

“Road safety touches all of us. It is for all of us. If we can go away from here determined to build the partnerships that we need and draw many thousands of new people into what we are convinced is a winnable battle, we will truly find ourselves embarked on the road to safety”

**SPEECH BY THE MEC OF ROADS AND TRANSPORT, Mme PINKY
KEKANA, MPL**

**AT THE OFFICIAL OPENING CEREMONY OF THE NATIONAL DRIVER OF
THE YEAR COMPETITION**

- Polokwane International Airport, Tuesday, 20 October 2009

Programme Director

Your Excellency, Bishop B E Lekganyane

Honourable Executive Mayor Motalane Monakedi

Mayors and councillors present

Honourable Members of the Provincial Legislature

The HoD: Roads and Transport and his Executive Management Team

Representatives of the RTMC

Our valued stakeholders from the transport industry

Leadership of the Taxi Industry and Operating License Board

Professional drivers

Sponsors

Members of the media

Ladies and gentlemen

It has been a week of tragedy and grief. It is of great sadness to me that a high-level gathering of this nature should be taking place in these circumstances after the funeral of five young souls whose lives were snuffed untimely in Burgersdorp, near Tzaneen. Indeed it has been terrible for the families of those who have lost their loved ones. It has also been terrible for those who have been injured. In a deeply human fashion we are required to acknowledge this tragedy and the grief it has caused. But we must also be cautious that we do not fall into that characteristically South African trap of

self-flagellation. Certainly we must acknowledge our weaknesses and our errors. But, as bad as this week has been, there is absolutely no reason to start talking about its tragic events as if they represented an un-resolvable trend. If we react speedily, appropriately and decisively in learning the lessons from these events, then the big red light which is flashing its warning now can be turned off.

It gives me the greatest of pleasure to welcome all of you here today to share with us this important milestone in the history of road safety in Limpopo. In particular, let me express my heartfelt appreciation to the ZCC and the Bishop Barnabas Lekganyane for making time in his hectic schedule to be with us at this official opening ceremony. We are honoured by your presence, Your Excellency, not least because it is a public signal of the support already given to road safety by your church. But also in true ANC-speak together we can do more!

Executive Mayor, let me offer thanks for your warm words of welcome to all our guests and friends. Each of us gathered here has a role to play. Each of us has the responsibility to critically examine what it is that we are doing and what we can do better to ensure safety.

In Government we have begun to do so already.

We accept that there is more that we can do.

We accept that there are things we can do differently.

The national Driver of the year competition is very important event on the calendar of road safety in this country. 126 drivers going through their paces over the next 4 days will be critically in assessing the best from across the length and breadth of South Africa. Road safety can be the only winner, as we need to refresh the skills of you the professional drivers. I am sure you will rise to the challenge as South Africa needs men and women of your calibre to represent us at the World Championships to be held next year in the Netherlands.

Bus Industry

Ladies and gentlemen, in order to improve safety on our roads may I say we look to the bus operators to join us. We ask that you examine your fleet management practices, your maintenance programmes, your capital expenditure and re-investment programmes, your safety policies, your employment practices and policies – all with a view to ensuring that your customers can be assured of continuously improving levels of safety.

We look to the workers and trade unions in the industry to join us. Are you taking every step to ensure that the passengers on your bus are safe? Are you driving in a way that protects the precious human cargo on your bus? Are you as organised workers pulling together to promote not just health and safety for your members, but your community as well?

Fraud and Corruption: Driver Licensing and Testing

Today here I really want to give you all a clear idea of some of the key short term projects that are under way or will shortly kick into action. We will be attacking inefficiency, fraud and corruption in our driver licensing and testing systems. Bad drivers kill people. Un-trained and un-licensed drivers are bad drivers. We want to urgently introduce greater efficiency and consistent standards into our driver licence testing system.

Ladies and gentlemen, I now turn to crime prevention and law enforcement - and in particular to the problems of fraud and corruption in the areas of driver licence and vehicle testing and vehicle registration. We take those issues very seriously. Driver licence fraud puts incompetent drivers on our roads. When it is present in the public passenger transport sector it directly puts thousands of lives at risk. But it also leads to loss of revenue and places an unacceptable additional strain on our health services and the economy as a whole. We are determined to stamp it out.

However, we recognise the urgency of deepening our approach to this issue across the board. We are therefore now setting up a programme with support from Business Against Crime (BAC) focused on the need to designing further

measures to close the loopholes that still exist in the system. The additional measures being examined include:

- Structural changes to office layouts. The most important changes involve the separation of the customer interface from back office functions and further separation and division of functions in the registration chain to ensure that the entire transaction is more secure.
- A queue management and document tracking system which form part of the process of procedural change
- All registration documents must conform to the document management model, so that no fraudulent documents can by-pass the upfront verification process.

Regulation and Self-Regulation

Let me turn to the important issue of regulation and self-regulation in the road freight and public passenger transport industry.

The problems we face here are well known: unlicensed and/or inadequately trained drivers, particularly in the bus and taxi sectors; fatigued and medically unfit long-distance drivers; poorly maintained and unfit vehicles; and systematic overloading in both the road freight and public passenger sectors.

Overloading Control

A moment ago I mentioned that one of the items that needs urgent and drastic attention is overloading. This is both a system issue and safety issue. On the one hand, freight overloading destroys our national road network and burdens the taxpayer to the tune of hundreds of millions of Rands every year for rehabilitation of damage to infrastructure. On the other hand, an overloaded vehicle is a safety-compromised vehicle.

In the sphere of dangerous goods carriage and passenger transport in particular, I therefore regard overloading in a very serious light. It has got to stop, and we are going to take stringent measures to ensure that it does. We have already been engaged in a series of projects to develop tightly policed, corridor-based approach to the problem that will in the first instance at least

bring overloading on the national arterial network under firm control. This requires a multi-faceted approach involving the following components:

- public-private partnerships to upgrade, maintain and securely manage static traffic control centres and weigh-stations;
- 24-hour road surveillance by specialist overload control squads;
- monitoring and control of secondary escape routes;
- refusing permission to any vehicle found to be overloaded to continue its journey until another vehicle has been sent from the company's base to remove the overloaded cargo;

But we don't need to rely on the criminal justice system alone. By regulation, it is perfectly possible to introduce some kinds of effective deterrent:

- We can introduce a form of compulsory self-regulation that requires operators in the bulk goods sectors known to be offending most regularly to set-up at their own cost point-of-origin or point-of-arrival weighbridges – depending on the type of cargo.

Specialist enforcement teams can then regularly stop trucks to check whether the load being carried corresponds with the certificate issued at these weighbridges. We would not have to catch every truck operating with a falsely documented load, because the penalty could simply be suspension or total withdrawal of the operator's card. In other words the operational penalties for knowing and systematic overloading must be pushed so high as to make the risk not worth taking.

I know very well that the majority of operators are bitterly opposed to the over-loaders in their midst and are as concerned as we are to address the problem vigorously – for safety reasons, for the good of the shared infrastructure and the general economy, and in order to create the necessary level playing field for fair competition.

Road Safety

Nothing can be more important to us than the safety of our people. This applies to all of us as individuals, citizens of our country, mothers, fathers, children, relatives, and friends. We come from a turbulent and violent past. The family that we call South Africa was for many years split apart, broken up, divided and humiliated. In our pain we learned to bind together, to resist oppression, to build dreams of a better future and a better life for all. And we triumphed. We now live in a society that, for the first time in 350 years, has discovered political democracy and has opened up opportunities for progress to all of its citizens.

But apartheid left us a terrible legacy. It destroyed mutual respect and self-respect. It dehumanised people, and like a cancer spread a culture of violence in our suffering land. Many of us became involved in crime, and found old and new ways to oppress, humiliate, injure and exploit each other. You and I know very well that we are still living - and dying - in the whirlpool of these problems in our new South Africa.

This anti-human culture, these behaviour patterns and attitudes continue to thrive, causing untold misery to our mothers, fathers, brothers, sisters, sons and daughters. While this continues we must be honest and admit - we don't yet have the full fruits of democracy. We don't yet have the full fruits of freedom. We are still involved in a war - albeit of a different kind.

The struggle now is more complicated, because it has to be fought in so many areas of society. Its victories are less easy to see. It takes time to build systems of delivery that work and a culture of mutual respect rooted in strong experiences of empowerment, creativity and collective problem solving. These processes are fragile. They take time to become strong.

Of course government has a vital role to play in creating and defending the vital space that people need to live their lives in peace and growing prosperity. But just as important is the example that individuals and groups like

yourselves, acting together with government, can give to the rest of us in showing how things can and should be done.

This means - yes - enforcement, coordination and communication; but it also means much more stringent legislation and regulation of vehicle fitness and design, eliminating fraud and corruption in driver and vehicle licensing and testing, targeted rehabilitation of dangerous sections of road, sure and effective prosecution and fine collection, effective use of electronic technology, a complete overhaul and restructuring of road traffic management systems in South Africa - and, equally important, the vigorous implementation of these measures.

We need to move with speed and determination, but in a carefully planned and structured way. Road traffic safety has many components. It starts before the driver gets into the vehicle or the pedestrian leaves his or her home to walk across the street or along the highway. It is already an issue before the vehicle's engine is started.

It becomes critical as soon as you put all these elements together, and it gets even more critical after a crash has taken place.

I spoke earlier about a culture of violence and crime. What we call "accidents" are almost always the result of criminal driver behaviour. Such behaviour does not represent some special category of "innocent" crime. It represents a blatant refusal to comply with the law.

Congratulations to all of you for this excellent and forward-looking initiative. I trust that the experience will encourage you to be the best amongst your peers. Hope to meet shortly in a celebratory mood at the Awards Ceremony and all of the best to all of you.

I thank you. Arrive Alive!