

SPEAKING NOTES FOR THE KWAZULU-NATAL MEC FOR TRANSPORT, COMMUNITY SAFETY AND LIAISON MR WILLIES MCHUNU DURING HIS ENGAGEMENT WITH FARMERS IN THE ESTCOURT AREA ON THE 19TH OF APRIL 2013

Programme Director;
Members of the farming community;
Representatives from different community structures present here;
Distinguished guests;
Ladies and gentlemen;
Protocol observed.

I would like to take this opportunity to extend a warm welcome to all of you who have come to this important meeting. Your presence here is an indication of your passion to make this area and your business environment safer and more prosperous.

I am very pleased to be part of a session that emphasises the importance of agriculture. We are told that although the contribution of agriculture to the country's GDP is just below 3%, the total contribution, including industries dependent on agriculture, is around 23%. This makes it one of the key cornerstones of the economy in this country.

But it is just unfortunate that an apparent low number of new entrants in this sector has resulted to the creation of a visible ageing population of farmers, and the few remaining have had to face the challenges brought about by unstable weather patterns, unpredictable food prices and most importantly, criminals.

It is therefore of paramount importance that on occasions such as the one that we are having today, we must encourage those farmers and entrepreneurs who are currently in the sector that they must remain positive about what they are about and what they doing.

Negative messages emanating from the farming circles can do an enormous amount of harm in discouraging participation in the sector. We know that youngsters are very good at reading the signals when choosing their careers.

Now, it is the very purpose of this meeting to address the issue of safety which we feel is a priority if this crucial sector is to continue operating as well as it should. The situation calls for us to revitalize and revive the much-needed confidence between the police and

the farming community. Our collective responsibility is to ensure that communities remain willing and ready to give critical crime-related information to the police, which is needed in order to arrest criminals.

Hence, in November last year, the Provincial Government launched the KwaZulu-Natal Community Crime Prevention Association (KZN-CCPA) under the theme of 'People's Action Against Crime.' The formation of the KZN-CCPA would help to address wrong perceptions about community crime fighting structures.

It was meant to respond to a situation that saw some of the crime fighting structures becoming vigilantes who were prone to committing unlawful acts in the process of carrying out their crime fighting methods. But the question we were asking was: why should Government not correct them? The answer was simple – as Government we do not condemn, but we correct or rehabilitate those who are trying to do something that they think is right because they are doing it in a wrong way in this particular instance.

Today we know that the Estcourt Framers' Associations have come out in support of the Government's programme of promoting 'People's Action Against Crime'.

It has come to our attention that the Estcourt Cluster is highly affected by Stock Theft and petty crimes such as theft of electrical cables, the cutting of fences, draining of diesel from the vehicles of farmers and the theft of vehicle batteries by criminals.

These unacceptable conditions confirm that farmers are also the victims of crimes as well and that crime has no colour. Actually, the criminals do not care whether you are black or white.

Therefore, we thank those farmers who support our government and our Voluntary Crime Fighting Organisations and the police as the Government's fieldworkers who are employed to combat crime.

Despite the escalation of stock theft activities within the Estcourt Cluster, there is an incredible good relationship and partnership between some of the Farmers Associations such as Mooi-River and Estcourt Framers Associations as well as the Voluntary Crime Fighting Associations that are dominant in the area such as Umkhumbi and Isikebhe.

This good partnership was demonstrated and confirmed by Mr. Douglas Sletcher and his Mooi River Farmers Association which donated a 4X4 Ford Corrie Vehicle to Umkhumbi

and Isikebhe to be able to reduce stock theft and petty crime. We applaud this and welcome such trends.

We also highly appreciate what is done by Mr. Tim Ralfe who is the Chairperson of Estcourt Farmers Association and KwaZulu-Natal Red Meat Producers Organisation as he provides his own transport to Umkhumbi to conduct their operations. This is leadership by example at its best and we commend this.

We were pleased to learn that Umkhumbi and the Farmers' Associations have worked together to an extent that today they are aware who the criminals are and which places are the stock theft hot spots in the area. For instance, we know now about an area called Emmaus and here at Emangweni/Loskop and KwaNdaba are the well-known hot spots.

Some of the butcheries and abattoirs serve as the markets for criminals. Stolen cattle are found at these places at all times.

Therefore, in this meeting we would like to express our gratitude as the KwaZulu-Natal Government to these farmers to what they have done.

Although, the other Farmers Associations may not as yet donated with material resources to these crime fighting organisations that are in the forefront, but their physical, moral support and good partnership shall at all times be unconditionally appreciated.

It is important that we motivate and encourage the other Farmers' Associations to advance their support to the South African Police Service and Voluntary Crime Fighting Associations to enable them to double their efforts in combating stock theft.

From our side as Government we will also continue to provide these Voluntary Crime Fighting Associations with the necessary training and workshops, like our we do with our Community Policing Forums, so as to sharpen their skills and knowledge.

We must ensure that all these Voluntary Crime Fighting Organisations do have the resources and necessary support systems. We need to close the gap or rift that exists between these Voluntary Crime Fighting Associations and the CPFs in terms of their existence and operations.

We know that in some areas these two structures have not yet learnt how to work together and have not yet accepted each other as collaborators or work-mates in the fight against fight crime. This is a challenge and a problem which needs to be resolved.

Having said all that, ladies and gentlemen, I want to give all representatives an opportunity to make their input. As we say, this day is for all of us to share our ideas, engage each other and emerge with workable solutions for the benefit of all.

Let us agree that today we are officiating a partnership that will only succeed in proportion to your commitment. We look forward to receiving input from you on what role you can play in bringing about lasting safety and security for this area.

I thank you