

**SPEECH NOTES BY KZN TRANSPORT, COMMUNITY SAFETY & LIAISON
MEC AND ACTING PREMIER, THE HONOURABLE WILLIES MCHUNU IN
MTUBATUBA ON THE OCCASION OF THE UNVEILING OF THE MEMORIAL
PLAQUE TO COMMOMMERATE THE ARRIVAL OF INDENTURED INDIAN
LABOURERS IN 1860.**

30TH MARCH 2012.

Protocol Observed.

It is a great honour and privilege for me to be part of the auspicious occasion this evening as we are meeting to witness the unveiling of a memorial plaque to commemorate an important chapter in the history of our country.

Programme Director, it is often said that every nation is defined by different epochs in its evolution. For South Africa, one of the important chapters in the history of our nation is the arrival of indentured Indian labourers in this country more than 150 years ago.

Not only did this chapter change the character of the country as we know it, but it remains an enduring symbol of victory and the resilience of the human spirit.

Ladies and Gentlemen, as all of us know, our country has come a long way from being a recluse on the global stage to being one of the most celebrated democracies in the world.

In our quest to become a nation that can take its rightful place as a respectable nation amongst other nations, we have overcome many challenges and succeeded to build a country which is a melting pot of cultural diversity, a country in which diversity is celebrated rather than used as a tool to divide our people.

But as a collective, we have been able to build from the ruins of the apartheid and colonial edifice a country that all of us can be proud of. The contribution of the Indian community in this regard is of particular significance tonight as we remember a decisive period in the history of this country.

It is because of this reason that as government we believe that this historic milestone, that is, the arrival of indentured Indian labourers on our shores, should be celebrated by all South Africans

Ladies and Gentlemen, the arrival of the Indians in South Africa heralded the early beginnings of protest action against colonial tendencies that undermined, belittled and bullied our people, including Indians.

Naturally, once again this day we recognize the exemplary role of Mahatma Gandhi as a leader who pioneered the idea of peaceful resistance, which became a critical pillar of the struggle against apartheid.

It was Gandhi who taught us that ours was a noble struggle and that we could face the might of the apartheid state machinery armed with nothing but the burning desire to free our people from the clutches of repression.

Later on in 1947 the joint declaring of cooperation by Dr A. B. Xuma, the then President of the African National Congress, Dr G.M. Naicker who was the President of Natal Indian Congress and Dr Y.M Dadoo who was the President of the Transvaal Indian Congress, was to prove a critical move in cementing the ties between all the oppressed people of this country.

Today, the “Three Doctors’ Pact” is referred to by historians as one of the turning points in galvanizing all the oppressed people of this country to work in tandem against the apartheid enemy.

As we commemorate the arrival of our Indian brothers and sisters in Africa, we can only be reminded of the need to unite as the people of South Africa.

As all of us know, the former President of the African National Congress Inkosi Albert Luthuli, Africa's first Nobel Peace prize winner, was influenced by the strategies of Gandhi when he adopted non-violence (or satyagraha) as a tool to fight against injustice and oppression.

As we reflect on the contribution of our icons such as Gandhi and Luthuli who were the path-finders of the liberation struggle, we find ourselves standing on the shoulders of great men and women and the responsibility bestowed on us is therefore tremendous.

Ours is a generation that has been given a daunting but fulfilling mission to complete the work that was started by these towering figures by ensuring that the dream of building a non-racial, democratic, non-sexist and prosperous South Africa is realized.

In order to achieve this, we need to mobilize all forces in our communities, including business, civil society and government - the same way that we created a wall of resistance against the apartheid state.

Programme Director, this event takes place at a critical time in the evolution of our country. As all of us know, this year the African National Congress, the oldest liberation movement on the African continent, is celebrating a rare milestone, its centenary.

As we mark this landmark occasion, freedom-loving people from all corners of the globe acknowledge that a large part of the ANC's rich heritage has its roots in KwaZulu-Natal in the form of its founding fathers like the first president of the African National Congress, John Dube and Pixley ka Seme who worked within the same province that Gandhi worked in during his stay in Phoenix.

In this regard, we re-affirm our commitment to elevate our heritage treasures to get the recognition and honour they deserve. We must do our best to live up to the lofty ideals of peaceful co-existence, prosperity, peace, political and religious tolerance and celebrate our unity in diversity.

Thanks to the heroic deeds of our people, today our country has a constitution that is one of the most forward-looking and progressive in the world. Hence, we must collectively ensure that the history of all our people, including the Indian community, is fused and blended healthily into one tapestry that represents the rich variety of the cultures of South African people.

We have no doubt that this plaque will become a living moment of the struggle of the people of this country and symbol of the richness of our cultural diversity. Let everyone who sees it agree with us that the struggle for the liberation of our people was not in vain.

I thank you.