

Speech delivered by Health MEC and Leader of Government Business, Dr Zweli Mkhize at the Inauguration Ceremony for the Mayor for UMTshezi Municipality at the Town Hall, Estcourt, on 29 October 2004 at 14H00.

Today is indeed a great day for the people of Estcourt. Today's inauguration marks the beginning of a new dawn for the communities of Estcourt... We hope the new beginning brings with it closure to a most unpleasant episode in the politics of this area. It is the hope of many people that today's event marks the beginning of an era in which service delivery, and not self serving, will be paramount in the minds of all the leaders of this area.

One has watched with sadness the recent events unfolding in this Municipality, events which culminated with the tragic death of Councillor Stanley Chetty. One had hoped that our country, and our province in particular, had long gone past the tradition of killing people if they do something we do not like, if they belong to a political party that we do not like, but from the events of the past few weeks it would appear that it is not so. I can say right now that this is unacceptable and that it is a situation that we will not tolerate as the government of this province. The right of freedom of association is enshrined in the Bill of Rights of our Constitution. Section 18 states that everyone has the right to freedom of association. Section 19 (1) of the Bill of Rights further states that: Every citizen is free to make political choices, which include the right

- a. to form a political party;
- b. to participate in the activities of, or recruit members for, a political party; and
- c. to campaign for a political party or cause.

To deny any person these rights is to attack on the Constitution of the Republic of South Africa itself. I re-iterate therefore, that we will not tolerate acts of violence as the government of this province. I want to state this clearly and unambiguously, so that it is clear in everyone's mind that the full might of the law will be brought to bear on anyone who thinks they can control the tide of political events by using violence.

The national and provincial governments are made up of all political parties and they all work together for the good of this country. We expect local government structures to do the same. We expect people who call themselves leader to work for the good of the communities they purport to lead and not to put party political interests above the interests of the whole community. Estcourt is one of the areas that were ravaged by violence in the past. The people of this area deserve better. It is the responsibility of all of us to live up to their expectations; we are after all, their leaders.

The wave of intolerance sweeping through Estcourt is seen rearing its ugly head in other areas of our province. We saw this most recently during a visit

to Osuthu by four MECs at the weekend. What was a gathering to deliver development projects to the community by MEC for Finance and Economic Development, Mr Mike Mbauyakhulu; MEC for Transport and Safety and Security, Mr Bheki Cele; MEC for Agriculture and Environmental Affairs, Professor Gabriel Ndabandaba and myself, was nearly turned into a tragedy by people bent on sowing fear and violence. We cannot and we will not allow these incidents to continue. We cannot allow ourselves to be distracted from the very serious challenges we face as a province. The people of this province cannot be held to ransom by people who have no interest in the advancement of our province and who only want to advance their interest at all costs, even at the cost of human life.

The people of this province have had enough, enough war, enough burials, and enough underdevelopment. The people of this province now want delivery and they are looking up to us as their leaders to deliver them from hunger, unemployment and diseases. The women of this province are looking up to us to provide a safe and prosperous environment in which to raise their children. They are looking up to us to make it possible for their children to grow up unscarred by violence and fear. The children of Estcourt are looking up to us to let them be children and not refugees in the land of their birth, simply because we are intolerant of our political differences.

We are calling on all leaders and leader in this community in particular to lead by example and preach the gospel of peace and tolerance in the province. We are calling on them to stop fanning the flames of violence and to distance themselves from acts of intimidation. As a province we have worked long and hard to bring stability to KwaZulu-Natal. I know I speak for the majority of the people of this province when I urge all of us to accept that political differences are an integral part of democracy, the same democracy that we spent decades fighting for. It is a sign of a maturing nation when we can accept that *abantu abayi nganxanye bengemanzi, nokuthi ukuthi umuntu akayi ngalapho mina ngiya ngakhona akumezi isitha lokho*.

Violence perpetuates poverty and underdevelopment, which affect disadvantaged communities in our province, irrespective of their political affiliations. Hunger knows no political affiliations, neither does disease and poverty. We cannot allow violence to distract us from the most pressing business of ensuring a better life for all the citizens of our country. Premier Sbu Ndebele has made it one of the priorities of his government to rejuvenate the dying towns of KwaZulu-Natal. Many of the small towns in the province, like Estcourt, Dundee, Vryheid, Colenso have systematically been drained of industries that in the past sustained the communities of these areas. We are facing a challenge of reversing this economic drain and restoring the dignity of these communities by making sure that these towns become economically vibrant and sustainable. This is a crucial role that must be played by this new municipality and it must not allow itself to be distracted from this mammoth task. Our province launched the Provincial Growth and Development Strategy on the 22nd of this month. This document is the basis for how our province will rebuild itself. It sets out a clear roadmap for the rejuvenation of our province,

based on the provincial priorities. The goals of the Provincial Growth and Development Strategy are:

- to build a people focussed, effective and efficient government
- to build the economy
- to reduce poverty and create sustainable communities

This all sounds like insurmountable challenges but if local, provincial and national government work together with various business communities we can roll back the frontiers of poverty and rebuild our province.

The provincial and national government will be fully behind the municipality as it implements strategies to reverse the decay of the economy of this area. We also want to call on the local business community to form partnerships with us as government for the benefit of everyone. We cannot overemphasize how important this task is. We therefore cannot afford to be fighting among ourselves when there is hunger and disease that is ravaging our people. How can we entice the business community to the dying towns, and indeed to the whole of KwaZulu-Natal, if we are still known as an unstable province that cannot get its leaders to work together, if we are known as a province that knows nothing but fighting and killing?

I repeat my call for all leaders bury their differences and to join hands and work for peace, development and prosperity in Estcourt. The community expects no less from us. We dare not fail them.