

# **MEDIA STATEMENT BY HON. PREMIER MR SIHLE ZIKALALA ON THE PROVINCE'S RESPONSE TO THE CIVIL UNREST, 12 JULY 2021**

## **INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND**

Fellow citizens of KwaZulu-Natal,

We engage with you today, following the address by His Excellency President Cyril Ramaphosa last night. We strongly affirm the call for the return of peace, calm and stability in our province and the country. We ask of each and every citizens to join hands, no matter the difficulties, let us avoid an eye for an eye confrontation that can only turn our world blind.

There can be no denying that as a Province we are going through a lot of pain and difficulty. The past few days have been extremely challenging in our body politic. We have seen violent incidents which, from the beginning, appear to have arisen as a response to the incarceration of former President Jacob Zuma.

But have now unfolding into an unprecedented and extremely disturbing situation, as it poses a threat to human lives; and carries the potential to destabilise our economy, at a delicate time when we are trying to recover from the severe damage caused by the COVID – 19 pandemic. The current situation has a huge potential to undermine our advance in battling the delta variant of the Covid-19 which is increasing at an uncontrollable rate across the entire province.

His Excellency the President summed it up when he stated in his address last night that **“law-abiding citizens have been threatened and intimidated, workers are scared that they may not be able to return to work. People have died”**.

## **CASUALTIES TO DATE**

These episodes of violence are inflicting many lasting scars. The latest fatalities confirmed by the Security Cluster in KwaZulu-Natal as of this morning stands at 26. These were people that were killed during stampedes as protesters ran riot in areas including Umlazi, KwaMashu, Inanda, Phoenix, uMgungundlovu and northern KwaZulu-Natal. As of last night, law-enforcement agencies had arrested 187 suspects.

## **IMPACT OF THE CURRENT CRISIS (ECONOMICALLY AND SOCIALLY)**

This crisis has reminded us of the painful and the ugly scars of violence that took place in the 90s. We must all work hard to prevent our province from descending into the dark days of our violent past.

The violent protests have had a negative impact on the economy of the province. This is largely because the protests have targeted key economic centres and infrastructure including shopping malls, trucks and major arterial routes such as the N2 and the N3.

More significantly, this violent has crippled our small and emerging businesses. Hawkers cannot sell because cities are shutdown, our fellow sisters and brothers in the taxi industry stand to lose their vehicles due to repossession by banks. Workers are losing work because industries and places of work are not operational.

The sectors severely impacted include the freight and the retail industries. However, other sectors were not spared. Many companies had to suspend their operations due to the inability to transport its material and stock. These incidents have the potential to dampen investor confidence and also derail our economic recovery efforts. The social costs of the damage might come in a form of increased unemployment and poverty in years to come.

While we are still collating the information relating to the cost of the protests, we estimate that the destruction to both private and public infrastructure will amount to not less than R1 Billion and that is a very conservative estimate.

## **IMPACT ON HEALTHCARE SERVICE DELIVERY**

One of the sectors that have been hardest-hit by the civil unrest has been healthcare, both in the public and private sectors.

The blockading of key infrastructure as well as provincial and local routes has made public mobility difficult. Many hospital staff who were working during night shift last night were unable to travel.

Matters have also been worsened by the non-availability of public transport. This must be understood clearly that the public transport has decided to stop its operations because they are fearful that their vehicles will be damaged.

As a result of all of this, a number of hospitals, Community Health Centres and clinics across KwaZulu-Natal have been operating on skeletal staff, with many nurses, doctors, allied health workers and support staff, including general staff workers, unable to report for work.

Some clinics have had to be closed as a result of the unrest. Many hospitals with trauma cases are unable to undergo important operational interventions such as X-Rays, and others.

It is extremely concerning that in some instances, the protesters stopped vehicles from delivering much-needed oxygen that was intended for use by patients battling COVID – 19 and other ailments.

In Howick, an ambulance was burnt, while another was attacked with rocks in Mariannhill.

The protests have all but put a stop to the province's all-important COVID – 19 vaccination programme.

We urge everyone to know that no matter what the circumstances, they should never, ever disrupt the functioning of hospitals and clinics. Our people are still sick. Our people are still getting injured. Our pregnant women still need to be admitted for Ante-Natal Care and birth delivery. They all need to be attended to by healthcare professionals; or be referred to higher-level institutions, due to complications that need specialist care in some cases. With the blockades, we might start losing lives unnecessarily. We are appealing to the collective conscience of all of those who are trying to render our Province ungovernable to desist from what they are doing, in order to avert unnecessary loss of lives.

### **IMPACT ON THE LOCAL GOVERNMENT SECTOR**

Most municipalities within the province have been adversely affected. The delivery of services has also been halted. Due to the continuing unrest maintenance and infrastructure repair teams are unable to get to areas that require such services. The sporadic outbreaks of violence have also hindered the delivery of basic services such as waste removal, provision of water through water tankers in water scarce communities. The torching of municipal assets such as the Disaster Management offices in uMtubatuba, and water tankers in the Ugu District which has long been battling with the provision of water is set to have a devastating impact. eThekweni metro had to cease rendering certain services such as busses in the interest of protecting workers, commuters and assets during this volatile situation. Other municipalities had to halt the collection of waste in their areas while most call centers cannot operate as workers cannot get to work for fear of their lives.

### **KZN GOVERNMENT ACTION IN MANAGING THE CURRENT CRISIS**

As KwaZulu-Natal, we are hard at work to ensure that we stop this situation. Yesterday, we convened a special Executive Council Meeting; where the Justice, Crime, Prevention and Security Cluster under the leadership of the MEC for Transport, Community Safety and Liaison, Neliswa Peggy Nkonyeni presented a detailed plan that seeks to address the current situation. We also convened and have had consultations with the KZN Economic Council and that consultation was attended by CEOs and representatives of major companies and on top of that there were even representatives of labour unions and civil society. We further engaged with the leadership of SANTACO in KwaZulu-Natal. These meetings took stock of the situation. The recommendations made by all partners will form part of our comprehensive response to the protests. We are continuing with engagements especially today we will have engagements with traditional leaders, religious leaders and diplomatic corps.

We will be intensifying engagements with community structures on the ground. As the Provincial Government, we have directed that all Municipalities must operationalise Operation Sukuma Sakhe to identify risk and threats in their areas and report those before they even happen. We also activated co-ordination at district levels where our Mayors and Councillors will work with all stakeholders and assist law enforcement agencies to attend to threats, protests that are engulfing our areas. We have also activated all our operation Sukuma Sakhe structures to engage at a local level with all structures to listen to people's concerns. We are a listening government after all. We are also ensuring that all MECs are on the ground working with their respective Mayors and stakeholders in all districts where they are champions to identify areas that have threats and ensure that those areas are addressed.

## **DEPLOYMENT OF THE DEFENCE FORCE**

The deployment of the South African National Defence Force came as a result of engagements within the security cluster but also seeing the obtaining conditions and events unfolding in various wards. Therefore, the deployments announced last night by President Ramaphosa had been taken through the consultation with the South African National Defence Force as well as the Provincial Operation where all law enforcement agencies are co-ordinated.

The SANDF will work in support of the SAPS. Their deployment will be supported by the Intelligence Coordinating Committee which includes Crime Intelligence, Defence Intelligence and State Security.

These forces will be part of our multi-disciplinary Law Enforcement Strategy to quell the unrest and attempts to render the province ungovernable.

This will enable our law enforcement authorities to counter these sporadic, yet well-orchestrated and violent protests.

In this regard, we are assured as the NATJOINTS as well as PROVJOINTS have intensified deployments in all areas affected by violent protests, and this will be done to arrest the damage to property and stop looting of shops that we have seen.

The South African National Defence Force together with law enforcement authorities will be manning all key economic centres, highways and strategic areas that lead to hospitals, the Port of Durban and other national key points.

We commend law enforcement agencies for the work done so far. A multi-pronged response plan has been developed and is being implemented by law enforcement agencies.

We call for adherence to the law. Whoever is found to be in possession of stolen goods will have to face the full might of the law.

## **LET US RESPECT THE TEACHINGS OF UMSHOLOZI – HIS NAME IS SYNONYMOUS WITH PEACE**

This province has great respect for the contribution of our former President Comrade Jacob Zuma. He has made a contribution to promote peace and reconciliation in our province and in the country. We cannot, and should not, within a matter of days, destroy that legacy which our former President fought and sacrificed so hard for. We are therefore appealing to all of you, our beloved fellow citizens of our Province to give space to the interventions proposed by government to bring peace to the province.

We understand that the calls for the release of former President Jacob Zuma from his current incarceration in Estcourt as the main cause of these disturbances. What may have begun as an understandable cause, supported by many, has now degenerated into criminality.

Former President Jacob Zuma worked hard for our province and our country especially for those people who were marginalised, to enter the mainstream and be integrated into the mainstream of the economy. Today, such small entrepreneurs are suffocated by these violent acts.

We can have a productive process of engagement outside of violence, and outside of the pain that we are seeing. This destruction cannot provide a solution to the problem we are facing. This destruction can however end. It must end. Let us end this self-destruction that we are going through.

We are aware that communities in fear of being invaded have organised themselves into community watch groups. Around the province armed groups are manning neighbourhood roadblocks to regulate movement into and out of their areas. Our duty as government is for our law enforcement agencies to support these groups and ensure that they work with them in ensuring that those groups work within the ambit of the law. Communities have a right to defend themselves but we must guard against racializing our society through these structures. We cannot waste time. We must work together to make our contribution. We must use this time to work together to resolve these challenges including racial polarisation.

I speak today, to all of you as a Black African but one who values the contributions of others. Therefore, I speak as an African, and I know we have compatriots who are White, Indian and Coloureds, who are very, very supportive of the cause of stability and prosperity of all our people. Therefore, we should speak as one – as South Africans. Now is the time for all of us to seek ways to unite all South Africans within KwaZulu-Natal as our home.

For all sides this is a time for cool heads and to refrain from using language that provokes hatred and racial intolerance among us as this militates against the spirit of unity and social cohesion. We are soliciting the support of all stakeholders to persuade citizens to bring back peace and calm in the province.

## **FAKE NEWS**

We have also witnessed a lot of fake news making rounds on social media. One example of this were the videos of a damaged fence at the Hluhluwe, IMfolozi Park. The messages accompanying those videos and images were that wild animals had been let loose at the park. However this is untrue.

## **ATTACKS ON JOURNALISTS**

We equally want to condemn the attacks on journalists. We have seen disturbing sights of cars and journalists under attack. Journalists are doing their jobs in keeping with their role to bring to national attention matters of public interest and they need our protection. We ask that people desist from interfering with journalists in the line of duty and understand the critical role a free press plays in the democracy and in educating us about what is happening.

## **CONDOLENCES TO NGUBANE AND ZUMA FAMILIES**

Once again, we pay tribute to our former Premier, Dr Ben Ngubane who passed away in the early hours of yesterday. We send our condolences to his family.

The passing of Dr Ngubane came just hours after the sad demise yesterday, of Mr Michael Zuma, who was the younger brother to former President Jacob Zuma.

We send our deepest condolences to both the Ngubane and Zuma families.

May the Lord Almighty cover them with His grace and grant them the strength and courage to deal with their respective losses.

## **I Thank You**