

**Address by the MEC for Economic Development and Tourism, Mr. Michael Mabuyakhulu, on the
occasion of the 20 Years of Freedom Gala Dinner held in Jozini**

28 March 2014

Programme Director;

The District Mayor of Umkhanyakude, His Worship Councillor Vilane;

The Mayor of Jozini Local Municipality, Councilor Mthethwa;

Your worships, the Mayors of the Umkhanyakude family of municipalities;

The Chairperson of the House of Traditional Leaders in Umkhanyakude, Inkosi Tembe;

The HOD Champion for Umkhanyakude, Dr Sishi;

Esteemed business leaders;

Veterans and stalwarts of our liberation struggle;

Families of veterans and stalwarts of our liberation struggle;

Ladies and gentlemen;

All protocol observed

It is our singular honour to be part of this momentous occasion in the life of our fledgling democracy. Indeed our gratitude goes to all of you who, at relatively short notice, responded positively to our invitation to celebrate a critical milestone not only for our district and the province of KwaZulu-Natal but the entirety of our country, South Africa.

As we are all aware, from the ruins of our sad past, our country has risen like the proverbial Phoenix to become one of the world's highly-regarded progressive and democratic countries. This year, friends and compatriots, our country is celebrating twenty years since the democratic breakthrough in 1994. This is a milestone that may seem innocuous to some who did not experience the humiliation and atrocities of

our collective past, but, to us, this milestone is a reason for humungous celebrations because there were times, in the not-so-distant past, when we thought we would not live to see the realization of a dream of a free South Africa. Hence, we are meeting in this beautiful district municipality this evening, to observe a once-in-a-lifetime in our political for, after this year, South Africa will never again observe the celebration of twenty years of freedom.

Programme Director, one novelist once remarked that time was like a flowing river. You can cross a river for so many times but you can wade through the same water for only once. This is why this occasion is so important because a nation as young as ours can only be 20 years for once in its existence. Therefore, this milestone should not only be cherishing but it becomes even more poignant when one looks at the odds which we have overcome in order as a country to reach where we are.

Friends and compatriots, while the scars of our collective past may be receding into faint memories, the reality is that our freedom was hard won. It is probably human nature to gloss over one's travails and tribulations when one sits down to reflect about the path that one has travelled. While it is good not to dwell on the past, it is important to draw lessons from one's past so that past mistakes and their ramifications do not threaten the future. It is in this regard that we have gathered here this evening to celebrate our collective leap while reminding one another of the work that still needs to be done to build a South Africa of our dreams.

Compatriots, it was the idea of the Executive Council of KwaZulu-Natal that, rather than having individuals celebrating this milestone, there needed to be a coherent and inclusive 20 year celebration programme to ensure that all citizens of our province, irrespective of their geographical location, should participate in these celebrations. To this end, we conceived of a programme that, while celebrating the twenty years of freedom, would strengthen the pillars of our democracy including social cohesion, reconciliation and drawing all of us towards the vision of creating a society characterized by equality, prosperity and stability.

As district champion for the District of Umkhanyakude, we were given an opportunity to craft a programme that would reflect the aspirations of the people of our district as well as the rest of the province of KwaZulu-Natal. Working together with all role-players, we believe we have crafted a programme that is a physical expression of all that we have done and also what we aim to achieve in future. At the core of this programme has been the visit of the Freedom Flame to all district municipalities in our province including the metro. The Freedom Flame is a symbol of the hope and

confidence that all of us have in our freedom and its ability to transform our lives. The Flame also reminds us that this hard-won freedom is fragile and, just like a flickering light, it needs to be shielded from all sorts of winds that might threaten it. Therefore, the Freedom Flame is both a celebration of what we have achieved over the past twenty years but also a reminder that we have a responsibility to safeguard that which we have struggled for.

Compatriots, over the next three days we will crisscross this district with the Freedom Flame. As part of our programme, we will showcase tangible successes that this democratic government has recorded in a very short space of time. We will also show how, working together with all of our social partners, we have been able to give our freedom physical expression seen through the manner in which our people's lives, even in this district, have improved. Over the next three days we will engage with a variety of stakeholders to talk frankly and openly about what it is that we need to do, to get our district; our province and our country on a growth path. Over the coming days, we will re-assess our performance and seek to draw new vigour in order to tackle the challenges afflicting our province.

Yet, for this evening we want to talk about two issues. This evening we, again, want to invite all social partners, particularly business, to play their different roles in building a country of our dreams. It is a fact, friends and compatriots, that our past had created a state of subliminal mistrust among all social partners because of the roles that our past sought to apportion to each one of us. It is a fact that, in the past, the relationship, for example, between a trade unionist and business person, was characterized by mutual mistrust. Yet, upon closer inspection, even those conceptions about each other's intentions were proven untrue. It is a universal fact that the initial talks about resolving the untenable South African situation were initiated by businesspeople with the then-banned African National Congress (ANC). It is also a fact that, when, on the eve of the democratic breakthrough, there were voices that sought to instill fear in our business sector, our social partners from this sector believed in the miracle that South Africa would become.

Yet, twenty years into democracy these social partners seem to be gradually retreating to their old shells. This evening's dinner is about government, speaking on behalf of the people who elected us into power, re-affirming to business that business has a huge role to play in building a country that all of us would be proud of. The challenge of unemployment, for example, is a challenge no single social partner can address. It needs all the social partners to deal with unemployment with business playing a critical role.

Over the past twenty years, we have enacted laws; introduced programmes and initiated campaigns that are aimed at making our country globally-competitive. More than any other social partner, it is business that stands to benefit the most as long as it works with other social partners. As we look towards twenty and more years of freedom in our country, we need a business sector which understands that South Africa is the beginning of any outward expansion and future growth. We also need a business sector that understands the role it has to play in forging a new society out of the ashes of our sad past. We need innovative and creative business who will engage robustly and frankly but, at all times, put the interests of our country first.

The second point we wanted to touch on, is the fight that we must wage against forgetting. Twenty years into democracy, some of us are tempted to think that this freedom was always there and that no one sacrificed for it. This thought is one that we must abolish from our minds. This freedom was fought for by men and women who could have decided to fold their arms and hope for the best. The forward trenches of our liberation struggle were occupied by women and men who were ordinary just like ourselves; who did not possess supernatural strength; women and men who were driven by their consciences to stand up for what is right.

As we recall these gallant yet ordinary women and men, we are reminded of the oft-quoted words of writer Martin Niemoller who, in promoting the spirit of solidarity and fight for human rights said:

First they came for the communists, and I did not speak out because I was not a communist;

Then they came for the socialists, and I did not speak out because I was not a socialist;

Then they came for the trade unionists, and I did not speak out because I was not a trade unionist;

Then they came for the Jews, and I did not speak out because I was not a Jew;

Then they came for me, and there was no one left to speak out for me”

Compatriots, those who stood up against oppression, like Niemoller, understood the universal fact that evil thrives when good men keep quiet. But as, Comrade President Nelson Mandela told us, they did not stand up because they had no fear but had learnt to conquer their fears and had trained their eyes on the prize that is our freedom.

This evening is about honouring those ordinary women and men in our district who conquered their fears and realized that their own lives were pointless if there was misery and strife around. This morning

we had the privilege of interacting with some of these gallant fighters in the Ingonini Border Cave. They regaled us with tales of inimitable bravery and sacrifice. Some of these heroes and heroines paid the ultimate prize for us to be free. As we all know, this district was a conduit for our freedom fighters coming into and leaving our country for training and military missions. As such, it was under the constant watch of those who did not want us to be free. Yet, as we buried one hero of our struggle, another one emerged. Surely this gallantry and persistence in the face of death deserves to be recognized. This evening we will do exactly that.

Yet, we must hasten to add that as we honour these heroes and heroines, many more remain unrecognized. We have a duty, all of us, to seek these martyrs and honour them because we would not be enjoying this twentieth anniversary of our freedom were it not because of their valour.

Compatriots, this is indeed an exceptional evening to honour exceptional men and women of this district and to remind us of the tasks at hand. As we honour those who were manning the forward trenches of our struggle we must always remember that as, Franz Fanon, once said, every generation has its mission. The heroes and heroines we are honouring today have completed their mission to deliver to us a South Africa that is free and that has taken its pride of place in the family of other nations.

The question that we need to ask is that what is the mission of our generation in the context of the second phase of our revolution. It would be a sad indictment on us as this generation if all this bravery that has been evinced by these struggle stalwarts were to dissipate into thin air because we have failed to jealously guard the gains of this revolution.

We must consider ourselves lucky that while these heroes and heroes had to face the might of the apartheid regime, armed with nothing but the burning desire to free this country from the clutches of oppression, our struggle, by comparison, is to ensure that in this district of Mkhanyakude, for example, everyone has access to water, electricity and all the basic services and that this district becomes a citadel of economic development. But more importantly, we must always remember that we are the inheritors of the intangible gift of freedom whose value is not only incalculable, but which is priceless. It is my singular honour to call those on stage whom we will honour tonight.