

REMARKS BY KZN MEC FOR TRANSPORT, COMMUNITY SAFETY AND LIAISON MR WILLIES MCHUNU AT THE SOUTH AFRICAN SEARCH AND RESCUE ORGANISATION IN DURBAN ON 31 MAY 2013.

Programme Director;
The Honourable Minister Ben Martins;
His Worship the Mayor of eThekwni: Cllr James Nxumalo;
Head of SASAR;
All SASAR personnel;
All stakeholders present;
Distinguished Guests;
Members of the Media;
Ladies and Gentlemen;

On behalf of the Provincial Government and all our citizens of KwaZulu-Natal, I take this opportunity to express our gratitude to the National Department of Transport and the South African Search and Rescue (SASAR) Organisation for identifying this province to host the Annual Meritorious Awards.

We are very much encouraged by your move to recognise and honour individuals and groups who consistently perform beyond average or exceptionally during search and rescue operations.

As the province of KwaZulu-Natal, we also take this opportunity to salute these men and women who, on a voluntary basis, go out to search for lost aircraft, boats, vessels and rescue survivors of aircraft accidents and the crew passengers of vessels or boats in distress.

We acknowledge them for their daunting task of always having to put their own lives at stake to ensure the safety of our people. Just think what would happen if they did not exist, and if they were unwilling to answer the calls for help. Surely, these unsung heroes and heroines deserve our recognition, respect and praise for the work they do.

We know that this province attracts a number of tourists because of its beautiful sea and mountains, regardless of the time of year - whether it is winter or summer time. Our popular Drakensberg Mountains are known for their extreme weather conditions that have caused aircraft crashes. It is only appropriate that we have a body of this nature that assists in keeping these destinations safe.

It is a well-known fact that given the historic background we come from, for many other black citizens of this country, exposure to these career options was taboo. I don't know how many school-going children in any township today would tell you that they aspire to become search and rescue personnel.

However, we know that South Africa is a democratic country, still characterized by inequalities which require redress, equity and reconstruction. Indeed all of us are in agreement that skills development is an essential component of the reconstruction of the South African society.

We therefore call upon all parties involved in the search and rescue service to join hands in addressing the discrepancies of the past which saw the majority of black South Africans not being exposed to search and rescue operations as a career prospect as is still the case today.

We nevertheless commend the fact that at least of late there is a growing number of black young people who are pursuing careers as life savers at our beaches.

It is our wish, ladies and gentlemen that our hosting these awards tonight will be worthwhile to the future of the province of KwaZulu-Natal in terms of boosting the morale of the personnel as well as promoting safer activity at sea and in the air.

Before I conclude, my view is that I would not have done justice if I did not touch briefly on the issues of safety on our roads this evening.

Today I was presenting the budget allocation for the financial year 2013/2014 at the Provincial Legislature.

Some of the things I mentioned was that our recent study indicates that we have reduced road fatalities by 33.6% since the 2009/2010 financial year. However, amidst the recorded reduction, we maintain that the number of fatalities on our roads is still unacceptable as one death is one too many.

We are therefore making a clarion call for all road users to obey the rules of the road so as to fight this scourge.

It is important that each one of us show our commitment to road safety by adhering to the rules of the road, including not over-speeding, drinking and driving or walking carelessly on the road whilst under the influence of alcohol.

As Government representatives who work with various communities from all walks of life and cultural backgrounds, we are making a clarion call to traffic law abiding citizens because safety on

the road begins with you. Let us all agree that as we leave here tonight, we re-commit ourselves to promulgating safe behaviour patterns on our roads whether it is during the festive season or any other day of the week, month or season. We can no longer afford to have festive season or Easter Holiday road safety awareness campaigns only.

Safety on the road is everyone's business and it is an everyday concern because breadwinners are being killed on a daily basis on our roads and consequently well-provided for children are transformed into orphans and beggars and our country cannot afford this state of affairs because its poverty and unemployment levels are high.

With these few words, I once again take this opportunity to express my sincere appreciation for allowing me to join you here tonight in this celebration.

I thank you.