

SPEAKING NOTES BY THE MEC FOR TRANSPORT, COMMUNITY SAFETY AND LIAISON, MR TM KAUNDA, AT THE PORTFOLIO COMMITTEE ON COMMUNITY SAFETY AND LIAISON ON FRIDAY, 02 SEPTEMBER 2016: DEPARTMENT OF COMMUNITY SAFETY AND LIAISON BOARDROOM, PIETERMARITZBURG

- Chairperson of the Portfolio Committee, Mr Bheki Ntuli;
- Honourable members;
- HOD of the Department, Mr Mavundla;
- Management and officials of the Department of Community Safety and Liaison;
- Legislature Official and staff members;

Sanibona, greetings to you all

Honourable Chairperson and Honourable Members, it is an honour once again, to meet with you this morning. This is my first meeting with you as the MEC for this portfolio. We have, however, met with some of you in various forums and I have been warmly welcomed. Thank you very much for this and I trust that we are going to continue with our good working relationship in serving the people of KwaZulu-Natal.

Let me say it from the outset that the success of the work that we have been called upon to do for the people of KwaZulu-Natal, will depend very much on the support and guidance we get from the Honourable members of this committee.

In this regard, Honourable members, allow me to give you an overview of the issues that we are currently dealing with as the Department of Community Safety and Liaison.

Let me start by expressing my concerns and that of the Department at the high levels of violent killings currently taking place in KwaZulu-Natal. In the past fortnight, we have buried not less than ten people, killed violently in this province. Of greater concern is that the majority of these people are defenceless women and children.

As the MEC, I have tried my utmost best not only to visit and mourn with these families during the most painful of these times. But we have, together with the Department and police, moved swiftly to put in place measures to curb further killings in these areas.

Honourable members, the sad reality is that our communities produce a great deal of violent crimes and criminals. The key drivers behind this crime, especially murder and robbery, is the easy availability of illegal firearms in the province.

Just to reflect on the extent and degree of the challenge of illegal firearms, in operations conducted by various policing clusters in the province between 3 July and 30 July this year, a total of 199 illegal firearms were recovered. These included six rifles, five shotguns, six homemade firearms and 102 pistols. A total of 1077 live rounds of ammunition were also recovered during the operations.

These firearms were taken for ballistics to ascertain if they have not been used in the commission of crime. In the process, the police managed to arrest at least 112 suspects for possession of unlicensed firearms and

ammunition. They have since appeared at various magistrate courts across the province.

As the law takes its course on those who are implicated in these crimes, the Department continues with its various initiatives to broker peace and bring about lasting solutions to communities in conflict.

Talks are currently underway to deal with the conflicts in Intshanga. Several other initiatives, to deal with conflicts in areas such as KwaDabhasi in KwaNongoma. On Tuesday and yesterday, I met with the affected families in an effort to restore peace in the area.

Honourable Chairperson, following an upsurge of violence and increasing incidents of murders, rapes and attempted murders in King Cetshwayo District (around Melmoth), an urgent meeting of all key stakeholders has been scheduled for Mthonjaneni Municipality next Monday. This was triggered by the murder of three Mhlongo family members, who were shot and killed recently. Last weekend I had an opportunity to attend and share the pain with that family during the funeral. We want to applaud the police for their prompt response to the incident which resulted in the arrest of five suspects. On Monday this week, the suspects appeared in court and the Department supported hundreds of people in the area who went to court to oppose bail. I have been informed that upon seeing hundreds of people arriving in court, the suspects withdrew their bail application.

Honourable members, we are making great strides in resolving violent conflicts in the province and our programmes are yielding good results. In this regard, let me report that we have made a significant progress in dealing with conflicts in Durban hostels. Just before the local government

elections, we signed a peace pledge to end conflict in Glebelands. I am equally pleased to report that elections in all our KZN hostels went on peacefully. We have also successfully resolved a conflict between Isikebhe-a voluntary crime fighting organisation and Sakhisizwe, KwaNibela, in Hluhluwe. The two organisations which enjoy the support for the community had some differences on various matters. However, the department was able to successfully intervene in 2015 before this matter exploded into a fully-fledged conflict. In July this year, I had an opportunity to officiate over a cleansing ceremony which marked the end of the conflict in the community. Such initiatives are, indeed, an important building block for peace and stability in KwaZulu-Natal.

Our message to communities is that crime does not pay and we have urged communities to work closely with the police to ensure that those responsible for terrorising our communities face the full might of the law. Similarly, we are intensifying our efforts to build a united front against crime by setting up community crime fighting structures. We are encouraged by the progress we have made in this regard. In July this year, this programme reached another level when we were able to launch community crime fighting committees, covering all wards of uPhongolo Municipality. This is a clear indication that communities are eager to be at the forefront of crime-fighting initiatives.

Honourable Members, let me express my appreciation for various roles you played in ensuring that we had relatively peaceful, free and fair elections. Our gratitude goes to all the leaders of political parties, especially the members of the Multi-Party Political Intervention Committee and all our law enforcement agencies.

We were, however, disturbed at the attack of candidate councillors and some unbecoming behaviour that accompanied the inauguration of some councils in the province. As leaders, we still have a huge responsibility of deepening the democratic culture and tolerance to the people. This means that it is not yet the time to rest on our laurels until all hung municipalities have been finalised. Police have been placed on full alert until all the work connected with the elections is finalised. The other reality is that, given the unfortunate murder of some candidate councillors, we may see ourselves going through by-elections in another three months. Your leadership and commitment to peace will still be needed. I trust that you will avail yourselves when you are called upon.

ISOLATED INCIDENTS OF TAXI RELATED CONFLICT

We remain concerned about the recent isolated incidents of violence related to the taxi industry. In particular, we had to deal with the blockade of road mounted by people within the taxi industry in Blood River which lasted for weeks. This had a potential to trigger violence and to reverse gains made in stabilizing this industry.

We thank the police for acting swiftly by breaking this blockade, confiscating well over 100 firearms and arrested a number of taxi operators. These firearms have since been sent for ballistic testing to check if they had not been used in the commission of any crime. Once again, we wish to thank the police for bravery displayed in dealing with this potentially explosive situation.

I have since had an opportunity to meet the captains of the taxi industry to underline the need for all of us to work within the law and not to place the lives of our commuters at risks. Further engagements with Santaco are on the cards.

We are satisfied that we have been able to stabilise areas historically known as flashpoints of taxi violence.

CONCLUSION

Chairperson and Honourable members we remain committed to ensuring that the people of KwaZulu-Natal live in a crime-free province and that we abide by the law and the respect for the Constitution. In this regard, I have met the management of all the law enforcement agencies in the province and expressed my concerns at the illegal and violent public protests. Fortunately, we have recently seen a decline in this disturbing trend.

Honourable Members, We urge you to constantly support and guide us to ensure that we are the province that respects the rule of law, the right to life and the rights of others to enjoy their rights. We have, however, made it clear that we will not tolerate lawlessness.

In all our conducts, we hold a view that safety on our roads and in our communities remain our collective responsibility.

Thank you very much for the opportunity.

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