

Opening address by Ms Refilwe Mongale, Chief Strategy Officer, Road Traffic Management Corporation, at the Inaugural General Assembly of Africa Road Safety Observatory held in Durban, South Africa

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Acknowledgements:

Mr Ben Eijbergen, Practice Manager, East Africa, Transport Global Practice, World Bank Group.

Ms Zoleka Mandela, our International Road Safety Advocate, the granddaughter to an icon of our struggle for freedom, Mama Winnie Mandela. There is a popular saying in our country that Mama Winnie Mandela has not died, she has multiplied, in Mme Zoleka Mandela we can see that indeed she is alive in us.

Mr David Kajange, Head of Transport, Energy and Infrastructure Division of the African Union.

Ms Doris Ma Fat, the World Health Organisation representative.

Mr Soames Job, Global Lead Road Safety and Head of the Global Road Safety Facility, Transport Global Practice, World Bank Group.

Mr Girma BEZABEH, Road Safety Lead, African Development Bank.

Members of the Africa Road Safety Observatory Transitional Steering Committee.

Sincere greetings are also extended to delegation in the room from various institutions representing the counties of our beautiful continent, Ladies and gentlemen, good morning, dumelang, sanibonani, jambo

It is a special honour and privilege for to extend a warm welcome to all of you to the First General Assembly of Africa Road Safety Observatory.

This assembly takes place in KwaZulu Natal, popularly known as the Kingdom of the Zulu. It would interest you to know that it was in Durban, the third biggest city in South

Africa, where our liberation icon President Nelson Mandela cast his first vote in April 1994.

It was also in this very province that Nelson Mandela was arrested before he was sent to prison for 27 years. I sincerely hope that you will find time to visit his capture site at Howick. This is also the province where Africa's Nobel peace prize winner Chief Albert Luthuli lived and died. We are in the land of gallant liberation fighters and we hope that we will take inspiration in a battle to improve road safety in our continent.

Our lead agency on road safety, the Road Traffic Management Corporation (RTMC), the Corporation is an important institution in our young democracy, with the key task of:

- 1) Developing the national road safety strategy, we are currently implementing the National Road Safety Strategy 2030 which was approved by Cabinet in 2017;
- 2) Coordinating road safety and law enforcement intervention based on the tools developed by ourselves such as hazardous area studies; and
- 3) Research and Development amongst other key areas of delivery.

All the above functions can only be meaningful if they are based on the production of reliable data; therefore, the management of road traffic information is the bedrock of our business, it guides our interventions and is a precondition for driving the rest of the functions that we perform. Our road traffic information is a national resource.

In the course of executing our duties, we are confronted by various challenges, we must be frank and say it outright that the role of a lead agency is complicated, dependent on various players, necessitating the patience to develop a common vision. Sustainable partnerships take time to mature. We regard your presence here as a significant step towards cementing a sound partnership in the development of road safety interventions.

Our other challenge relates to funding for road safety, implementation of safe infrastructure that is multi modal, sustainable and safe must be weighed against other socio-economic priorities. There are never enough resources. Given the financial reality before us, it is better to employ whatever useful resources at our disposal prudently and wisely, by developing customised and impactful solutions that our people can own and where we are able to measure results.

Linked to the Africa Road safety Charter, this meeting should also assist us to contribute towards the attainment of the vision espoused in the Africa Agenda 2063. This 50-year vision for the continent necessitates some reflection from ourselves. 44 years might seem to be a lifetime away, however, what we bequeath to the ones after us is important if we are to realise the aspirations of the Agenda:

Aspiration 1: A prosperous Afrika based on inclusive growth and sustainable development

It is self-evident that we are not going to meet the target of halving road fatalities by 50% by 2020. In our country, 14 000 people lose their lives and many more are injured annually. We always emphasise deliberately that these are not just numbers: It is people who come from families, youth with big dreams, breadwinners in families and when lives are lost and people injured in this manner, society is worse off. In our study of Cost of Crashes in South Africa, we estimated that the economy lost R142 billion in 2015 as a result of road crashes. This loss of life and resources perpetuates poverty, worsening the already prevalent inequality in our society which is known to be the most unequal in the world.

Aspiration 2: An integrated continent, politically united, based on the ideals of Pan Afrikanism

We believe that the spirit of this gathering speaks directly to this aspiration. We must strive to use the opportunities provided by this platform to foster common objectives

in pursuit of sustainability by sharing knowledge amongst ourselves as Afrikan countries.

Aspiration 3: An Africa of good governance, democracy, respect for human rights, justice and the rule of law

Establishing lead agencies promotes road safety management, it is essential that the agencies are given the powers to be able to make a difference by saving millions of lives, while at the same time ensuring that there is good governance in place to instil the necessary confidence from sectors of society. It would be remiss not to mention the prevalence of corruption as a threat to road safety, in our country corruption erodes the efforts of our interventions, and we are working tirelessly to change this culture. It is a work in progress and we call for Zero Tolerance.

Aspiration 4: A peaceful and secure Afrika

The collaboration between law enforcement agencies cannot be overemphasised, the administration of justice by punishing transgressors should contribute towards a change in behaviour towards safer roads.

Aspiration 5: An Afrika with a strong cultural identity, values and ethics

We call for advocacy for embracing Afrikan values such as Ubuntu, where we realise that we are bound by a common humanity and compassion, our coexistence is necessary for survival and prosperity. Ubuntu is a noble Afrikan value and that is what we should be inculcating in our communities in promotion of the right to life.

Aspiration 6: An Afrika where development is people driven relying on the potential of women and youth

Road deaths and injuries affect the youth the most, there should never be a solution without the participation of the youth. We have established the national youth structure to implement its own programmes.

We must continue to fight for the representation of women in structures of society including positions of authority when it comes to road safety management.

It is worth emphasizing that there should be nothing for the people without the people, including meaningful participation by women and youth.

Aspiration 7: Afrika as a strong and influential global player

We are not a dark continent; we are not a dark continent. We must make a meaningful contribution to the global goals, allow ourselves to be influenced and in turn also influence global developments.

In conclusion, we are compelled to invoke the words of a great son of Afrika, our former president of South Africa, Mr Thabo Mbeki had this to say about difficult times:

“Gloom and despondency have never defeated adversity. Trying times need courage and resilience. Our strength as a people is not tested during the best of times. We should never be despondent because the weather is bad, nor should we turn triumphalist because the sun shines”.

We dare not give up! This collaborative initiative that will emanate from this gathering will propel our continent to do better, to save lives, to learn and to grow, in the pursuit of making Afrikan roads safer.

The RTMC wishes you well in your deliberations and we equally look forward to the forging of mutually beneficially relations between all parties involved in this noble endeavour.

Aluta Continua, the struggle for safer roads continues.

I thank you. Ngiyabonga. Kea Leboha. Asante Sana.

Venceremos!!!