

**SPEECH NOTES BY KZN MEC FOR TRANSPORT, COMMUNITY SAFETY
AND LIAISON MR WILLIES MCHUNU DURING THE ILEMBE PRAYER
DAY ON SATURDAY 03 SEPTEMBER 2011**

Programme Director;
Chairperson of the Transport Portfolio Committee;
Inkosi Dube of the Dube Traditional Authority;
Hon. Deputy Mayor of Ilembe District Municipality;
His Worship, the Mayor of KwaDukuza Municipality;
KWANATACO Provincial Chairperson and SANTACO President;
PTPA Provincial Chairperson;
Interfaith Leaders;
Distinguished guests;
Members of the media;
Ladies and gentlemen.

I would like to take this opportunity to extend a warm welcome to all of you and thank you for honouring our invitation to this important gathering. We know that today is Saturday and you could instead be attending your important engagements as families and communities.

Therefore, to me, your presence here is a reflection that there is incredible will to make the Taxi Industry in the Ilembe District safer and prosperous.

I wish to pay a special thanks to all stakeholders and organisers of this prayer day. Some of us who were present at Comrade Kader Asmal's memorial service will remember that I also expressed the need to host a Prayer in the Ilembe District following the latest developments that involve peace agreements among taxi associations.

Today I do not want to dwell much on the past. But I must state that of the many challenges we have been faced with as a democratic government, few have been as complex as those relating to the restructuring of the public transportation system.

In our province we have always had public transportation virtually denoting horror. Our public transport has painted gory pictures of minibus crashes and of bodies of our loved ones scattered on our roads. In our public transport we have seen gunmen spraying bullets at innocent passengers in broad daylight and assassinations under the cover of darkness.

Just when we thought things were normalising in the taxi industry after a long time of on-and-off physical confrontation in Hammarsdale, Mpumalanga, violent conflict made a new start again.

Nowadays we have widows and orphans who may qualify to receive grants from our government's Department of Social Development and SASSA, both of whom are present here today to see new applicants, due to unnecessary killings in the taxi industry. Whether through taxi violence or road accidents, today we are continually seeing the taxi industry depriving society of breadwinners in a country that already has a serious challenge of unemployment and poverty caused by centuries of white people's colonial and apartheid rule.

The taxi industry, as a sector of the economy, has a unique profile. Other than soccer or football, no other sector of the economy is predominantly and overwhelmingly black-owned, black-managed and black-operated. Therefore, any instability in this industry undermines the image of black-run industries.

As a mode of public transportation, the minibus taxi industry carries the bulk of the public transport burden. The national average market share of the industry exceeds 60%. Within the KZN Province we are talking about a higher percentage due to the weaknesses in the rail system.

Now in my opinion, the taxi industry should serve as a remarkable example of on-going and sustained dialogue, not only for economic growth for the benefit of its stakeholders and the people it serves, but also for finding an end to the unfortunate and indeed undeserved, public stigma of being an industry of violence, death and lawlessness.

Today, I am proud of the fact that Ilembe District is at last beginning to succeed in a situation that some years ago many could dismiss as irredeemable and incapable of being changed.

The remarkable achievements made in the last few months towards putting an end to the violent conflicts between taxi associations as well as between the industry and passengers, all bear testimony to the fact that where there is a will to find peace, there is always a way.

In fact, despite the problems we have faced, perhaps the most momentous and desired for event in relation to the taxi industry – within government, the members of the taxi industry, the various other stakeholders, the taxi commuters, the communities whose livelihoods and way of life depend on public transport, and the general public itself – is to be able to witness with pride two powerful associations that have been at loggerheads with each other now committing themselves to embracing each other.

We welcome the move by Stanger Association to elect a new executive committee of leaders in accordance with their constitution, and as government we look forward to working with you in the interest of safety for both the industry and commuters.

We need to bear in mind the fact that – apart from the now infrequent and sporadic incidents of politically-motivated violence in our province – we have succeeded in maintaining lasting peace at a broader level. Generally, the known causes of violence are fast disappearing and South Africans are learning to embrace one another irrespective of race, colour, ethnicity and religion.

Why then should we allow the trouble-makers within the taxi industry to spoil the image and wellbeing of such an important industry due to the greed that informs route-based taxi feuds? Why should we create space for those who have no interest in peace to continue to instigate conflict among members of the same fraternity?

Why should we allow our inflated hunger for passengers, travel routes domination and monopoly in the industry to create non-African impediments to our traditional spirit of Ubuntu?

Programme Director, this event came spot on when I have just made a call to my Transport Department officials to bring forward to September all our road safety plans that were supposed to be executed during the month of October which is now regarded as transport month.

I made this special request after the province of KwaZulu-Natal had lost more than 30 people in three road accidents involving public transport in August alone. I am referring to the three accidents which claimed more than five lives each. However, we have had a number of other fatal accidents involving minibus taxis in the province during the same period.

Therefore, when we have prayers for peace such as this one here today, it is also important that we pledge ourselves to end road carnage on our roads.

I am appealing to all the leaders present here to apply their minds as to how best they can contribute to road safety campaigns.

Religious leaders more than any other sector understand the severity of our crisis. Everyday they pray at funerals of victims of road carnage. I am appealing to you to go beyond your responsibility to bury the dead and to take on the responsibility of counselling the bereaved and using your pulpit and church sermons to preach the gospel of road safety.

To the Taxi Council and public transport sector, my appeal is that you recognise your special responsibilities. Bus and taxi crashes inevitably result in the loss of lives for many passengers. It has been established as a fact that excessive speeding does play a role in 30% of all crashes and 50% of crashes involving public passenger vehicles.

To all the drivers present today, please acknowledge that driver behaviour and driver error are the major causes of most road crash fatalities.

Remember: Speed kills; Drunk driving kills; Driving without a valid drivers licence kills.

To the pedestrians present here, you must know that walking under the influence of alcohol is the major contributing factor in 40% to 50% of vehicle-pedestrian collisions in urban areas and 30% to 40% in rural areas.

The KwaZulu-Natal Department of Transport will play the role that we are mandated to play in providing the road infrastructure network and ensuring that it is maintained and used safely. We will continue to improve the road network and in particular we will undertake to implement appropriate remedial engineering measures at all hazardous locations.

We will continue to champion zero tolerance enforcement programmes. We will continue to root out corruption and fraud in driver and vehicle testing and licensing centres. We will continue to dedicate funds to ensure that the public is well informed and educated in all aspects of road safety.

We will play our role. However without you we will not achieve a safe road environment, and a safe road culture. All of us must commit ourselves to playing our respective roles. Together we can end the carnage on our roads. Together we can make KwaZulu-Natal and South Africa safe.

I thank you.