ADDRESS BY THE MINISTER OF TRANSPORT, MR JOE MASWANGANYI ON THE OCCASION OF THE FUNERAL SERVICE OF THE 17 VERENA ROAD CRASH VICTIMS HELD AT WOLVENKOP IN VERINA - MPUMALANGA

06 May 2017

Speaker of the National Assembly, Ms Baleka Mbethe;
Minister of Basic Education, Ms Angie Motshekga;
Mpumalanga Premier, Mr David Mabuza;
Mpumalanga MEC for Community Safety, Security and Liaison, Mr Pat Ngomane
Gauteng MEC for Education, Mr Panyaza Lesufi;
Mpumalanga MEC for Public Works, Roads and Transport, Ms Sasekani Manzini;
All MEC Present;
Mayors present;
Traditional leaders
The Leadership of the ANC and ANC WL and ANCYL and other parties in parliament
Faith Based Leaders from various denominations;
Officials from all spheres of government;
Taxi Association leadership;
Teachers of the learners;
The Bereaved families;
Members of the Media;
Ladies and gentlemen

We are gathered here today to mourn our children who departed under extremely tragic circumstances.
What the community of Verena and the other affected communities of Mpumalanaga, KwaZulu Natal and Limpopo provinces experienced this past weeks was a shock and a disaster that touched the entire nation.

Its impact resonates 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 that the events of the past week 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.

As the Minister of Transport, on behalf of President Jacob Zuma and the national government of South Africa, I bring the message of condolences to the grieving families, the government Mpumalanga province and other affected province. Be consoled and comforted.

When we heard about the crash that took the life and injured our people, the Road Accident Fund, the consoling arm of government, activated immediate assistance with regard to funeral arrangements, the purchasing of coffins, and the transportation and storage of the deceased. Families were consulted and assistance was provided to the families who had yet to identify their departed.

At this case in point, the RAF immediately intervened and attended to the scene of the accident with other stakeholders. To date, we have issued 16 funeral support activations and seven direct claims have been originated for the injured.

Two minors are still under care in Emalahleni Private Hospital through RAF Case Management intervention.

Over and above this figure the Road Accident Fund spends R33 Billion annually on payments of claims, which could be redirected to other government priorities which will go miles to address the triple challenges of employment, poverty and inequalities, thereby assisting us to increase the pace to achieve government radical socio-economic transformation.
Beyond the funeral services, the RAF will still be there to ensure post-crash care support through the activation of Medical Undertaking Certificates and originating for Loss of support for the deceased. 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 for the departed families as well as to the crash survivors.

To the families, far beyond claims and money, the Government through the RAF will be there, now and into the future – working tirelessly to ensure that the affected the families move through the pain and grief, to a point where each day becomes a little easier.

As the Minister of Transport, I hereby appeal to all the affected that don't speak to touts, those people who say they will help you, they end up taking the bulk of the money. Speak to the Mayor or Councilors to direct you to the RAF or the MECs office when you need help.

To the bereaved families and survivors, I am saying to you today, 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.

Ladies and gentlemen, last year over 9,000 funerals were funded by the RAF. Reducing the frequency, severity and impact of accidents remains the Fund’s highest priority, as the estimated cost of road crashes to South Africa’s (SA) economy remains staggeringly high. The burden of road crashes also impacts heavily on our health system and social welfare where more and more people rely on our social security net for survival. If all road users prioritise road safety, the resources that government spends unwittingly on accidents amounting 147 Billion Rands annually, which is equal to 3.4% of the country’s GDP could be reprioritized for service delivery.

As Government we are extremely concerned about the unacceptably high levels of motor vehicle crashes and injuries in our country.
Human factor still remained a causal factor for most of the crashes. As we all know, this can be avoidable if we all prioritise road safety and use our roads responsibly. During the Easter period our statistics indicates that people who died on the roads this Easter were passengers at 50% followed by pedestrians at 24.5%, drivers at 19.8% and cyclists at 5.7%.

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.

As a result of this unwarranted pain caused by vehicle crashes and injuries, we continue to engage our courts to show no mercy to offenders and give them the harshest penalties permissible.

To ensure that there are severe consequences for the road rule offenders, I would like to indicate that we are at an advance stage in negotiations with the Department of Justice to finalise the introduction of minimum sentences for negligent and reckless driving.

The Department of Transport has also published numerous amendments to the National Road Traffic Regulations aimed at regulating the use of our road

We have also commenced with the Moloto Development Corridor by expanding the current road, making it more user friendly. We will be commencing soon with the construction of the rail network in the Moloto route to ensure that we reduce road traffic to rail in the three provinces of Mpumalanga, Limpopo and Gauteng.
Furthermore, to ensure that we elevate rail as an alternative mode of transport, we invested R173 billion towards the modernisation of passenger rail infrastructure and services, focusing on station and depot modernisation, upgrading of signalling and overhead lines, railway tracks and platform rectification. To this end, President Jacob Zuma will be presiding over the official launch of the commercialized Metro Rail Train at the Pretoria Station on Tuesday, the 9th May 2017.

SANRAL is spending billions of rands in maintaining and upgrading existing routes whilst also investing in new infrastructure that will open new vistas for economic emancipation and social upliftment.

Deteriorating roads are being repaired; additional capacity is being added; dangerous segments are being eliminated; and new routes that are shorter and safer are being carved on the national landscape.

Building on the previous and recent experiences, the Department will continue to improve its enforcement policies and strategies, and upscale public road safety education and awareness campaigns, which is our key component and driver of our road safety strategy. We also continue cooperation with the public transport industry, particularly the taxi industry, the bus as well as the transport freight industry to reduce carnages on the roads. I call upon all of us to be road safety ambassadors. Working together we can do more to make sure that our roads are safe for all.

To the families of 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.

As I conclude, let us always remember that improving road safety is a long term project that requires the active participation of all citizens and interested formations.
As I conclude, 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 dear departed rest in eternal peace.

I thank you.