

REMARKS BY KWAZULU-NATAL MEC FOR TRANSPORT, COMMUNITY SAFETY AND LIAISON MR. WILLIES MCHUNU DURING THE NATIONAL ROAD SAFETY SCHOOL DEBATING COMPETITION AT COASTLANDS HOTEL - UMHLANGA, 05 OCTOBER 2011.

Programme Director;

The Honourable Minister Sibusiso Ndebele;

Ethekwini Deputy Mayor, Cllr Nomvuzo Shabalala;

RTMC CEO, Mr Collins Letsoalo;

Representatives of the Department of Basic Education;

Transnet;

BP South Africa;

Road Accident Fund;

National and Provincial Senior Government Officials:

All stakeholders present;

All participating learners;

Distinguished Guests;

Ladies and Gentlemen;

I wish to pay special thanks to the organizers of this event for choosing the province of KwaZulu-Natal to host this program as it falls directly in line with our quest to influence road-user behavior.

You will readily agree with me that you have come to the province that is currently experiencing an increase in the number of fatalities on the roads. And, with the festive season at our doorstep, it is even more worrying now.

It is a worrying development that we have to bury 15 people on Saturday this week in Pietermaritzburg due to human error. It is not normal that from the 1st of August 2011 to date our province alone has had some 716 fatalities and 310 crashes. And the number keeps going up each day. This is an unacceptably high number of people to die in two months.

It is therefore appropriate that through such Road Safety School Debating initiatives, we should inculcate a culture of sound conduct in our youths on the road as drivers, pedestrians and passengers. Such educational interventions will go a long way in meeting our target of reducing accidents and ultimately making our roads safer.

The KwaZulu-Natal Department of Transport is very committed to an ongoing consultation process that allows both the Department and its stakeholders to make informed decisions on how best to tackle the challenges of safety which our people face on our roads.

As Government, it is only through interacting with various sectors of our society that we can have access to researched ideas. We therefore encourage this kind of ongoing communication on the action plans to improve road safety, and to use innovations presented by the debating teams in future pilot programmes.

Today we are asking ourselves if South Africa will reduce road fatalities by 50% by 2020 as per the Decade of Action on Road Safety proclaimed by the United Nations. For the purpose of raising awareness on road safety challenges and preventative measures among our young people, it is good that we debate this topic.

The outcome of our traffic law enforcement activities over the last two years (2009/10 to 2010/11) highlights the extent or magnitude of the seriousness and levels of impunity of our motorists on our roads. Motorists remain the prime culprits when it comes to disregarding road traffic rules.

The categories that have been regarded as contributory factors to collisions in KZN are speed, drink driving, vehicle defects and moving offences such as using cell-phones whilst driving, not wearing seatbelts and overloading.

It is on that score that this competition must provide us with an opportunity to hear first-hand contributions from our young people as to what else can be done to fight this scourge.

We are pleased that some of the topics you have debated included:

- The lack of smart policing which is the main challenge to effective road traffic law enforcement;
- The high rate of fatalities in South Africa is a result of unsafe level crossings;
- South Africa has inadequate road safety solutions for young road users;
- The inclusion of road safety education in the school curriculum can help to reduce road traffic fatalities in South Africa.

We are convinced that your participation in finding solutions to road safety challenges will go a long way in ensuring that individuals, community formations at all levels, the wider society, own the fight against road carnages because the responsibility for safety rests with each and every one of us.

I have always maintained, and I still believe, that we are all in agreement that we need to come together like this, at a time when the whole world is uniting behind endeavours to curb road deaths drastically between 2011 and 2020.

At this stage, the KwaZulu-Natal Department of Transport has rolled out its campaign of galvanizing individuals and the society at large to play a role in curbing carnages on our roads.

As for our school children, we have seen our learners taking advantage of our road safety programmes such as the Participatory Education Techniques (PET) project which is undertaken to develop learners' research skills, project management skills, presentation skills and the ability to think innovatively and creatively around finding solutions to engineering road safety challenges in various communities.

It is very encouraging that learners, through these programmes, are able to identify road safety problems in the environment, research and present proposed solutions to these problems, and we have had instances where recommendations from the Participatory Education Techniques (PET) have been implemented in local communities.

We continue to request the youth to internalize sound road safety norms and values from now and when you reach tertiary level because when as you become independent human beings there is a greater need for responsible behavior for no one is monitoring you closely after matric.

So you will party and forget about ensuring that there is a designated driver, one amongst you who will not drink because he or she will be driving you home after partying all night.

We also urge our young people as road users not to passively accept unacceptable and indeed criminal actions on our roads. The blatant disregard of the law should not be tolerated – whether you are driver or passenger – speak out for your right to be safe.

Our research tells us that people who die on our country's roads are mostly young people between the ages of 16 and 35 years. These are people who are economically active. These are usually professionals who have just graduated and started work at good jobs. These are people who have just been married and have young kids.

Unfortunately, some learn bad driving habits from their parents, brothers, sisters, relatives, friends and role models and particularly the mass media like drama films. We even have people who glorify these bad driving behavior patterns. It is not acceptable that you should be proud of exceeding the speed limit in order to reach your destination faster than other road users.

But, today all we say is that it is time for us to stand up and say speed is not fashionable, and it never was: speed kills. We say accidents are not accidental, but are often as a result of sheer carelessness and recklessness or even ignorance that is informed by under-preparedness to use the road.

The latest accident which claimed the lives of fifteen people in Pietermaritzburg last Friday is an echo of many such incidents that we feel are avoidable or preventable.

On behalf of the KwaZulu-Natal Department of Transport and the entire provincial Government, I take this opportunity to thank all the learners from the four Regions who participated in this competition by putting their innovative ideas forward. As Government, we value all your ideas, no matter how small or big you think they are.

At my capacity as MEC for Transport, I would like to congratulate Kokstad College from the Pietermaritzburg Region for the privilege of representing KwaZulu-Natal in this important national road safety contest.

Finally, I wish to thank the principals of the schools, the staff and the governing bodies for their contribution towards cultivating the culture of road safety amongst these children. I salute all our partners, the Government officials and the community present here today, for the time dedicated to this occasion.

I appeal to you all to assist these young boys and girls to reach their dreams through education because education is power; the power to think critically and to make good and healthy decisions.

I thank you.