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Address by North West MEC for Public Works, Roads and Transport during the awarding of Transport, Education, Training Authority certificates to provincial taxi operators held on Saturday, August 06, Protea Hotel, Mahikeng

Date: Saturday, August 06, 2011

- Programme Director
- Chairperson of the North West Provincial Taxi Council
- Chief Executive Officer of TETA
- Representative of the North West Taxi drivers
- Projects Manager from the National Department of Transport
- Training Provider from Khoete Investment
- Distinguished guests
- Ladies and gentlemen

Greetings.

I thank you Programme Director for according me the privilege to address this important gathering.

Important in the sense that this collective gathered here this morning, may be small in number, but the truth is, it represents one critical part of a bigger and even massive operation in the transport sector of our country.

Allow me also Programme Director to mention upfront the following:

While I am very grateful that an invitation was extended to me, which I have honoured in my capacity as the provincial MEC for Public Works, Roads and Transport:

I am also privileged to represent at this very occasion, the Premier of the North West province, Mme Thandi Modise. It was her wish to be present at this function.

These is a saying in Setswana: ``Ditiro ga di latsane!''

As result of other pressing engagements, the Premier has requested me convey on her behalf, her appreciation of the work you have been doing for the province, and to congratulate on behalf of the provincial government, taxi drivers who would be awarded certificates of achievement in a few moments.

I also want to say congratulations to the 29 graduates of our province, who saw the need to enrol with the Transport Education Training Authority for the Taxi Driver Skills Development and Training.

My message to them is, you now belong to the league of safe and reliable drivers behind the wheel in an industry that transports more than 65 percent of the economically active South African population. One of the oldest black owned industry in this country which has a rich history also.

Because you make a living from transporting people to and from various destinations, it therefore becomes imperative that you also acquire the skills to improve on customer relations.

Customer care between yourselves and your bosses, who are the very same passengers sustaining your business at all times be nursed and massaged. That is very critical.

For us a government, the training you and many of your colleagues in the same industry in other parts of the country receive is an important intervention, which we honestly believe gives expression to our call that together we can do more.

In my opening remarks, I spoke about the objectives of this programme, to transform swiftly the old habits in the taxi industry which have blemished the image of this noble industry.

I will not dwell much into that, but it is common knowledge that:

Top of that list is the rude and unfriendly attitude which taxi drivers often display their interaction with passengers. So fearful are some of your colleagues in the industry that, the poor paying passenger, who doesn't not have a choice, still have the hard earned cash to be subjected to the most inhumane and sometimes life threatening attitude from your own ranks.

That is very suicidal.

You kick in the teeth, your source of income and on hind-side; count on the victim for support in times of need.

You and others elsewhere, must now become disciplined ambassadors of the renewed taxi brigade, who can preach courtesy.

Spread the gospel of a better service to our people. That a client should be treated with respect and deserve a better service.

Programme Director:

The safety on all the roads in the country is the responsibility of all roads users, pedestrians included.

It cannot be the responsibility of government and government alone. We are all in this together.

It is regrettable however, that biggest contributor of road fatalities on our roads is attributed to an assortment of factors, among them:

Unroadworthy vehicles, excessive speed, drunken driving and or a combination of all three factors often attributed to cause of road accidents, with multiple fatalities.

This is arguable, one category of road related accidents and fatalities dominated by mini-bus taxis in your industry.

It will forever make front-page news because:

If a mini bus taxi, with a sitting capacity of 16 passengers is involved in a head-on collision with another of the same sitting capacity, there is an outside chance that 32 lives would be snuffed-out in just one such accident.

If similar accidents involving the same kind of vehicles carrying the same number of passengers occur elsewhere, you can just imagine how frightening a scenario this can turn out to be.

Therefore, training and more training on responsible driver behaviour cannot be overemphasises especially, when your business is to transport people.

To respect the rules of the road is not an expensive exercise. However, the cost to tax payers for clearing of accident scenes, hospitalisation of victims and funerals costs have a severe impact on the economy.

There is not amount that can replace a life lost in a road accident, the rare skills of the victims and many others factors which are often left by those directly affected by the loss.

However, Programme Director:

Road safety cannot be complete, until government ensures that the conditions of the roads you travel on are also safe, reliable with proper and visible signage.

The backlog of road maintenance in the whole country requires billions of rands to address adequately.

It is not the challenge peculiar to North West province. You have also travelled on bad roads outside this province, and in some cases on worse roads in cities or provinces you least expected such to be the case.

It is a national crisis even for provinces which arguable have the biggest budgets for road infrastructure.

Our province, where you do business, is a largely rural and our road infrastructure is far from adequate.

We are trying to do more with the little resources we have but the challenges will forever remain.

To adequately address the road maintenance backlog in this province, we need nothing less than R2 billion, excluding additional monies to built and repair bridges and construct new roads.

We acknowledge that to attract investments, you need among others a well maintained road infrastructure free of potholes. You need rehabilitated roads which we are implementing here in the provincial capital with our Revitalisation Programme of the Mafikeng.

In spite of these challenges, there is visible evidence that we are indeed trying harder and winning where others thought we will fail.

We indeed draw courage from your support, understanding and patience as we continue to undo the legacies of the past in our quest to deliver a better quality of live all irrespective of where they reside.

In conclusion Programme Director:

To our graduates, I hope you will be a shining light to be followed by many of your colleagues who may not have realised the value of the training you have just completed.

Encourage those still outside the system to also enlist, because knowledge is power because no one is too old to learn.

There are new developments which require that you reposition your business operation, for example:

How will my business fit or integrate into new transport system like the bus rapid system coming in Rustenburg in a few years from now?

My wish, if I was a law maker, would make this training compulsory to all taxi operators and drivers.

I take my hat off to the leadership of the South African National Taxi Council, its affiliates here and elsewhere for supporting this training offered to their members by the Transport Education Training Authority.

Last but not least, let us put our hands together for those who will ascend the podium to receive their accredited certificates.

I thank you!