

REMARKS BY KZN HEALTH MEC Ms NOMAGUGU SIMELANE, ON THE OCCASION OF WELCOMING CHRISTMAS BABIES, AT VICTORIA MXENGE HOSPITAL, DURBAN, 25 DECEMBER 2024

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS:

HONOURABLE PREMIER OF KWAZULU-NATAL, Mr THAMI NTULI;

MAYOR OF ETHEKWINI, Mr CYRIL XABA;

DIRECTOR-GENERAL, Ms NONHLANHLA MKHIZE;

HEAD OF DEPARTMENT, DR SANDILE TSHABALALA;

DDG FOR CORPORATE MANAGEMENT SERVICES; Ms NOZIPHO MTHEMBU;

DDG FOR CLINICAL SUPPORT SERVICES, Ms PENNY MSIMANGO;

DDG FOR DISTRICT HEALTH SERVICES, DR TOGOHO MOJI;

DISTRICT DIRECTOR FOR ETHEKWINI (SOUTH REGION), Ms THABISILE SAKYI;

OFFICIALS FROM THE OFFICE OF THE PREMIER AND FROM THE DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH;

HOSPITAL MANAGEMENT AND STAFF;

MEMBERS OF THE MEDIA;

DISTINGUISHED GUESTS;

LADIES AND GENTLEMEN

INTRODUCTORY REMARKS:

Thank you for joining us this morning, as we officially welcome our Christmas babies to the world.

Today, we celebrate the arrival of our special and beautiful bundles of joy, who share a birthday with Jesus Christ himself. These babies are therefore a reminder of hope, joy, and the beauty of new beginnings.

As they grow up, we hope and pray that they will bring light and happiness to the world.

Last year, we welcomed our Christmas babies in Newcastle, and we said some of them would have to be named oNomvula, and oMvula, because it was raining cats and dogs.

We are hoping that today's weather will be clear and sunny here in Durban, so that the parents can have the opportunity to give their babies names such as oLangalibalele, oLangaletu, o-Sunshine, nab'oLangelihle, njalo-njalo...

As the KwaZulu-Natal Department of Health, we want to say to all the mothers of these Christmas babies, Congratulations!!!

You have done something truly extraordinary. Bringing life into the world is the greatest gift, and doing so on a day as sacred as Christmas is truly special.

We also want to take this opportunity and express our deep appreciation to all our healthcare workers across all levels, for working through the December and January holiday period.

THE DISTINCTION OF BEING BORN IN A HOSPITAL NAMED AFTER A SIGNIFICANT FREEDOM FIGHTER LIKE VICTORIA MXENGE (AND A BRIEF HISTORY ABOUT HER):

As if being born on Christmas Day was not special enough, these babies also carry the distinction of being born in a hospital that is named after one of our most gallant Struggle heroes.

For those who may not be aware, we officially renamed this hospital in May this year, to ensure that, through it, we preserve and celebrate the name of one of the most precious daughters of the soil.

I deliberately call uMam' Victoria Mxenge a hero and not a heroine, because a heroic deed is a heroic deed – regardless of the gender of the person who performed it.

Victoria Mxenge was indeed a woman of incredible courage, resilience, and purpose. She gave up her life for the ideals of justice, freedom, and equality that we enjoy today.

If the world still talks about the Holocaust, which took place more than 80 years ago, then who are we to stop talking about the horrors of Apartheid, a mere 30 years since it ended?

CHRISTMAS BABIES BORN SO FAR:

As I move to the main business of the day, as the Province of KwaZulu-Natal, we are pleased to announce that, as of 6.30am today, we have welcomed a total of 47 Christmas babies from healthcare facilities across the Province. This number was made up of 21 boys and 26 girls.

The Province's first Christmas baby, a bouncing baby boy weighing 3,5kg kg, was born at Osindisweni Hospital, and arrived exactly at the stroke of midnight.

Among our Christmas babies is a set of twins – a boy and a girl – who were born at Umphumulo Hospital. Their respective weights are 1,6 kg and 2,2 kg.

Here at Victoria Mxenge Hospital, we've had five Christmas babies, so far. All of them are girls.

We wish all the mothers of Christmas babies nothing but the best, as they begin this new journey with their precious bundles of joy.

A PLEA TO THE MOTHERS: PLEASE RAISE THESE BABIES WELL, SO THAT THEIR FULFIL THEIR LEGACY AND SPIRIT OF GREATNESS:

To the mothers of our Christmas babies, we want you to know and always remember that your babies have been born into a legacy of greatness.

They carry with them the spirit of Christmas and the legacy of a freedom fighter. Therefore, you have no choice but to raise them with purpose.

This will help ensure that they always strive for excellence, and become symbols of hope and joy in a world that desperately needs them.

They must fulfill the promise of their remarkable beginnings.

A MOMENT OF JOY, BUT A TIME TO REFLECT ON THE SCOURGE OF CHILD AND TEENAGE PREGNANCY:

Honourable Premier, while we celebrate our Christmas babies, we must also confront some troubling realities.

It is highly disturbing that among the mothers giving birth today, we have three 15 year-olds, who gave birth at Emmaus, Hlabisa, and St Andrews Hospitals. This means these little girls fell pregnant at the age of 14, which is highly unacceptable. Two of these fathers are aged 19, while the third is a 23 year-old man.

We also have a 16 year-old mother, who also delivered at St Andrews Hospital; a 17 year-old, who delivered at Mahatma Gandhi Memorial Hospital; and another 17 year-old, who delivered at Estcourt Hospital. We also have an 18 year-old, who gave birth at Church of Scotland Hospital.

Honourable Premier, these are the youngest mothers of our Christmas babies. What concerns us is that this situation of girls fall pregnant at a young age is not a phenomenon that is unique to Christmas Day—it is something that happens on a regular basis, and reflects a broader societal challenge.

It is a big problem, as it robs young girls of their childhood, often forcing them into adulthood too soon.

It also places their lives and those of these babies at risk.

We therefore must ask ourselves: what role do we all have to play in this crisis?

To older men who exploit young girls: just stop it! You need to re-cultivate your conscience, and understand the harm you are causing.

To parents: please guide your children. You need to have honest conversations about relationships, family planning, and life choices, with your children.
Do not allow your children to be raised by social media, or by their friends, because they will be wrongly influenced, and end up making costly mistakes.
To parents and communities: let us work together to end the stigma around family planning. Let us understand that contraceptives are tools for empowerment, not shame.
Let us all remember that every child deserves to be born into a loving, planned, and supportive environment.
Unplanned and unwanted pregnancies often lead to lifelong challenges, both for the child and the parent.

A MESSAGE TO ALL MOTHERS ABOUT VACCINATION, BREASTFEEDING, AND GENERAL CARE FOR CHILDREN:

Now, to all the parents of our Christmas babies — and all parents in general — your responsibility begins today.

Your newborns depend on you for everything, especially their health.

Please ensure that your baby is immunised according to the “Road to Health Chart.”

Remember that vaccines are not optional; they are lifesaving. They protect your child from diseases like measles, polio, and tuberculosis.

Breastfeeding is another powerful tool for giving your baby the best start in life.

Exclusive breastfeeding for the first six months provides essential nutrients, strengthens your baby’s immune system, and fosters a special bond between mother and child.

It is the most natural and effective way to ensure your baby thrives.

We also call on men to realise that they also have an important role and responsibility to play as fathers, in helping their partners in raising these children.

CONCLUSION:

To all our Christmas babies, may your lives be filled with love, laughter, and purpose.

And to their mothers, thank you, and congratulations once again for bringing such joy into the world.

You are appreciated, and you are not alone.

Thank you.