**KEYNOTE ADDRESS BY HONOURABLE PREMIER THAMSANQA NTULI ON THE OCCASION OF LAW ENFORCEMENT PARADE, LAUNCH OF MEN’S MONTH ON 1 JULY 2024 IN ETHEKWINI METROPOLITAN MUNICIPALITY**

Programme Director: Bishop Bhekimpi Mchunu – eThekwini Men’s Forum Chairperson;

Deputy Mayor Cllr. Zandile Myeni

Director-General, Dr Nonhlanhla Mkhize;

Lieutenant General Nhlanhla Mkhwanazi;

Regional Commander Zibuse Ngcece;

Commissioner Sbonelo Mchunu;

Regional Commander Thabani Mthembu;

Captain Jingxi;

Bishop Thabani Khumalo – eThekwini Men’s Forum Deputy Chairperson;

Mr Lindani Sicwala – Deputy Head – CPASU;

Mr. Sanele Nxumalo;

Distinguished Guests;

Ladies and Gentlemen

I am honoured to address such an important event, which is part of the all-important fight against gender-based violence and femicide.

I know of no culture, religion, or creed that does not place on men the responsibility to protect women and children. It is, therefore, very shameful that the scourge of gender-based violence and femicide has reached dizzying proportions in our country.

According to statistics released last year, in the KZN Province, Inanda is leading in terms of gender-based violence-related crimes, having recorded **641** cases in the period of April 2022 to March 2023.

These cases include rape, sexual assault, assault with a purpose to inflict grievous bodily harm, attempted murder, common assault, and murder.

According to the same report, the top 30 police stations in the province recorded **10 442** cases of GBV-related crimes. Inanda’s figure represents 6.14 per cent of the top 30 police stations. Of the top 30 police stations (with the highest number of such cases), 12 fall within the eThekwini jurisdiction. Regarding the number of cases in the province, the eThekwini police stations account for 10.91 per cent.

The attributes that God gave to men, such as masculinity, are not meant to exert suffering on women. They are intended to provide safety and security. Even in war, since time immemorial, hurting women and children has always been seriously frowned upon.

Men who attack women have always been regarded as cowards. Even in rites of passage, conceptually, boys are taught to respect women. If this is no longer happening, those rites of passage violate tradition.

Therefore, it is shocking that we have a high prevalence of toxic masculinity. There is general consensus in all platforms – be they social, political or socio-economic – that ridding our society of the scourge of gender-based violence depends substantially on us men changing our behaviour.

Programme director, no one is born a man. We are born male children who have to be appropriately socialised to grow up to become the kind of men that society needs. Men who love and respect women. Men who protect women. Men who take their role in society seriously. Men who ensure that they do not abuse any leadership that they are given.

Programme director, what also leads to high levels of gender-based violence are ignorance, myths, fallacies, and falsehoods.

It is a major fallacy that men are made for leadership. Those men who believe this nonsense are likely to unnecessarily feel emasculated by the mere occupation of leadership positions by women.

History is replete with examples of how capable women are. From Zulu Queen Mthaniya, who ruled for several years (contrary to a false narrative), Mkabayi KaJama, Winnie Nomzamo Mandela to former Speaker of Parliament Frene Ginwala, women have acquitted themselves very well. Please tell your boys about these women so that they do not look on women in general.

In order to have the kind of men I have just mentioned, we need to teach our male children that women are:

1. Not their maids;

2. Not their toys;

3. Not their punching bags;

4. Their equal partners;

Furthermore, programme director, we must teach our children that washing dishes and clothes; cleaning the house, and cooking are not gender roles but life skills. While such an approach is essential for our male children’s own development and readiness for the future, it also ensures that as they grow and meet women, they do not attempt to relegate them to their servants.

Expectations are responsible for violent behaviour, especially against women. Men who grow up being taught that women are their servants are more likely to use their power or authority to demand sexual favours from women, in abuse of office. When women baulk at these demands, a badly raised man can easily resort to rape because he can’t believe that this “creature” that is meant to serve him is turning him down. We must teach our boys that girls or women do not owe them anything.

Programme director, over and above the men’s general responsibility to protect women, men in uniform have a unique role to play. That special role stems from the fact that a distressed woman gains hope when she sees a man in uniform. She sees a saviour and a protector. Abused women look up to men in uniform for relief, be it medical, psychological or legal. They rightly expect justice from those charged with healing and protection.

When a woman is a victim of domestic violence, she relies on the paramedic in specific cases and the police, who are expecting to make arrests and to process and effect protect orders.

According to Human Rights Watch, domestic violence is the most common form of gender-based violence among partners. Domestic violence refers to forms of abuse, which include physical abuse; emotional, verbal and psychological abuse; economic abuse; intimidation; harassment; stalking; property damage; and so on. When these women walk or, sometimes sadly, crawl into police stations, they expect justice and healing. They do not expect negotiations to be brokered by police officers. They do not expect judgment when wearing revealing clothes. They do not expect lethargy and indifference.

Thus, programme director, it warms my heart to see men, particularly those in uniform, taking a stand. By taking a stand, men in uniform send a message that over and above protecting women from society, our sisters, daughters and mothers in the uniformed forces are also safe. It means that where they serve, they have their colleagues as protectors.

Programme director, when I was sworn into the noble task of being Premier of KwaZulu-Natal, I announced that I was moving the Safety and Security function to the Office of the Premier; that is how serious I am about the safety and security of the people of this province.

This will allow me to consolidate the human rights function in the Office of the Premier with the resources and plans that the former Department of Community Safety and Liaison had, specifically for the fight against gender-based violence and femicide.

Seeing the cooperation today among different entities and organisations gives me hope that the noble fight against this scourge will succeed. I call on all non-governmental organisations, various state bodies, religious bodies, cultural organisations and individuals to continue cooperating.

Through various platforms, the KwaZulu-Natal Provincial Government is committed to working with all stakeholders to fight gender-based violence. These stakeholders include men’s organisations. I hope, programme director, that the men’s organisations are not boys’ clubs who are averse to sharing perspectives with women. I do believe that by forming themselves into the gender entities that they are, the men’s organisations are not suggesting that they are the authority on the subject. I believe it is an act of taking responsibility for an abomination that must be wiped out.

If the men’s organisations subscribe to the notion that they have a significant contribution to make in this fight, not to dictate to women how they should react to abuse, as we believe they do, the Provincial Government will not hesitate to work with them.

No society can thrive when an entire section of that society lives in constant fear and is abused in any form. It is important to note that gender-based violence is not only physical, as I mentioned earlier. It is also economic and psychological.

Programme director, the hallmark of this Administration is that there should not be talk shops and ticking the boxes. This Administration will follow up on the declarations made in activations such as this one. Equally, we expect our partners, like men's organisations, to follow up on the commitments we make. Social accountability is a value to which we strongly subscribe.

I wish to state here and now that those who believe that they are superior to women are not only hallucinating, but they are also in a collision with the Administration I lead.

**JULY IS MEN’S MONTH**

As we enter the month of July, we come together to recognize and celebrate Men’s Month.  This initiative holds a significant relevance for our province, as it focuses on raising awareness about the health challenges confronting men and advocates for early detection and treatment of diseases.

Today, I stand before you to outline the programmes and initiatives that KwaZulu-Natal has earmarked to commemorate this important occasion.

Our government is committed to promoting preventive healthcare. Throughout July, we will organize health screenings across the province. These screenings will cover essential aspects of men’s health, including blood pressure, cholesterol levels, diabetes, and prostate health.

We will collaborate with local clinics, community centres, and workplaces to ensure that men have easy access to these screenings. Our awareness campaigns will emphasize the importance of regular check-ups and early intervention.

**Mental Health Support:**

Mental health is a critical component of overall well-being. We recognize that men often face unique challenges in seeking help for mental health issues. Therefore, we will launch targeted campaigns to destigmatize mental health discussions.

Our province will expand counselling services, helplines, and support groups specifically tailored for men. We encourage men to reach out, share their struggles, and seek professional assistance when needed.

**Physical Fitness and Active Lifestyle:**

Physical activity plays a vital role in preventing health problems. We will promote physical fitness through community events, sports programs, and recreational activities.

Let us encourage our men to engage in regular exercise, whether it’s walking, jogging, or participating in team sports. A healthy body contributes to a healthy mind.

**Nutrition and Healthy Eating:**

Proper nutrition is the cornerstone of good health. Our province will collaborate with schools, workplaces, and local markets to raise awareness about balanced diets.

We aim to provide practical guidance on healthy eating, emphasizing the importance of fruits, vegetables, whole grains, and lean proteins.

**Fatherhood and Family Support:**

Men play a crucial role in families and communities. We will celebrate responsible fatherhood and encourage positive parenting practices.

Workshops, seminars, and parenting classes will equip fathers with essential skills to support their children’s emotional and physical development.

In conclusion, let us use this Men’s Month as an opportunity to prioritize our health, break down barriers, and foster a culture of well-being. Together, we can create a healthier, happier KwaZulu-Natal for all its citizens.

I thank you.