

MESSAGE OF SUPPORT BY KWAZULU-NATAL MEC FOR TRANSPORT, COMMUNITY SAFETY AND LIAISON MR WILLIES MCHUNU AT THE CORRECTIONAL SERVICE EXCELLENCE AWARDS CEREMONY HELD AT THE YMCA IN PIETERMARIZBURG ON FRIDAY, 21 NOVEMBER 2014.

- Programme Director;
- Provincial Education MEC Peggy Nkonyeni;
- Umgungundlovu District Mayor Cllr Yusuf Bhamjee;
- Umsunduzi Local Municipality Mayor Cllr Chris Ndlela;
- KZN Regional Commissioner of Correctional Services;
- Senior Management of Correctional Services;
- All stakeholders;
- All Correctional Service personnel;
- Members of the media;
- Protocol Observed;
- Ladies and Gentlemen.

I am once again honored this evening to be a part of this important occasion to celebrate excellence in service delivery at the Department of Correctional Services.

We take this opportunity to thank this Department for organizing this initiative to get public servants to be service-orientated, to strive for excellence in service delivery and to commit to continuous improvement in service delivery.

We are always encouraged indeed when we see people who are committed and willing to ensure that our country, and particularly the province of KwaZulu-Natal, is safer and prosperous. One cannot help but feel a sense of pride for the work you do.

Tonight's event is one of those that make us proud of the calibre of staff that the Department of Correctional Services has attracted over the past years - the soldiers in our crusade for breaking the cycle of crime - those who protect the next victim of crime and prevent repeat-offenses in society.

I am aware of the Correctional Service's call to give a second chance to rehabilitated offenders and that the current rehabilitation interventions are progressively registering the desired effect.

Our correctional centres are no longer places of punishment but places of rehabilitation, love, human capacity, moral regeneration and centres of hope. Unfortunately, other detractors view this as a reason that most of repeat offenders make correctional centres their permanent residences.

But one other greatest achievement in this Department is how it has been able to transform in a democracy.

This has been achieved through the commitment of the staff as well as the levels of service excellence one has come to associate with Correctional Services.

We know that we come from an era where public servants, particularly uniformed enforcement agencies, were distrusted by the majority of our people. But our officers have consciously worked to build up the confidence of the communities they serve.

We are heartened by the fact that before 1994, this Department had not even a single black person at a Director or Brigadier level. Today we commend the role played by our labour movement before and after 1994, in ensuring that workers' rights are respected in Correctional Services.

Indeed, one cannot help but feel a sense of pride for the work you do. Indeed, the challenge of transformation has never been easy.

Ladies and gentlemen, one of the reasons we have gone all out to pay tribute to our officers at Correctional Services is that their work is no bed of roses. These officers work under the most difficult and dangerous conditions, and their daily duties include things most of us would avoid doing in a lifetime.

These officers look after people who have been declared by the courts of law as inappropriate to live with the public because they are dangerous.

We recognize them for being role models, for being ideal correctional officials who spared neither effort nor energy in advancing the founding values of the correctional system.

Correctional Services' achievements so far have shown what can be done when we work together to pursue the common good. We are proud of these achievements, but we do not underestimate the difficulties and challenges that still lie ahead.

On that score, we also acknowledge the fact that as correctional officers, you are indeed beacons of hope at a time where media is replete with headlines of gloom and ugliness on the state and conditions of our correctional centres.

The trial of Oscar Pistorius is but one example where our centres have been portrayed as not well resourced to provide safe and humane custody to the disabled.

Programme Director, ladies and gentlemen, while celebrating Correctional Services' achievements we must also accept that we are still at a stage, some would describe as infancy, in our crusade to free our province from criminality in and outside prison.

This, of course, is because overcoming the historic aggression of South Africans that manifests itself in our prisons is not an easy task and it cannot be accomplished in a short time.

We, from the Department of Community Safety and Liaison are leading the Justice Crime Prevention and Security Cluster (JCPS) to promote a United Action Against Crime through targeted crime prevention programmes.

Our programmes include improving secure and safe custody of all inmates and to decrease assaults in correctional and remand facilities. We also ensure increasing levels of education and skills acquisition of offenders and ensuring that persons under community corrections are successfully reintegrated.

It is therefore appropriate in this gathering that I make a clarion call on all of you here to continuously remain true partners in the fight against crime in our province.

In conclusion, let me take this opportunity to thank those men and women, past and present, who have contributed to correcting the perception about this profession and those who are determined to turnaround the delivery of services.

There are many people who are not honoured here this evening but who deserve to be saluted. I encourage them all to persevere in their good work and to continue building the Public Service and the province to be a better place we are all proud of.

Congratulations to you all!

I thank you