

**Speech by National Transport Minister Mme Dipuo Peters at the Memorial Service of 53 people who were killed in Road Collisions in the Eastern Cape.**

**04 September 2015**

**EAST LONDON**

Premier Phumulo Masualle

All MEC's Present Herein

MEC Weziwe Tikana

The Leadership of the ANC

Mayors

Traditional leaders

Councillors

Members of the deceased families

Ladies and gentlemen

We are gathered here today to mourn our fellow countrymen and women, brothers and sisters as well as children who departed under extremely tragic circumstances. What the community of Eastern Cape experienced this past weekend was a shock and a disaster that touched the entire nation.

Its impact was felt not only here in the Eastern Cape but it resonated throughout the entire country and the whole world. It is for this reason that we are gathered here to share the pain and grief and convey - to the grieving families, the people of the Eastern Cape and Government - that the events of the past weekend did not affect you alone, they affected all of us. Today the entire nation is mourning together with you for this is the darkest moment for us all.

At this critical moment when we feel weak and are consumed with self-doubt we look up to the Lord, who is our Shepherd to guide us. We are comforted in the words of King David who in Psalm 23 says, I quote:

*“Even though I walk  
through the darkest valley,  
I will fear no evil,  
for you are with me;  
your rod and your staff,  
they comfort me.” (end quote)*

As the Transport family we commit that we shall work with the Provincial Government and the families to prepare for the dignified send off of all the departed mothers, fathers, sisters, brothers and children.

On Sunday, the Road Accident Fund, one of our Agencies, attended a prayer meeting at kuBadi and activated immediate assistance with regard to funeral arrangements, the purchasing of coffins, and the transportation and storage of the deceased. By Monday, families were consulted and assistance was provided to the families who had yet to identify the departed.

Proactive service directly to those affected by road crashes, deaths and injuries is what the RAF is becoming known for. Last year over 9,000 funerals were funded by the RAF as it provides quick and accessible services to all affected. It is a good thing to know that more and more

compatriots are coming directly to receive the support of a Government Agency that cares.

The RAF will work with the families and survivors to bring about relief and ensure that claims are handled expeditiously to provide support and care to the spouses and children of our dearly departed countrymen and women as well as to the crash survivors. Far beyond claims and money, the Government through the RAF will be there with you, now and into the future – working tirelessly to ensure that you and your families move through the pain, the grief and the sadness, to a point where each day becomes a little easier.

To the bereaved families and survivors, I am saying to you, be not afraid during this dark hour of your lives, you will not walk this journey alone. The ANC government will be with you every step of the way right to the end. Your government will be your comfort and source of strength.

As Government we are extremely concerned about the unacceptably high levels of motor vehicle crashes in our country. In the weeks before this weekend's tragic events, there were other equally gruesome incidents that robbed our nation of fathers and mothers, brothers and sisters as well as young people who had the potential to grow up and make a contribution to the development of country.

We remember with sadness the 15 people who lost their lives when a minibus taxi fell off a bridge in KwaZulu Natal and collided with a train. We

also have not forgotten ten people who died when a minibus taxi collided with truck in Limpopo. There are also seven people whose death in the Free State is still fresh in our minds.

Mr Premier, MECs, Mayors ,Councillors,fellow comrades and leaders we know from the analysis of road crashes that we have done, that the Eastern Cape, KwaZulu Natal, Gauteng and Limpopo account for 65% of all fatal crashes in the country, more devastating is that out of the 53 lives we lost over the weekend 25 of them were women, what a painful way to close the women's month.

This is an unacceptable state of affairs. It is unacceptable because we know that road crashes are preventable and they are avoidable. Anyone who drives a vehicle with faulty brakes or steering wheel knows that at some point they will be unable to control the vehicle and that will cause a crash which will result in a loss of life. Anyone who drives at high speeds knows fully well that they may not be able to stop the vehicle if a pedestrian were to suddenly walk into the street ahead of them. And anyone driving under the influence of alcohol knows that at some point they will veer off their lane onto oncoming traffic and cause a fatal crash.

Mr Premier, the deaths of 53 people in this province last weekend as well as many others who died in others parts of the country should spur us to double our efforts to make our roads safer. The only tribute we can pay to those whose lives have been lost is to work together to end the

fragmentation that currently exists within our traffic and law-enforcement fraternity.

The lessons that the tragic events of the past weekend have taught us is that the presence of our traffic police needs to be felt day and night and on all weekends. I am therefore inviting you Mr Premier, Mayors and other local government leaders to support us in our quest to streamline and align traffic law-enforcement across all three spheres of Government and introduce a 24/7 shift system.

The truth of the matter is that available resources in South Africa do not permit this huge duplication of functions and multiple independent command and control structures. There is a dire need for the harmonisation of the road traffic and law-enforcement in the country which will facilitate coordination, collaboration and ensure implementation and compliance with agreed uniform national standards.

We should introduce tough new laws as a legacy from the recent events. We have already started engagements with the Department of Justice to introduce minimum sentences for negligent and reckless driving. We are seeking to reclassify drunken driving from a Schedule 3 to a Schedule 5 offence to ensure those who negligently cause crashes on the roads do not get bail easily and spend time behind bars.

As you may be aware, I have introduced for public comment new regulations to make our roads safer. These proposed regulations are in

addition to the regulations that came in effect in May this year compelling passengers in motor vehicles to wear seatbelts and drivers to ensure that children under the age of three years are placed on car seats or child restraints whenever they are transported on public roads.

In the new regulations, I have proposed the practical re-testing of drivers who make an application for the renewal of driving licence cards. The idea is not to make applicants to rewrite test but it is for the applicant to practically demonstrate his driving ability on a vehicle code for which he or she is seeking to re-new the licence. This is done in order to eliminate fraudsters and ensure that an applicant knows the rules of the roads and is fit to drive the class of vehicle for which they are seeking a licence.

The regulations also seek to restrict the use of bakkies, vans and trucks, for the transportation of human beings. The regulation limits to five the number of people who may be transported at the back of a goods vehicle provided they are employees travelling to work.

The regulations are explicit that no school children may be transported at the back of a bakkies, van or truck and these vehicles may not be used as taxis unless permission has been granted in terms of the National Land and Transport Act.

The regulations also seek to reduce speed limits to 40 kilometres an hour in respect of public roads within residential areas. A speed limit of 80

kilometres an hour shall apply on public roads, other than freeways, situated outside of urban areas.

A speed limit of 120 kilometres an hour shall apply on all freeways provided a limit of 100 kilometres is observed if the freeway passes through a residential area.

The regulations also seek to restrict the operation of heavy trucks on public roads between certain hours. Our proposal is that heavy trucks should be prohibited from using the road between 06H00 and 09H00 in morning and between 17H00 and 20H00 in the evening from Monday to Friday, excluding weekends and public holidays.

Ladies and gentlemen, we are fully aware that these measures will not yield the desired outcomes unless we improve the skills of our traffic officers and deal decisively with fraud and corruption within their ranks.

We must tackle the widespread corruption in our driving licence testing centres which make it possible for an individual to obtain a driver's licence without even setting a foot in a vehicle. The fraudulent issuance of roadworthy certificates must be totally eliminated if we are to reduce crashes caused by public transport vehicles and heavy duty vehicle.

Our anti-corruption unit and the All Law enforcement Agencies should not rest until this scourge has been completely eliminated. They must deal

with the driving schools that facilitate this corruption, and bring before justice, not only the runners or small guys but the kingpins who have made corruption their lucrative business to pervert our system.

Our officers need to be provided with the tools and capacity to be effective on the roads. We cannot continue training them in 18<sup>th</sup> century methods and expect them to operate effectively in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. It is for this reason that we are in the process of introducing a 21<sup>st</sup> century curriculum in our training school and extend the training of traffic officers from the current one year to a three year diploma.

The officers we deploy on the roads should have all the requisite skills to enforce overload control, dangerous goods transportation, vehicle examination, license examination, crash investigations, road traffic information analysis and road traffic legislation. They should also be trained to do high speed pursuit and interception as well as in managerial skills.

We are also working to introduce a training module for driving school instructors because we believe they have a role to play in ensuring that we have competent drivers on our roads. It is no longer acceptable that every Tom, Dick and Harriet can conduct learner driver training simply because they have a driver's license. The instructor must have a certain level of skill in driver training and road safety awareness before they can train others to drive.

Ladies and gentlemen, I have no doubt that if we implemented all these measures it will be on very rare occurrences that we come together in tragic circumstance to mourn our beloved ones who would have perished on the roads.

I trust the initiatives I have outline will help us to attain the goal of reducing road crash fatalities by half as set out in the United Nations Global Plan for the Decade of Action for Road Safety 2011- 2020. These seeks to implement the five pillars of the Global Plan which are building road safety management capacity, improving the safety of road infrastructure broader transport networks, further developing the safety of vehicles, enhancing the behaviour of road users and improving post-crash care.

Let us not be daunted by the task ahead of us to save lives and make our roads safe to travel in. We must be guided by the words of Nelson Mandela who taught us that, I quote:

*“It always seems impossible until its done”* close quote.

To the families of the our dear departed and the survivors, know that our hearts ache for each and every family affected. We may have to speak as Government leaders, but know that we speak first and foremost as a caring Government. A Government that knows and feels your pain.

I invite you to take comfort in the words of God who, In Isaiah 41 says, I quote, *“Fear not, for I am with you, be not dismayed, for I am your God, I*

*will strengthen you, I will help you, I will uphold you with my righteous right hand. For I, the Lord your God, hold your right hand, it is I who say to you, Fear not I am the one who helps you.” End quote.*

May the souls of our departed rest in eternal peace.

I thank you.