

**SPEECH OF THE KZN MEC FOR TRANSPORT, COMMUNITY SAFETY &  
LIAISON MR WILLIES MCHUNU AT THE MEMORIAL SERVICE OF RTI  
APPLICANTS/RECRUITS DELIVERED AT THE PIETERMARITZBURG CITY  
HALL ON THE 09<sup>TH</sup> OF JANUARY 2013**

The Programme Director;  
Premier of KwaZulu-Natal, Dr Zweli Mkhize;  
Members of the KZN Legislature;  
UMgungundlovu District Mayor;  
UMsunduzi Municipality Mayor;  
All Municipal Mayors present;  
All Councillors present;  
Religious leaders present;  
Representatives of labour unions;  
Traditional leaders;  
Bereaved families and relatives of the deceased;

With all due respect, I humbly wish to start by expressing our gratitude in the name of the KwaZulu-Natal Provincial Government under the leadership of the Honourable Premier Dr Zweli Mkhize, for being afforded the opportunity to gather here today to be part of a memorial service to pay our respect to youngsters whose promising lives were ended unexpectedly in this painful manner.

We are particularly grateful to the bereaved families who agreed to be part of this special service. That alone is an indication that you as the affected families realize that your loss is shared by all of us.

What is important about your being with us here today is to come together with the prime aim of acknowledging what has happened and grieve together as we find ourselves having to live with the terrible experience we are going through – the pain of losing our youths.

We would like to thank members of the various communities that are here today to be with the affected families as a demonstration of solidarity and Ubuntu as is customary for human beings to come together and sympathise with the bereaved in the event of such unwelcome happenings taking place.

Coming together like this is about saying we as fellow human beings share your pain too. This gathering is about saying to you we are here to hold your hands and console you no matter how difficult the situation is.

That alone is a gesture of Ubuntu because a person is a person because of other people. This gathering is significant to the bereaved because they can see that you are here in your numbers to console them and give them hope.

As provincial Government we saw the urgent need to have this memorial service. It is our duty as Government, the affected families and society at large to join hands in our endeavour to talk about what has happened with a view to preventing it from happening again.

What brings us together today is regarded as a serious mishap because the original intentions of the KZN Department of Transport were good since the whole thing was about giving the youth better job opportunities.

We are therefore here to say it must not be that such a thing should happen again because it is a first in the province and the country as whole.

It is uncalled for that people should leave their homes in search of work opportunities and end up making news because they have died following a recruitment fitness assessment physical exercise. This is unbelievable and the pain that has been caused is unimaginable.

It is important for me to give you a brief background as to how this RTI recruitment drive came about because a lot has been said and reported in the media about this matter.

Some three years ago the Department took a decision to stop employing people for a while because there was a need to review and plan the composition and nature of the organizational structure anew. When one embarks on such a cause of action you cannot continue employing new people because this process is also about re-looking at the way the workforce is structured.

We finished this process last year, and we then agreed that we must begin to employ people. We saw a need to increase the number of our traffic law enforcement officers under the Road Traffic Inspectorate (RTI) as there was an urgent need to deal with offenders and lawlessness on our roads. It was agreed upon that for a start, 90 posts would be filled.

Physical fitness tests are an important aspect of the procedure which is followed when recruiting new traffic officers because of the strenuous nature of the work which traffic officers perform. Hence, it is necessary that new recruits are physically suitable to perform the functions of a traffic officer, which includes being on your feet for prolonged hours in different and harsh conditions.

That is why as from the 27<sup>th</sup> to the 28<sup>th</sup> of December 2012 we conducted these physical fitness tests at the Harry Gwala Stadium.

I got the report that the test was limited to 4 km and that it took place on a very hot day. I was devastated when I heard that some of the participants died after taking part in the test.

I then asked for an urgent meeting with Departmental officials which were responsible for this recruitment process. There are many questions which I asked myself and there are several things which I raised with them to look at in preparing an elaborate report on what happened.

I wanted to know whether there was pre-planning with regards to the provision of water for participants, and I wanted to know if there were first-aid and emergency personnel on stand-by.

I asked about the length of the distance, and other issues surrounding this matter which now form part of the official investigation currently under way in this respect.

I have received the report and I have passed it on to the Honourable Premier, Dr Mkhize, so that he can decide what should happen from now on about this unfortunate happening and finally have closure on this matter.

I wish to reiterate that I am really thankful to all the bereaved families present here today even though what happened was highly sensitive and emotionally taxing, but they were able to give us an opportunity to talk with them because at the end of the day what happened was not intended or done on purpose.

We were also able to support one another as some of the families have already buried their loved ones at the weekend. In all this there were many challenges that we went through but we are grateful that we were able to work together and our doors are open to the bereaved families should there be issues that are still outstanding that we need to address or talk about.

Government officials and members of parliament have represented Government when we laid our loved ones to rest since I could not be in all the funerals that took place on the same day.

It must be acknowledged that even though we are here to facilitate the process of healing your wounds, the bereaved will still find it difficult to deal with what has happened because to you these deaths were like having your limbs removed from you. That is why we accept the fact that some of you will find it very difficult to deal with this matter.

Some of the things we are preoccupied with as a provincial government Department include ensuring that road users are safe on our roads. This involves enforcing traffic laws which is carried out by traffic law enforcement officers.

There will always be challenges in all work situations. But it is important that efforts to work towards ensuring safer roads do not stop. In the process of doing that, job opportunities must be increased so that we can fight against poverty.

As it stands, the ruling party under the presidency of Mr Jacob Zuma is re-focussing its attention on the triple challenge of poverty, unemployment and inequality as one of the key areas that need special and renewed attention.

It is not surprising that the deceased youngsters that are a reason for our converging here today were quick to respond to the invitation to apply for the vacant posts at RTI, but then the evil one with his devious intention to make himself seem like God, yet he is not, robbed us of our future hope.

No one in their right mind would leave their homes during the festive season and seek for a job if there is no need to do so. The seriousness and desperation with which better job opportunities are sought can be seen in the number of people that defied the festive holiday and subjected themselves to a physical fitness test in order to stand a better chance to be employed in order to achieve better livelihood for themselves and their families.

At the end of the day it must therefore be said that what happened was a grave mishap. When such happens there are bound to be many questions that we ask, but at this stage it is important for us to wait for the final pronouncements of the Premier after he has finalised his findings and decided on what needs to happen next – who was at fault and what steps must be taken to deal with that.

It is regrettable that political parties have already taken unfair advantage of this sad situation and used it as a political tool to further their own interests. What happened has left all of us confused, and hence we are pleading that this matter be treated with the dignity and respect it deserves.

I must emphasize that it is no longer for me to say whether or not the officials of the KwaZulu-Natal Department of Transport were negligent or not in handling the RTI new trainee recruitment exercise because the duty to do so is now firmly in the hands of the Premier of KwaZulu-Natal and his Executive Council.

But I can reiterate that the death of our children in this fashion confirms what the ruling party, the ANC, under the leadership of Jacob Gedleyihlekisa Zuma, has been highlighting of late with the regards to the three challenges of poverty, joblessness and inequality or very different socio-economic levels in society, have reached serious proportions. Therefore the time to tackle these challenges directly is now.

We are sure about the need for this cause of action, and that is why the ANC conference that re-elected President Zuma resolved that the renewed drive and endeavour to address these challenges once and for all is urgent.

Think of the fact that these posts were not advertised in the media, but the Department ended up with 150 000 applicants, and they could only be reduced to 40 700.

As government we will therefore not be discouraged and stop employing people just because there has been an unintended consequence in the process of recruiting our youths for jobs. If there is something that we should sort out, let us rectify that and carry on with the mammoth task of providing job opportunities and fighting against carnage on our roads.

This kind of gathering is undesirable and it must be the resolve and prayer of everyone gathered here that we do not come together again in this manner because of the same reason.

As a Department, mass funerals involving different bereaved families are not uncommon in our line of work if many people have died in a road crash or one road related incident.

But it is not going to be that as a Department we again find ourselves inviting more bereaved families to get together with us like this because their children have died following a recruitment exercise of this nature as it is the case today.

It is necessary for me to invite everyone present here to become road safety ambassadors, including the bereaved families. Everyone has a responsibility not to undermine the safety of other road users and to adhere to traffic laws.

We know that it was the wish of the deceased to work as traffic law enforcers. So, whether you are a traffic officer or not, whether you work for the KZN Transport Department or not, it is our collective duty to improve the level of safety on our roads.

The road accidents statistics are frightening. During the December/January holiday period alone, some 190 road accidents took place and claimed the lives of 208 people in this province alone.

Let me take this opportunity to say that in the name of the Government of KwaZulu-Natal, our prayers are with you and we pass our condolences to the families of the following:

- 1. Lindokuhle Kunene (32);**
- 2. Bongwiwe Gladness Mbatha (29).**
- 3. Sibonakaliso Mhlanga (30).**
- 4. Emmanuel Xolani Gumede (29).**
- 5. Anele Ngcobo (22).**
- 6. Ntuthuko Sibisi (28).**

**7. Lungile Wambi (30).**

**8. Lenny Alson Nxumalo (28).**

We thank you all for your coming here and the words of support we have received. We trust that God will keep us safe from road crashes and everything that puts our lives in danger as from now until the end of the year 2013.

**I thank you.**