

**SPEECH NOTES BY KWAZULU-NATAL MEC FOR TRANSPORT, COMMUNITY SAFETY AND LIAISON MR WILLIES MCHUNU DURING THE SANTACO KWAZULU-NATAL AGM ON MONDAY THE 25TH OF MARCH 2013.**

Programme Director;  
The Executive Committee of SANTACO KZN;  
The Leadership of the taxi associations;  
All operators present;  
Distinguished Guests;  
Ladies and Gentlemen;  
Protocol Observed.

It is a great honor for me to be a part of the Annual General Meeting of the South African National Taxi Council KwaZulu-Natal since SANTACO as a national body was formed in the year 2001.

This gathering comes at a very crucial time for both the Government and the taxi industry as it coincides with the Easter Holidays period. This is the time when many people will be taking their short holidays, migrant workers going home to their families and Christians will be travelling to various places of worship.

Most of these people will depend on public transport, particularly the taxi industry, in order to be able to reach their destinations. It is precisely for this reason that as Government we are always concerned about the way you behave on the road.

Your sensitivity to the safety of commuters, who are your core business, is of great interest to us. This is actually what brings us together because as Government we are elected to the positions of responsibility by these commuters, and they are tax payers as well.

But most importantly, many of these commuters are breadwinners or productive members of society whom siblings and relatives are dependent on for a living. They are the ones who provide the necessary buying power as consumers of goods and services.

It is therefore vital that they are transported safely every day – whether it's a holiday, weekend or week-day. Without them as workers and customers, there would be little or no economic sustainability and prosperity in our country.

We know that it has become common to associate this period with minibus crashes that claim many lives of our loved ones and leave many others maimed every year.

It is one period of the year which has seen the taxi industry depriving many families of breadwinners, thereby exacerbating the serious challenge of unemployment and poverty that we face as a country.

Last Monday, the 18<sup>th</sup> of March, the Provincial Government launched its road safety campaign for this Easter Holiday period. But I wish to put it on record 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.

Therefore that launch was in fact only a heightened continuation of our road safety programme that we run throughout the year. It was to review our road safety plan and adjust it to suit this particular period.

I must hasten to thank the bold leadership demonstrated by the SANTACO KZN in an effort to stop the unnecessary deaths on our roads. We know how you have rallied behind our *Operation Vali'ingozi* campaign. We have seen how your *Operation Hlokomela* has impacted on the reduction of road fatalities.

Today we can say with great pride that Government is no longer alone in shouldering the responsibility to promote safety on our roads because we now have a leadership in the taxi industry that does not hesitate to mount road blocks of its own and police its own membership on our roads.

There can be no turning back – you have set a precedent for your children who will inherit your business in future. They will know what to do in order to promote safety on our roads because you stood up and led the way.

Although the number of fatalities on our roads is still high, there is light at the end of the tunnel because there is a strong indication that a number of taxi operators in KwaZulu-Natal are heeding 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.

During the Easter Launch last week I made mention of the fact that since the 2009/2010 financial year, when this current government came to power, 'till this financial year ending this month of March, we have reduced road fatalities by 30.6%.

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 like you as important role players on our roads have been widely prepared and engaged to own the 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. Hence, this year we are rightfully saying 2013 is *'The year of Accelerating People's Activism Against Road Accidents'*.

In this meeting therefore it is important to remind 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*, and such wonderful road safety initiatives as *Hlokomela*.

As we all know, another aspect of the challenges we have always faced in this industry is instability that has been brought about by violent confrontation amongst business men and women in this industry.

In this industry we have had weapon-wielding gunmen who find it easy to just spray bullets at innocent passengers in broad daylight and engage in assassinations under the cover of darkness sometimes.

It is encouraging though that the Provincial Government through its Department of Transport continues to enjoy the backing of the leadership of the taxi industry in its ongoing efforts to promote the use of dialogue as a credible means to resolve conflict situations which are mainly caused by contests for routes. In some instances, Government has had to use law enforcement interventions to stabilize operations in the industry.

It pains me to have to mention some of the areas which need special attention. .  
These include the following:

Mpumalanga and District Taxi Association, Folweni Taxi Association and Umlazi-West MNR Taxi Association in the Ethekeini Region; Mandini-Sundumbili, Stanger Association, Dolphin Coast Taxi Association and Maphumulo Taxi Association in the Ilembe Region; A-Rank and Ngwelezane Taxi Associations in the Uthungulu Region; Bergville Taxi Association in the Uthukela Region; Intuthuko Taxi Association and Masihambisane Taxi Association in the Amajuba Region; Amatimatolo Taxi Association in the Umzinyathi Region; and Uzimeleni as well as Pietermaritzburg Long Distance Taxi Associations in the Umgungundlovu Region.

Those who were at the Provincial Taxi Indaba last year will remember that we talked substantially about this and we highlighted some of the causes of these conflicts with a view to finding solutions to these challenges.

We noted that some taxi associations have constitutions that give vague and unlimited powers to individuals while others do not have constitutions at all and thus governance of the association is always directed by the whims of the powerful or most feared.

Financial accountability is unheard of in most associations which is most worrying in an industry that handles a lot of cash and shows a great capacity to engage in sustained violent conflict, often involving serious weapons.

The extra-ordinary collection of monies in many associations has almost always strangely coincided with acts of violence and the practice of non-accountability is a known flow or weakness. It is against the law and unprofessional not to have a sound financial management system documenting and detailing the income and expenditure of your organizations. It promotes fraudulent activity and defeats the very purpose your organizations were created for.

There is also the question of some vehicle dealers who in pursuit of business interests resort to unethical conduct of selling vehicles without due basic requirements, that is, the buyer must be in possession of a valid Operating Licence.

We are aware that a significant number of municipalities in the province have no official ranking facilities. Where these exist they are not properly managed. Not only does this allow for the creation of illegal facilities that do not meet requisite standards as legitimate public transport facilities, in other areas it has led to the creation of illegal taxi ranks on private property.

Consequently, conflicts have erupted and loss of lives continued as operators without access to the private facilities have either been aggressors or victims of those with access.

In other instances, bloody taxi feuds have been as a result of illegitimate route operations as well as operators and/or taxi associations that have access to more than one starting points. This has fanned violent conflict.

New infrastructural development projects, residential areas, as well as business outlets create a new demand for public transport. These create a need for new routes that are not registered to any association. When these routes begin to be operational, taxi operators compete for rights to use them and this often leads to the violation of their legally authorised routes and the encroachment on routes of other taxi associations.

Now, as part of the solution, the Provincial Government will continue to work with various Municipalities to ensure that issues of Public Transport are not neglected in their processes as they are a statutory responsibility and critical to the governance and stability of the very municipalities and by extension the province.

In the form of ward committees, we will further encourage that community leadership structures, including local government, have continuous engagements with the taxi operators in their localities for purposes of harmonising relations and ensuring sufficient sharing of important or relevant information.

But having said all that, I wish to put on record again that since I joined this Department of Transport in 2009, generally I have had a healthy relationship with SANTACO. This is one organisation that is made up of visionary people, business people and indeed very cooperative people.

We would appreciate to see more of you now taking advantage of our developed strategy for transformation of subsidised contract in the Province. It is our wish to see more of you awarded contracts to operate subsidised public transport in the form of small bus operators.

We have done this empowerment programme in Port Shepstone with Ugu Transport Services PTY (Ltd) which is a company of small bus operators and taxi operators in Port Shepstone.

In conclusion, we urge you to continue to rely on dialogue and peaceful business engagements, not only for economic growth, but also for the benefit of your stakeholders and the people you serve.

By so doing you will shed the unfortunate and sometimes undeserved public stigma of being regarded as an industry of violence, death and lawlessness.

Do not allow the few trouble-makers within the taxi industry to spoil the image and wellbeing of such an important industry due to the greed that informs route-based taxi feuds. Do not create space for those who have no interest in peace to continue to instigate conflict among members of the same fraternity.

Do not allow your hunger for passengers, travel routes domination and monopoly in the industry to create non-African impediments to our traditional spirit of Ubuntu. The modern world is about business operations that thrive as a result of being efficient, reliable, affordable, accessible and client-friendly. Taxis may be efficient, accessible and even affordable.

But do your clients, that is, passengers, think that you are friendly business people? Do commuters or passengers think that you are polite, kind and in possession of appropriate business mannerisms? Do you treat them with respect? Do you use insulting language when addressing them? Are your employees hygienic and presentable? Do owners of other modes of transport like buses and trains think that you are healthy competitors or are they threatened by your presence?

Needless to say, it is in your interest to make your passengers and business competitors think that you offer the best service and thus sustain the perception that you may not be replaced, even if it is desirable that you cooperate with others and engage in healthy competition with your competitors in the trade.

As the KwaZulu-Natal Department of Transport we commit ourselves to continue to play the role that we are mandated to play in providing the road infrastructure network and ensuring that it is maintained and used safely.

We will continue to improve the road network and in particular we will undertake to implement appropriate remedial engineering measures at all hazardous locations, and we expect you to continue working with us to achieve mutual objectives.

With these words, I wish to take this opportunity to thank you for giving me this opportunity. Let the journey continue. Together we can accelerate the process of ending the carnage on our roads. Together we can make KwaZulu-Natal and South Africa safe during this Easter and beyond.

**I thank you.**