

SPEAKING NOTES FOR HONOURABLE MEC FOR ARTS AND CULTURE, SPORT AND RECREATION AT THE FIRST INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE ON INDIGENOUS KNOWLEDGE SYSTEMS AND ENVIRONMENTAL ETHICS ON 28 APRIL 2015

Chairperson and Organisers of the Conference,
Vice-Chancellor,
Honourable Members of the KwaZulu-Natal Provincial Executive Council,
Distinguished Guests
Ladies and Gentlemen.

It is my honour to welcome all the delegates from outside our country and province to our beautiful land, which has made its own contribution to history in various areas of human endeavour. It is my honour to represent Premier Senzo Mchunu and the government of the Province of KwaZulu-Natal in this historic conference, which is seized with interrogation indigenous knowledge systems and their implications for peace-building and sustainable development. We would like to thank the organizers for bringing this important event to our province.

Yesterday April 27th, we marked 21 years of freedom and democracy in South Africa. It is a symbolic coming of age for our country as a democracy. We are mindful that this freedom was attained after years of struggle, which was spearheaded by the people of South Africa and supported by the people of goodwill around the world.

We are equally mindful that we have achieved this milestone, as a result of long years of struggle for freedom. This struggle was not only for civil liberties but equally, for us to be able to pursue human endeavour that recognises our indigenous knowledge as part of human civilisation. Like any society that came to be colonised, we also had our own indigenous knowledge that had come to shape our civilisation.

It is interesting and equally remarkable that we meet to explore the implications of peace-building and sustainable development, at a time when the narrative about Africa has in the past decade or so, changed dramatically. This evolution from a continent that has been known for famine, civil strifes and endless political instability and

conflict, to a frontier market that is reshaping its standing among the nations of the world, is a remarkable progress.

We have had several nations in our continent, holding peaceful elections to choose those who must govern. Granted, we still have pockets of challenges that have degenerated to armed conflicts leading to unnecessary losses of lives and displacement of people. This is a continent that had experienced no less than 30 wars since 1970 and mostly intrastate in origin. Today, the narrative is different. The story of Africa is no longer about aid, but about trade and investment.

Chairperson, Ladies and Gentlemen;

It is timely that you meet in our province at a time when we have just emerged from a period of global shame. All manner of civility was lost as violence was perpetuated against fellow human beings, simply because they happened to be immigrants. The importance of peace-building thus cannot be overemphasised as it ensures that any future prospects of conflict are minimised. In his 1992 report, "An Agenda for Peace," former UN Secretary-General Boutros Boutros-Ghali introduced the concept of peacebuilding and defined it as "action to identify and support structures, which will tend to strengthen and solidify peace in order to avoid a relapse into conflict."

We hope we will give meaning to this definition in the answers and programmes we will propose and adopt by the end of this conference. It is thus remarkable that we are discussing these important issues, at a time as a country we are engaged in a new conversation to find lasting solutions to our emerging challenge of intolerance.

In our country we always talk of Ubuntu, which is what we consider to be our defining value that simply says - I am because we are, and because we are, therefore I am. Because of this value, we have been able to draw from its characteristics in seeking to build a society that is at peace with itself.

Allow me to share with you some of our own lessons as a country. In South Africa, we adopted a system of governance where democratically elected leaders and institutions, co-exist with traditional leadership and institutions. We have traditional

councils who amongst other issues, preside over dispute at local level to arrive at peaceful settlement of such disputes. In the area of medicine, we have recognised and drawn to the mainstream through legislation, traditional healers as part and parcel of our health systems. We do this as recognition of the critical and equitable role and contribution that indigenous knowledge systems can play in the advancement of humanity.

The second area, I would like to locate my contribution to the theme of the conference within our provincial initiative of OPERATION SUKUMA SAKHE “***Let us stand up and build***”. The philosophical basis of SUKUMA SAKHE is building partnership among all sectors, public and private, with local communities using community-based knowledge systems, in promoting sustainable development including environmental preservation and protection.

This conference is in line with OPERATION SUKUMA SAKHE because it is about mobilising communities for environmental preservation and protection using their own ways of knowing, attitudes and value systems. It emphasizes the significance of community level engagement: This is central to democracy and development because without community engagement there is a distortion of the relevance of the developmental agenda and the meaning of democracy.

As an ethical value, the African indigenous understanding of the environment and hence human rights is the symbiotic relationship between the humans and other forms of life, i.e. the natural environment. The engagement communities through OPERATION SUKUMA SAKHE mitigates the mistake of alienating people from government initiatives and the private sector. It alienates people’s sovereignty by marginalizing their efforts and knowledge systems in their development process. Once people, in their respective communities, feel that they are part of the business of the state, they become inspired and ready to protect society, the state, their own resources and natural environment in general.

Therefore, OPERATION SUKUMA SAKHE brings all these aspects together, i.e. environment as a home and as a place work. The environment as a home gives people a sense of location, sense of belonging, creates a context for solidarity and identity.

OPERATION SUKUMA SAKHE is an institutional arrangement which provides people and the state the context for partnership to achieve these ethical values and principles. This is based on the realization that when communities recognize the importance of the environment, stand up together and accept collective responsibility to protect and preserve the environment, it creates the necessary conditions for sustainable development and livelihood including job creation and poverty eradication. It creates a balance between the environment as home, source of life and people themselves. The sense of shared risks and responsibility, also creates a sense of development as important element for democracy.

The responsibility of preserving and protecting their environment as a collective, creates a sense of security for the people and the state. South Africa has been struggling to find a comprehensive framework of integrating policy, legislation, institutional arrangements, rules and regulations across provinces and sectors and across borders. Environment knows no boundaries in terms of climate change patterns and their adverse effects. It affects everyone regardless of race, class and gender, etc. Therefore, its mitigation requires a collective effort within and across national borders. This implies that to be an active citizen is to have a shared ethical responsibility on the environment as a home and place of work. This is the essence of Ubuntu whose value systems go beyond humans to encompass all form of life. OPERATION SUKUMA SAKHE recognizes this agency as it emphasizes the significance of partnerships, collective agency, solidarity and active citizenry.

Therefore, we would like this conference to interrogate the importance of Indigenous Knowledge Systems as people's knowledge in enhancing sustainable development. We are glad to note that UKZN in the spirit of OPERATION SUKUMA SAKHE, is already working in partnership with the Moses Kotane Institute, and the provincial departments of Economic Development, Tourism and Environmental Affairs; and Social Development and the municipalities to develop a provincial IKS Strategy and Ubuntu as public policy to enrich and advance the implementation of the Provincial Growth and Development Strategy (PGDS).

Thank you again for the invitation. We wish you all, the best outcomes from this conference. For those from outside our province and South Africa, we wish you a safe and memorable stay in our province.