

MEC VR Shongwe's Key Note Address on the Launch of Youth For Road Safety (YOURS) on the 26th August 2012

The Head of Department, Mr T. Sibuyi

The Executive Mayor of Mbombela Clr C. Dlamini

Speakers and Members of Mayoral Committees,

General Manager, Traffic Management, Mr S. Nkuna

General Manager, Crime Prevention and Community Police Relations: Ms N. Ndonga

Members of the Community of Lekazi

Ladies and Gentlemen, I greet you all.

Yesterday we were listening to robust and fruitful debates about road safety. The debates were lively and young minds were engaging highlighting the strength of our road safety programs as well as drawing our attention to weaknesses that are there.

The debates provided an opportunity to reflect because the teams had researched their arguments well and went further to present them in a very convincing way. Once more, let me take this opportunity to congratulate the winners of the Road Safety Debate yesterday and we wish them all the best in the next National level.

Our congratulations also go to all the participants who could not make it but, like I said yesterday, by virtue of them participating, they have been admitted into the broad front and an advanced detachment in the fight against crime and road carnage.

Yesterday I said, "Help us to strengthen our call and appeal to communities and all stakeholders, to work more with law enforcement officers so that this broad front in the fight against crime and road carnage is seen, felt and understood. The broad front which I also think represents an advance detachment should declare the Province of Mpumalanga a no go area for those who have little respect for rules of the roads and rights of others".

Ladies and I am happy that today is yet another meeting which seek to consolidate further our broad front. Let me say it up front that we welcome and commit to support the Youth for road safety (YOURS) in all its work.

The partnership between our Department, Youth For Road Safety (YOURS), the Global Roads Safety Partnership (GRSP) and the South African Red Cross Society (SARCS) has a potential to give the research team the edge it needs to produce useful data that will shape our road safety programs in the future.

This research will further help us understand the deep seated root causes of drinking and driving and drinking and walking. It will also shed light on the deep seated social problems which are contributing factors to the problem.

As we launch this important research project today, we are taking our focus to Youth and road safety, at which we put on the spotlight Drinking and Driving as well as Drinking and Walking.

This ladies and gentlemen is a serious problem in our country and our province in particular. We all know the devastating effect of alcohol on road safety and we are well aware of the many precious lives that has been lost over the years.

Information provided by the Medical Research Council shows that in South Africa, 61% of pedestrians and 59% of drivers killed in road crashes were under the influence of alcohol.

A significant number of drivers in our province are driving under the influence of alcohol. The number increases dramatically at night however and as a result we witness more crashes occurring during the evening through to the night.

These crashes are surely linked to drink and driving and drink and walking by pedestrians. Many of the drivers who get involved in accidents are obviously young people. The research will just go to the heart of our problem and we are calling on the people of Likazi and Mbombela in general to cooperate with the research team.

As part of our concerted effort to deal with the problem of drinking and driving and other roads transgressions, as a Department we introduced a Traffic Intervention Unit (TIU) to concentrate on the roads that has high crashes and accidents rate.

Through our Overall Friday Campaign, we join forces with the South African Police to conduct roadblocks, raid taverns to check if they are complying with their license conditions. We join our efforts to present united front to the public while educating them through our operations aimed at drinking and driving and statistics shows that we have achieved some decreases in the last Easter holidays.

We have installed two Computerized Learners License Testing Systems in Witbank and Standerton.

Over and above the Computerized Learners Testing Systems, we committed to install four queuing systems to eradicate corruption in the issuing of licenses and to improve quality of the driver on the road.

A drunken quality driver on the road is as dangerous as ever. We do produce qualitative drivers through our systems and that is proven by the extent at which our drivers compete in national and international competitions.

Our work and efforts are surely insulted and rubbished by alcohol usage by both drivers and pedestrians. This is an area that we redirected many of our efforts to, and we intensified our road education campaigns. Our road safety officials are hard at work to highlight this and urge motorists to refrain from drinking and driving.

Dealing with human being is a very complicated task and attitude comes in to make it more complex and hard to tackle. We have not lost hopes, we are not shaken, we remain steadfast in our resolve to remove these drunken masters on our roads.

In order for us to get around this one, we need active and committed partners because the use of alcohol is an acceptable social behavior in our country and province. It is part of our social life during celebrations and ceremonies on daily bases.

Our TV screens are flooded with soapies and young men and woman are seen drinking alcohol on daily bases. Drinking has been made fashionable and every soapy be it Generations, Isidingo, or Rhythm City are all crowded by young professionals all drinking alcohol.

Ladies and Gentlemen, I am raising this so that you can understand how this prime time soapies affect our efforts to fight against drinking and driving. In some sets, you will see a person grabbing his/her car keys after heavy drinking and leaving the bar to drive home. That immediately sends a message that its ok, to drink and drive.

To change this kind of behavior, traffic enforcement officials by themselves cannot be effective and be successful in stopping it. Moreover, there is no law preventing people from walking after they have consumed large volumes of alcohol.

Arresting drunk pedestrians is a difficult and unpopular measure and mostly serves to take those people off our roads for one night, without any permanent effect.

Improved road safety can only be achieved through the active participation of all stakeholders. Alcohol also plays a role in other aspects of our unique community.

Our high figures of interpersonal violence are also linked, in part to the abuse of alcohol. Alcohol is also linked to other deaths and injuries not related to traffic crashes.

A study on youth risk behavior showed that amongst high school learners in Mpumalanga, 57% of boys and 48% of girls had used alcohol, 29% of boys and 21% of girls had engaged in binge drinking. Also 20% of boys and 8% of girls already started drinking before they were aged 13.

This clearly shows that the problem of alcohol in our society cannot be solved by traffic enforcement on its own and that we need to start working together with other Departments and civil society.

For the purpose of the research, we already have the buy in of The South African Police Services, particularly the police station here in KaNyamazane, Community Development Workers, schools and learners,

The Mbombela Municipality through their traffic and other departments, our provincial Departments of Education; Department of Health and Social Development,

NGOs like SANCA and the Red Cross, and most importantly our community based organizations and youth organizations have also pledged their active participation in the research.

They represent what I call the advanced detachment and the question is how effective this broad front will be in ensuring that we produce an accurate diagnosis of the problem.

The research project should help us with recommendations that will unleash the potential of this broad front and suggest strategies to work in a coordinated and more effective way to eliminate drunken driving and drunk and walking.

We applaud the initiative from the international role players P.A.U., our own Road Safety section, the Global Road Safety Partnership and the South African Red Cross, to make Mbombela part of this international project. We look forward to also read about the project progress in Vietnam and Argentina and our sister community in Cape Town.

We appreciate the fact that research will be done and that we will see the results of this project over the next 2 years. We also understand that the community of KaNyamazane will play a crucial role in the selection and implementation of the projects that will be identified.

We ask that the youth in this community take this opportunity to become part of this project, which will also provide youth and community members with training and build the capacity to sustain this project even beyond the two years of outside involvement.

Ladies and Gentlemen on behalf of the Provincial Government and the people of Mpumalanga under the leadership of Honorable DD Mabuza, hereby pledge our full support to this project.

We will closely monitor it as it unfolds and we will always be on standby and ready to assist as and when you come across problems and bottle neck in the cause of your assignment.

Let's all commit to the broad front against crime and road carnage and declare our Province a no go area for criminals and their criminal activities including traffic law breakers.

We wish the project team all the best.

I thank you.