

**STATEMENT BY THE PREMIER OF THE PROVINCE OF KWAZULU-NATAL
DR Z.L. MKHIZE
HUMAN RIGHTS DAY – HELD IN HOWICK AT LIONS RIVER SPORTSFIELD
(NEAR MANDELA CAPTURE SITE)
21 MARCH 2010**

Master of ceremonies
Colleagues in the Executive;
Honourable Members of the Legislature;
Mayors present;
Councilors;
Amakhosi;
Distinguished guests;
Ladies and Gentlemen;

Fellow citizens

Let me start by acknowledging all our honoured guests who are here today and the people of KwaZulu-Natal who are commemorating the most memorable epoch in our struggle for freedom.

We are meeting here after visiting a site where former President Nelson Mandela was captured.

As government, we want to market Howick as one of the strategic liberation routes in order to stimulate local economic development. More importantly we want to use this route for political education - teaching our children our history.

We must preserve our history and heritage, lest we forget the oppression, the pain, the suffering, the bloodshed, the sacrifice and the dedication to service to mankind.

That is the foundation upon which our democracy is founded.

The most significant thing is that we are gathered to remember thousands of people who converged in different venues across South Africa on this day in 1960 to demonstrate, peacefully, their opposition to the legislation which was designed to restrict the movement of the African people in their country of birth.

Pass laws subjected African people to the worst form of humiliation and discrimination and literally put the lives of Africans in the hands of the apartheid police who disregarded human rights.

It is important to recall that the peaceful demonstrations against pass laws underpinned the struggle for human rights and had been used in various instances by all progressive forces who opposed the apartheid regime.

These demonstrations included the workers' strike in 1918, a women's anti-pass campaign organised by the Bantu Women's League, and pass-burning campaigns organised during the 1930s by the Communist party and trade unions.

Resistance to the pass laws intensified during the 1950s, and various protests took place further uniting the people of Africa against a common enemy – the apartheid regime.

Despite the brutality of the regime, thousands of innocent women joined in these peaceful demonstrations, determined to ensure that one day Africans would have a freedom of movement, the right of choice of residence and the right of freedom to purchase land or fixed property from anywhere.

The women's march to the Union Buildings in August 1956, which is now commemorated each year as Women's Day was a precursor to the anti-pass campaign that culminated in the Sharpeville Massacre.

On this day, thousands of heroines and heroes sacrificed all what they had and marched to the police stations and demanded to be arrested in an attempt to fill up prisons, leaving the apartheid government with no choice but to scrap the pass laws.

In the true fashion of brutality, the apartheid police force opened fire, indiscriminately leaving 69 people dead and 180 injured. While the country was still in mourning, few days later, the apartheid government declared a state of emergency detaining more than 18 000 people.

Liberation movements were also banned in an attempt to discourage the people of South Africa from demanding what belonged to them, their human rights.

This however ignited an unprecedented wave of protests and anti apartheid activities - amongst others: the start of an armed struggle in response to the apartheid machinery which was being unleashed against unarmed and innocent people.

Nelson Mandela is one of leaders who led this popular struggle with so much discipline and dedication until his arrest.

It is a poignant moment for us as the people of KwaZulu-Natal that we are gathered here in the area in which he enjoyed his last days of freedom.

As we reflect on his journey, we heartily remember that during the International Human Rights Day on the 10th December 1996, Nelson Mandela signed our new Constitution in Sharpeville effectively ushering in the new South African society based on democratic values, social justice and fundamental human rights.

The preamble of our constitution states amongst others that:

"We, the people of South Africa,
Recognise the injustices of our past;
Honour those who suffered for justice and freedom in our land;
Respect those who have worked to build and develop our country;
And believe that South Africa belongs to all who live in it, united in our diversity.

The Constitution itself asserts that: "The Republic of South Africa is one, sovereign, democratic state founded on the following values: Human dignity, the achievement of equality and the advancement of human rights and freedoms."

Clearly, we should celebrate this day with dignity in honour of the forebears of our democracy.

We should salute Chief Albert Luthuli, Moses Kotane, Robert Sobukwe, Dr Xuma, Dr Monty Naicker, Dr Yusuf Dadoo, Joe Slovo, Ahmed Kathrada and many other heroes and heroines.

We remain indebted and inspired by their selfless struggle for a peaceful, united, non-racial, non-sexist and prosperous democratic society.

Drawing from their seasoned and exemplary leadership, we commit this government to creating an equal society where values identified in the country's constitution are enjoyed by all.

Central to this commitment is the acknowledgement that human rights cannot be separated from social and economic rights.

Whilst the democratic government has made progress in terms of addressing huge socio-economic inequalities resulting from decades of apartheid, there is a need to accelerate the provision of basic services to our people.

We have to ensure that many of our people especially those living in rural areas have access to water and electricity.

Water and electricity are basic needs for human life. This basically, means that in all activities undertaken for socio-economic development water and electricity plays a major role.

Adequate access to infrastructure such as housing, roads and bridges will complete this democracy but on the other hand, the limited access to this infrastructure means that for many people of our country, democracy will remain shallow.

The transformation of our country and the enactment of enabling legislations for service delivery since we achieved democracy have been focused on ensuring that we create a better life for all.

As a developmental state we are committed to ensure the participation of ordinary people of this country to better their lives. This is what democracy is all about – enabling the populace to determine what services they want and giving each and every member of the community the opportunity to participate in monitoring the delivery of such services.

As we commemorate this day we called upon all the people of this province to join hands with government to strengthen our programmes in order to steer this province in the right direction.

Working with one heart and one mind: “Let’s Build a Better Future Together.”

Let’s work together to deal with the challenge of HIV and AIDS and TB. Whilst government has unveiled measures aimed at expanding the availability of Anti-Retroviral Treatment (ARV), combining treatment for TB and ARV’s in one facility and increasing the CD4 count for treatment initiation from 250 to 350, members of the society must play an active role.

Those who are affected must not be discriminated but must be given love and compassion. We must all participate in government’s programme aimed at ensuring behavioral change and we must all be responsible and live a healthy lifestyle.

As we commemorate this day, we need to detest incidences of crime. Crime has become the biggest threat to our human rights since the demise of apartheid.

As government we reiterate our respect for the rights of citizens to live in a crime free society.

Last year government launched a United Front Against Crime an initiative which seeks to ensure the integration and coordination of efforts of stakeholders from education, economic development, social development, health, home affairs, police and criminal justice departments including municipalities.

Because crime occurs in our communities and it is vital that as the society we must be integrally involved in the campaign to create safer neighborhoods.

We are strengthening the participation of civil society in this campaign: churches against crime, business against crime, street committees and neighborhood watch groups.

If crime is allowed to prevail, the provision of quality education to our children will be impossible. Students won't be able to attend extra classes at the weekend or in the afternoon when criminals who are known by the community are allowed to terrorize learners and teachers.

When we discuss issues around service delivery we should not forget that whilst in pursuit of its functions, the public service in a democratic country such as ours needs to display certain features. These include a general sense of sensitivity to the needs of customers of the public service.

Clearly as government we are committed to developing a new public service that is imbued with a strong, ethical and professional orientation. At all times public servants must be reliable, responsive and show courtesy when rendering public services.

One issue which stands out for me as I conclude my address is cultural tolerance. The inability to see the value of our rich cultures and diversity is a challenge which we need to resolve together.

The essence of the struggle for liberation was to ensure that "all people shall have equal right to use their own languages, and to develop their own folk culture and customs."

Our constitution was designed specifically to protect all cultures and customs practiced by our people even minority communities.

Government will continue to ensure that many people from different communities participate in activities that are aimed at celebrating our culture and our heritage.

Establishing an environment in which people can truly live together in peace is the responsibility of all the people of this province.

I thank you,

Issued by the Office of the Premier

Enquiries:

Ndabezinhle Sibiyi
Premier's Spokesperson
082 3754742
ndabezinhlesibiyi@yahoo.com or
sibiyand@premier.kzntl.gov.za

Premier's Media Desk:

Regi Khumalo
Media Liaison
0797516108 or regi.khumalo@yahoo.com