

**SPEECH NOTES BY KWAZULU-NATAL MEC FOR TRANSPORT,
COMMUNITY SAFETY AND LIAISON MR WILLIES MCHUNU AT THE
MEMORIAL SERVICE FOR STUDENTS IN DURBAN ON THURSDAY 02
JUNE 2011**

Programme Director;
Members of the Provincial Legislature;
Leadership of EtheKwini;
All Councilors present;
Religious leaders;
Members of the media;
Members of the affected families;
Ladies and gentlemen;
All Protocol observed

Firstly, let me take this opportunity to thank the families of the deceased, the management of the three institutions and the student bodies, for allowing us as the Department of Transport and the Government of KwaZulu-Natal to organize this service in memory of our children who passed on recently.

A gathering of this nature, especially when our young people are involved, is certainly the saddest and most difficult moment for us at the KwaZulu-Natal Department of Transport.

It has become this Department's initiative to intervene with assistance when five or more people die on our roads. The trend has been that we consult with the families to establish what assistance is required and then agree on whether we will have the memorial service, usually on a Thursday, or funeral service, together.

However, our intervention does not underestimate the devastating impact of fatalities involving less than five people. In fact, we have always said that "one death on our road is one too many."

This memorial service comes immediately after the one we had last Thursday in Empangeni where five people lost their lives as they were travelling from Ladysmith where they had staged an ilobolo ceremony. In other words, a joyful ceremony ended in sadness. Again, I want to emphasize that this is just one example of many road crashes that are claiming innocent lives every weekend on our roads throughout the country.

Now, how do we move forward together to respond to this challenge? The KwaZulu-Natal Department of Transport hosted a Road Safety Summit in March this year. The summit 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.

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

- The youth must become champions of driver-behavior;
- Laws and enforcement strategies need to be harsh because perpetrators are penalised too lightly;
- Government needs to lobby for the creation of traffic courts so that road offenders are dealt with amicably;
- We needed 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;
- We have a challenge to come up with a vigorous pedestrian safety strategy.

The Honourable Minister of Transport Dr Sbu Ndebele always says that “the living close the eyes the dead, and the dead open the eyes of the living”.

Incidents like these open our eyes to the reality of death on our roads. That is why the Department would like to utilise this incident as a platform from which we can call upon our youth to join our campaign of 'Students Against Road Carnage and Transgressions'. Let this incident help galvanise individuals and the student bodies to play a role in curbing carnage on our roads. We say that accidents do not happen by accident but they are caused.

I therefore take this opportunity to personally invite each one of you to show your commitment to road safety by supporting this campaign. Our point of departure here is to give priority to the concept of self-policing to ensure that all of you as road users take the responsibility for safer roads because road safety is everybody's business.

Our research tells us that people who die on our country's roads are mostly young people between the ages 18 and 35 years. These are people who are economically active. These are usually professionals who have just graduated and got good jobs. These are people who have just got married and have young kids.

Unfortunately, some learn bad driving habits from their parents, brothers, sisters, relatives and role models and particularly the mass media like drama films. We even have people who glorify these bad driving behavior patterns. How often do we hear people bragging about how fast they can drive between Johannesburg and Durban or between Durban and Pietermaritzburg? It is time for us to stand up and say speed is not fashionable, and it never was: speed kills – ukujaha imoto akudlisi - kuyabulala.

Furthermore, road accidents cost the South African government billions of rands (more than R56 billion per annum), funds that could have been used to deliver services and improve the lives of the citizens of this country through developmental projects.

It is my duty today to remind everyone about the factors which contribute to collisions in our country, including KZN, our beautiful province which, unfortunately for us, has a reputation of killing more people than any other province, whether it is as a result of HIV and AIDS, crime or road crashes. The number one cause for road crashes is excessive speed, drunk driving, vehicle that are not worthy to be on the road as well as moving offences such as using a cell-phone whilst driving, not wearing seatbelts and overloading.

I believe that in South Africa we still live in interesting times where there is hope. Therefore, as members of communities and various institutions, we must ensure that we provide coordinated and consolidated responses to address challenges including crime, poverty as well as the HIV and AIDS pandemic.

A key element of our fight against these challenges must be the reduction of the conditions which give rise to such challenges. We must embark on providing a safety net to the most vulnerable in our society so as to make sense of our overall objective of creating a caring society.

The accident that brings us together today happened at about 02h30 am on Saturday (28/05/2011) at the intersection of Manning and Clark Road, in Glenwood, Durban. A BMW motor vehicle lost control and plunged onto a tree and occupants were flung out, and they were exposed to the merciless force of gravity which decided their fate.

Hence, of the seven (7) occupants, including the driver, six occupants died on the scene and the driver was taken to St Augustine Hospital in Durban after sustaining critical injuries.

The driver has been discharged from the Intensive Care Unit and is now in the ordinary ward at the same hospital. His name is Mzuphilile Gadu, who is a twenty-four-year-old male from the DUT student and a resident of King Williams Town, in the Eastern Cape.

According to the police reports, the possible cause of the accident was speed (as the speedometer was stuck at 130 km/h when the accident took place), and chances are that it may have been higher than that before the accident actually happened. It appears that overloading and the possible consumption of alcohol contributed to this situation. UMbilo SAPS is currently investigating the case.

We have managed to get personal details of the alleged driver and our eNatis system has revealed that he does have a valid driver license which he obtained during the cause of last year, that is, the year 2010.

We would like to express our sincere condolences to all the bereaved families during this time of grief.

The names of the deceased are as follows:

- 1 Mzwandile Zitha, a 30-year-old male DUT student from uMtata;
- 2 Elethu Diko, an 18-year-old CIT College student from uMtata;
- 3 Athi Nzawuse, a 17-year-old female Berea College student from Tsolo;
- 4 Zimkhitha Falteni, an 18-year-old CTI female student from Tsolo;
- 5 Bongeka Silinga, a 19-year-old Berea College female student from uMtata;
- 6 Zanele Thabethe, a 20-year-old Berea College female student from Nquthu.

May their souls rest in peace!

Finally, as young people you must take responsibility to determine your destiny. You must refuse to be distracted by the ordinary things that attract the youth like too much of the good thing found in alcohol, drugs and endless partying. This is your life; your one solitary life and you must treasure it!

I THANK YOU.