

SPEECH NOTES BY KWAZULU-NATAL MEC FOR TRANSPORT, COMMUNITY SAFETY AND LIAISON MR WILLIES MCHUNU DURING THE ROMAN CATHOLIC CHURCH VISIT ON SUNDAY 31 JULY 2011

Programme Director;
Archbishop of the Mariannhill Diocese Baba uDlungwane;
All Bishops present;
All Priests present;
All leaders of the Church at various levels;
The Congregation;
I greet you all in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ.

On behalf of the Department of Transport, Community Safety and Liaison, and the entire Government of KwaZulu-Natal, I wish to take this opportunity to thank the Mariannhill Diocese of the Roman Catholic Church for inviting us to be part of this important church gathering today.

As Government, we are always encouraged by the meaningful partnership that we have with the church community around the province. The warm welcome we receive when we visit church services like this one here is very appreciable. To that effect, in your invitation, you mentioned specifically that amongst other things, "this retreat will also be thanking God for the peaceful 2011 Local Government Elections and also the decrease of crime levels in Tshelimnyama and surrounding areas."

As the political head of the Department of Community Safety and Liaison that is responsible for assisting the SAPF in ensuring that we have a peaceful election, I wish to echo the sentiments of your invitation by reassuring you that my Department has in the recent past organized prayer gatherings involving supporters of the various political organizations, with the support of the different religious formations in the land.

I wish to say without any doubt that the glory of God is evident in the province of KwaZulu-Natal because lesser people died in the run up to the election. I must praise the province's local government election multi-party committee that seeks to promote fair and peaceful elections for the splendid work of promoting peace in this province which our past history has painted as amongst the most violent places in the world.

As the Lord Jesus Christ encourages us not to stop praying because we can never know when the Devil will strike again and find us weak, we therefore urge you not to stop praying with us as this committee

prepares for the 2014 general election. Through the grace of the Lord, we pray for peace, a healthy competition and coexistence amongst contesting political parties.

It is true that as members of the Church we are perceived as peace brokers. But it is also true that we come from a divided society and societal problems affect all of us. We cannot call ourselves a civilized nation if we cannot hold peaceful elections because the outcome of coerced and forced choices is bad governance – people who are not credible or acceptable to the majority they claim to lead.

On behalf of the Government of KwaZulu-Natal, I want to convey my sincere appreciation to all members of political parties that contested local government elections in this area for committing themselves to peace, political tolerance and promotion of free political activity before, and during elections up until now.

As an effort of promoting peace, democracy and social cohesion, in March this year the Provincial Government, led by the Premier Dr. Zweli Mkhize, staged an important summit that featured political leaders from all political parties in the Province, the Independent Electoral Commission (IEC), the Police, as well as the traditional and the religious leaders.

The participants of the summit resolved, amongst other things, to reaffirm their commitment to the provisions of the Electoral Code of Conduct; to promote political tolerance, unity, peace, freedom of choice, expression, association, before and during elections as well as to form a Multi-party committee which I am privileged to be leading together with other leaders who are representing the various political parties in our province.

In our recent review meeting as the multi-party committee, we agreed that even if the local elections have come and gone, the task team must continue with its work as a build up to the 2014 general elections. We must also remember that during their term of office, the councils will be having by-elections now and then when people die or leave to pursue other interests.

I know that most of us here come from the Umhlathuzane Deanery, which is the Mariannhill area. I take this opportunity to commend the communities of Pinetown and Mariannhill in particular, for rallying behind local and provincial government in their fight against crime. We all know that towards the end of last year, this area was in the limelight due to criminal incidents that were widely reported. But the way you as communities have cooperated with government departments and the South African Police Force (SAPF) is very much appreciated.

Our call now is for members of the Church to come on board and be a part of the establishment of Street Committees in the promotion of safety at local level. Let us ensure that our Community Policing Forums (CPFs) are functioning well.

These are your structures as communities and should not be seen as representing certain political organizations. We say this is the year of People's Action Against Crime. Let us build a United Front Against Crime.

I also stand here before you as the political head of the KZN Department of Transport. The core function of this Department is to ensure that people have access, i.e. roads and bridges, but more importantly, it is also our business to ensure that people are safe on these roads.

It is for this reason that this Department has over the years launched a number of road safety initiatives, one of which is this ever-growing partnership with organizations that represent different faiths, particularly the Christian churches. It has always been the belief of this Department that the churches are an important part of the fight against carnage on our roads. Prayers for successful road safety advocacy work in society must go hand in hand with taking full responsibility for our safety and the safety of our loved ones.

Road accidents and fatalities continue depriving us of our children and breadwinners whom we expect to play a major role in supporting their families and building this nation. We continue burying innocent victims of road carnage. Statistics show us that this country is experiencing more than 16 000 road fatalities which cost an estimated R56 billion annually that is spent on medical and legal expenses.

As Government, we step up our road safety campaigns around particular times of the year when traffic volumes are at their peak. This includes the festive season and the Easter holidays which are always targeted for this. But, the truth is that the 16 000 road victims we are talking about are the people that we lose even during the course of the year on our roads.

In view of this, two weeks ago we launched an Integrated Traffic Law Enforcement Committee (ITLEC) that is working towards the attainment of the goal of preventing road crashes and offences that lead to fatalities throughout the year.

The major role players in this initiative are the Provincial Department of Transport, Ethekewini Metro Police and the various Municipalities. This Committee will drive the integrated provincial traffic enforcement initiatives and programmes as well as engage in continuous research aimed at finding

new ways to curb the high levels of road accidents and fatalities. We want to see vigorous enforcement of traffic laws in all areas including the rural areas, townships and cities. We want to ensure that we focus our attention on road safety 24 hours a day, 7 days a week, and 365 days a year,

That is from the perspective of law enforcement. But to us as members of the public, it is important to note that this year is dedicated to 'Activism Against Road Carnage and Transgressions'. This means that institutions like the church have a responsibility to help us galvanise individuals and the society at large to play a role in curbing carnage on our roads. We say that accidents do not happen but they are caused, and that preventing them from happening is a joint responsibility.

I therefore take this opportunity to personally invite each one of you to show your commitment to road safety by supporting our campaign. Let us all agree that today we are forming a partnership that will take us to the festive season and beyond. Let us give priority to the concept of self-policing to ensure that road users take the responsibility for safer roads because road safety is everybody's business.

We are saying it is not fair that we need to spend millions of rands on public awareness campaigns and that the taxpayer is saddled with this huge bill of having to pay for the rich to be reminded of the rules of the road such as: "Wear your seatbelts." It is almost an insult, if not a waste of money to have to remind a supposedly qualified driver not to drive a vehicle that is not road-worthy with huge billboards that read: "Speed Kills!" or "Don't drink and drive."

Once again, we call upon all members of the Church to come on board and ensure that together we take our province forward. Let us 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 that kills in numbers. We cannot be the ones that lead other provinces because of high incidents of road carnage, taxi violence and criminal activities. It cannot be that every year statistics put us on top of the list in the country.

We therefore call upon all our communities in the province to come on board 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 South Africa, where the number of road accidents and incidents of crime will be significantly reduced.

I thank you