage in unprotected sex leading to unplanned pregnancy and HIV infection.

I urge all the comrades here not to contribute to this problem. I am saying this because it is our young girls unfortunately who 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 we must guard against as members of COSATU.

In conclusion, let us unite to show that it cannot be right that KwaZulu-Natal is always the worst province in the country when it comes to spreading the HIV and AIDS pandemic. We cannot be the ones that lead other countries because of high incidents of road carnage, taxi violence and other criminal activities. It cannot be that every year statistics put us on top of the list in the country.

Let us join hands as communities in the province and ensure that we clean up our province. Let us continue to work and pray with unity of purpose and without ceasing for a safer province, where the number of road accidents and incidents of crime will be significantly reduced.

I thank you