

MEC VR Shongwe Speech on the Driver of the Year Competition 18th of August 2012.

The Head of Department in absentia

Members of Mayoral Committees

Manager: Traffic Management

Representative from Road Accident Fund

Representative from Transnet

Ladies and gentlemen, Good Day.

Ladies and Gentlemen, it is indeed heartwarming that today we are gathered not to cry and moan about deaths in our roads but to celebrate some of the exemplary drivers who have once more elevated our Province at an International level.

However, as we celebrate, at the back of our minds are the shocking and very sad developments that we have seen unfolding in Rustenburg. The numbers of lives lost are already too much and it is difficult for me to say them. As an MEC for Community Safety Security and Liaison, I want to take this opportunity to lead with the people of Mpumalanga to avoid at all cost incidences like the one of Marikana.

We are encouraged by the actions of the President of the Republic of South Africa, Mr Jacob Zuma had to cut short his attendance of the 32nd SADC Summit in Maputo, Mozambique, in order to visit Rustenburg and provide leadership to avoid further bloodshed.

We understand through the Spokesperson of the President, Mr Mac Maharaj that he is concerned about the violent nature of the protest, especially given the fact that that the Constitution and labour laws allow enough avenues to deal with issues, and also that he is sympathetic to calls for a commission of inquiry.

Ladies and Gentlemen, we are joining those who are calling for the parties involved in the conflict to exhaust all the avenues that our constitution and labour laws make provision for. We are calling on AMCU, NUM and the Management of Lonmin's mine to seat around the table and find one another in the interest of the our people, our country and our future.

Our heartfelt condolences go to those who lost their lives including the two Police Officials, one of whom is from the Mpumalanga CCU, Warrant Officer Monene of Nkangala.

Ladies and Gentlemen, as the Province of Mpumalanga, we managed to record a reduction in the number of accidents and fatalities in the last Easter Holiday. This was made possible by the hard work and planning that went into it but, it was also because our campaigns have been heeded.

We have many Road Safety Campaigns that we run and when it comes to road safety competition, our Province has proven beyond reasonable doubts that it is a strong and serious contender.

Not long ago we were celebrating a very young and humble driver, Shane Mashaba who won himself a brand new Sesifikile Toyota Quantum; courtesy of The Brandhouse Number One Taxi Driver Campaign.

Shane won in the Commuter category. In this category commuters identify a driver who does not drink and drive, who does not drive an unroad worthy vehicle as well as one that treats his or her customers with respect.

Meanwhile congratulating him for representing the Province and winning himself a minibus, I had a strong warning for Shane and I said to him,

“As the dust settles and real life kicks in Mr Mashaba, if we find you operating your taxi without permit, we will arrest you. If we find you overloading, you will be arrested, if we find you drinking and driving, I can promise you now that we will arrest you. You must never forget that we have declared our intentions clearly when we said “Sekwanele Bopha”.

Now this warning was clear cut signal that, we may be friends and comrades, we can dine and eat together, we can walk with you to realise your dreams but the bottom line is once we find you faltering on the road and putting the lives of other road users at risk, we will not hesitate to act and act harshly if needs be.

Ladies and Gentlemen, I am saying this upfront so that the winners that we are celebrating today, must know that today's prizes are not a licence for going out and start misbehaving on the road. We are celebrating and congratulating you now and we want the accolades that you are given today to live in your blood cells, in your nerves and in your mentality.

You are now ambassadors of the country and you have raised the bar. We can't afford to be let down by you and hence we will be as harsh as we possibly can be.

Ladies and Gentlemen, THE DRIVER OF THE YEAR COMPETITION is an International competition which is held every two year and as such since its inception in 2004 it has been held in

2004	Croatia
2006	Luxembourg
2008	Italy
2010	Austria
2012	South Africa and the next stop is Poland in 2014.

This year's competition was held in our country in North West and of the 15 drivers that represented the South Africa, five of them are from Mpumalanga. This can easily be interpreted to mean that 33% of those that represented the Country were from Mpumalanga.

The sons of the soil who beautifully represented the Province and also made the country proud are :

Mr. P. Mananyetjo (Articulated category),

Mr. M. Mosia (rigid category) ,

Mr. S. Motsepe (Bus category),

Mr. M. Ngwenya (Rigid plus four wheel trailer category) and

Mr. S. Ntuli (3,5 ton delivery vehicle).

Ladies an Gentlemen, this is an indication that we have good and effective road safety education programs. The fact that we were represented in all categories explains why we must continue with our programs and intensify their implementation. However, for as long as we do not reduce significantly road fatalities, we will always have a problem explaining to people that our programs are bearing fruits.

When we claim about compiting and winning international compatitions, victims of road carnage and fatalities will think that we are making up stories in order to look good. Our greatest challenge is achiving a double digit and significant reduction of road accidences thereby eliminating the number of people dying on our roads every day.

We must convert this accolades and increase the number of quality drivers on our roads and be hard on those who want to speed, drink and drive as well as driving un-roadworthy vehicles.

We lost 25 precious lives in a terrible accident of a train and a truck ferrying farm workers. Many of these lives were young lives and that says this tragedy has affected the future of the Province and the Country.

Some months back lost 18 between a truck and a minibus carrying Mozambiquen's.

Ladies and Gentlemen, I can go on and on but the fact is this is sad, it is painful and it must stop. We cannot afford to take shortcuts. We work together and all contribute as different stakeholders to ensure that our roads are not death traps.

As we win and excel in National and International competitions, we should at the same time all working to ensure that the statement that we make by virtue of appearing in those competitions finds expression of the ground.

We should be found to leading and excelling as well in terms of road safety. I always say, I don't want to reduce crime in the Province but I want to eliminate it completely. The same goes for road carnage, we must have no people dying on our roads because of human element.

We understand as well that many of the accidents are not caused by the people of Mpumalanga but in some cases its those that are passing through.

We felt it is important to visit the neighbor Provinces that are surrounding Mpumalanga like KwaZulu Natal, Free State, Lipompo and Gauteng. We do this so that we can engage with them to give an edge to the road safety message and programs. We have been to Mozambique and we will be going to Swaziland early October.

Ladies and Gentlemen, our distinguished stakeholders we are doing our best to make it more difficult for irresponsible drivers to abuse our roads. As a Department we have opened two Computerized Learners License Testing Systems in eMalahleni (Witbank) and Lekwa (Standerton) Driving License Testing Centers.

As if that is enough we are going to install four queuing systems at eMalahleni (Witbank), Lekwa (Standerton), Thembisile Hani (KwaMhlanga) and Bushbuckridge (Mapulaneng).

This we do to deal with license corruption and without pointing fingers we want quality drivers on the roads so that we bring an end to unnecessary road deaths. It is this quality drivers like the once we are celebrating here today that must populate and drive on our roads and I can tell you now, they bare the once who are going to bring an end to unnecessary road accidents.

This confirm the correctness of our mission to engage bordering Countries and Provinces because, even if we do well, bad elements are still going to come from outside.

Members of the public must now understand and start to appreciate the work of Traffic Officials and the Police when they become hard on people who break the law.

It is on that spirit that I am calling on every member of the community to be a Police or a Traffic Official on our roads. You must inform law enforcement officials every time you come across something that has a potential to cause harm on our roads.

It is on that note ladies and Gentlemen that I want to pass our greatest appreciation to Team South Africa for doing well in the Competition and particularly the team from the Province of the Pioneering Spirit. We salute you and you have made us all proud.

We are a winning combination and as from today onwards, you carry on your shoulders, bigger responsibilities of being Road Safety Ambassadors'. You have raise the bar and and lets keep it up there.

Thank you.