

SPEECH NOTES BY THE KZN MEC FOR TRANSPORT, COMMUNITY SAFETY & LIAISON, HON. WILLIES MCHUNU, AT THE EASTER HOLIDAY ROAD SAFETY LAUNCH AT MARIANNHILL TOLL PLAZA ON MONDAY THE 18TH MARCH 2013:

Programme Director;
MEC for Health Dr Dhlomo;
Members of the Provincial Legislature present;
Ethekwini Mayor Cllr Nxumalo;
Traffic Law enforcement personnel;
Officials of various government departments;
Road Safety Ambassadors;
All our stakeholders;
Members of the Media;
Distinguished Guests;
Ladies and Gentlemen.

Programme Director - allow me to thank all of you for attending today's official Easter Holiday Road Safety Launch. This week marks the beginning of the Easter holidays in terms of our road safety campaigns.

This is the time when many people are starting to prepare for their short holidays, migrant workers will go home to their families and Christians will be travelling to various places of worship.

Unfortunately, as usual for our province, all this means increased traffic volumes, and what this means for us is that road users will be vulnerable to being victims of road carnage. Sadly, for some families this is also a time when religious and family celebrations are turned into nightmares.

Hence, we convey our deepest appreciation to all those men and women in uniform who always spend holiday periods working to safeguard our safety on the road.

We remain indebted to our enforcement officers, emergency services and health personnel for being there for us, for the sacrifices they make in the interest of our safety, not only during these hectic times in our calendar, but on a daily basis.

To that effect, we wish to reiterate what we have said in the past that as Government we have moved away from the trend of stepping up road safety campaigns around particular times of the year when traffic volumes are at their peak such as the festive season and Easter holidays.

It is therefore correct to say that today's event is only a heightened continuation of our road safety programme that we run throughout the year. Hence, we are gathered here today to review our road safety plan and adjust it to suit this particular period. We know that the congestions on our roads create fertile ground for vehicles to crash, including the fatal head on collisions that continue to claim so many lives each year.

You will remember that we declared the year 2011 as '*The year of People's Activism Against Road Carnage and Transgressions.*' Last year, we further strengthened that theme by declaring 2012 as '*The year of Deepening People's Activism Against Road Accidents.*' Now that people have been widely prepared and engaged to own the on-going struggle against road crashes, this year – the year 2013 – we think it is time to run with these campaigns and initiatives aimed at curbing these unnecessary deaths and injuries and we are rightfully saying 2013 is '*The year of Accelerating People's Activism Against Road Accidents.*'

Today we are therefore reminding ourselves that we cannot look back but press on with the existing and new efforts to galvanize communities and deepen our partnerships with relevant stakeholders to support and embrace *Operation Val'ingozi Campaigns.*

On that note ladies gentlemen, I wish to thank the bold leadership demonstrated by the public transport leadership from SANTACO KwaZulu-Natal for their relentless commitment to stop the unnecessary deaths.

Although the number of fatalities on our roads is still high, there is an indication that a number of public transport operators in KwaZulu-Natal have since heeded the call to revive their morals and consciences as individuals who contribute to societal safety and well-being.

Over the past months we have seen a decrease in the number of fatal road crashes involving minibuses, particularly in which five or more people lose their lives in one incident.

We are now convinced that if as Government, the public transport industry, and all other stakeholders, we continue together to provide good leadership, we can realise the objective of reducing road fatalities by 50% at the end of the United Nations Decade of Road Safety in 2020.

When we refer to our stakeholders, we are also making special reference to passengers whom we would like to see taking a front seat. We would like to see passengers taking responsibility for their own safety. It is in the interest of passengers to ensure that their drivers always obey the rules of

the road. It is their responsibility to ensure that children wear seat-belts whenever they start a new journey.

As we speed up the road safety awareness campaigns, we are always mindful of the fact that pedestrians have been the main victims of road fatalities as they accounted for about 53% during the 2012 Easter period, and drivers and passengers accounted for 27% and 20%, respectively. One of the major reasons for pedestrians dying, maimed or injured on our roads is drunken walking.

According to national statistics, South Africa loses well over 1000 people per month and this comes at a huge social and economic cost to the country. This means that about 40 people die every day. Obviously these are parents, children, bread winners and other family members.

Road fatalities cost the country billions of rands each year, diverting scarce resources from other social and economic needs of the country.

During the next financial year, starting in April 2013, the KwaZulu-Natal commits itself to support the National Department of Transport as it will be attending to some of the priority issues outlined at the end of the festive season road safety campaign in January 2013.

These include:

1. The implementation of the point demerit system to deal with serial offenders;
2. Do away with the current alcohol limit;
3. Support the ban on alcohol advertising;
4. Accelerate the implementation of S'hamba Sonke programme to ensure that the roads are always in good conditions;
5. Revision of the legislation dealing with periodic testing of motor vehicles
6. In rural areas, introduce measures to reduce fatalities caused by stray animals;
7. Encourage and support learners to obtain learner's licences and driving licences while still at school.

I want to salute the Scottsburgh Magistrate Court for cooperating with the efforts of our traffic law enforcement officers in bringing traffic law offenders to book. This court has set an example by giving huge traffic fines to speedsters on the N2 south coast.

The recent culprit was Thamsanqa Zama who was caught doing 216 km/h on a 120 km/h zone. He has been fined R30 000 and his licence was suspended for one year.

So to the offender, we say, you have been warned: if you do not comply with the law, you will face its full might.

Earlier on I conveyed my appreciation to our law enforcement officers for their commitment. In fact, we have always maintained that we need to ensure that our traffic officers are visible on the road. The public sees their presence and visibility on our roads as a meaningful contribution towards deterring potential offenders from acting foolishly and dangerously on our roads. It makes them feel safer and protected.

Like we have said before, it is the intention of this Department to recruit as many traffic officers as possible so as to improve the presence and the visibility of traffic officials on the road.

It pains me to have to acknowledge that in our recent undertaking to recruit new traffic officers, we experienced the tragic death of RTI applicants. It is public knowledge that a Commission of Enquiry has been appointed to investigate what happened.

I must also say that as Transport we have made a submission to the Cabinet to say how phase two of the recruitment process will be carried out as a way forward.

In conclusion, I take this opportunity to announce here that the provincial Cabinet has appointed Mr S'busiso Gumbi as Head of Department. Mr Gumbi has been acting since this time last year. You are officially welcome, Bab' Gumbi, but the work that you have already started can only continue with greater confidence and speed.

It is good that in you we have a person who is familiar with the challenges and the tasks at hand. So we wish you well in helping the province to realise its objectives in transportation, especially as it relates to the safe use of the roads that we build and maintain in accordance with our mandate in this province.

There is no turning back for you and all of us who are part of this Department.

I thank you