

TO ALL MEDIA  
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## **Ngwelezane Hospital Nurses hijacked and kidnapped into the forest**

KZN Health MEC, Dr Sibongiseni Dhlomo has expressed horror and disgust at the hijacking of three [3] senior female Nurses at the Ntambanana area near Empangeni.

The Ngwelezane based nurses had just finished their outreach programme at Bhiliya area in Ntambanana when their Citroen Kombi was overtaken by a maroon Toyota Sedan. Soon after that this Toyota was blocking the road and three of its armed occupants jumped out and demanded the valuables from the nurses, taking their Cell phones; Bank Cards; Rings and Necklaces.

The Nurses were then pushed into the middle seat of the Kombi and told to close their eyes. The Kombi was then driven into a bush by two of their assailants whilst the other was following in the Toyota. Deep into the bush the hijackers were joined by other 2 gang members who assisted in off-loading and throwing away all the Hospital equipment including BP Machines; Glucometers; Patients' Registers and medication.

One of the hijacked nurses says the Kombi was then driven away and they were left in the bush with the other two members who they found there. She says they were kept there freezing and afraid until around 20h00. She says even though they were unharmed, one of the assailants asked to have sex with her and she told him that she was HIV positive. Later on they were pushed deep into the bush and left on their own. They then walked until they saw some houses where they summoned help.

MEC Dhlomo met all three nurses apologising for what has happened to them in their endeavours to save lives of the communities. He informed that Counselling has been arranged for them and encouraged them to take some time off. MEC Dhlomo says the safety of health workers comes first:

‘On learning of this horrific act I rushed to UThungulu District toying with an idea of closing down all the out-reach programmes. This latest incident marks a total of 18 of our vehicles hijacked in that area since April 3, 2016. Our health professionals are really concerned and afraid and if we stop going to that area, our people are going to start dying.

As an interim measure, I have been encouraged with the meeting we had with the Cluster Commander, General Zondi who offered to escort our vehicles whilst we are working with the community, their leaders as well as the MEC for Safety and Liaison, Hon Mxolisi Kaunda on finding a permanent solution to this problem.’

MEC Dhlomo was also informed that two arrests were made earlier in the day after a shootout with suspects who had hijacked a Public Works Department's vehicle. Police will check if they are not linked to the spate of hijackings reported in that area.

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