

# **MEDIA BRIEFING STATEMENT BY THE CHAIRPERSON OF THE MPUMALANGA HOUSE OF TRADITIONAL LEADERS KGOSHI L.M MOKOENA**

**DATE: 17 August 2015**

## **1. SALUTATION**

Let me take this opportunity to welcome all members of the various media houses gathered here this morning. We appreciate your positive response.

## **2. 2015 INITIATION SEASON**

We are gathered here as the Mpumalanga House of Traditional Leaders to share with you our experience as the institution of traditional leadership regarding the initiation season in Mpumalanga this year. As you are probably aware, Amakhosi/Makgoshi are the custodians of traditions and cultural practices, and the initiation cultural practice (ukusoka or ingoma) forms part of it.

This year one hundred and eighty-eight (188) initiation schools were operated in Mpumalanga. Five thousand five hundred (5500) initiates were recorded in those schools. As you are aware, over the years the initiation process in which our young boys are initiated into adulthood, has been marred by controversy. This old-age cultural practice is tarnished by people who are persuaded by the misguided love of money, hence the controversy around it.

As we mark the end of the 2015 initiation season, let me remind you that the Mpumalanga Premier, Hon. DD Mabuza declared a zero-death campaign in the initiation schools during the State of the Province Address and during the official opening of the Provincial House of Traditional Leaders. His message was echoed by MEC for Co-operative Governance and Traditional Affairs, Hon. Refilwe Mtshweni when she tabled the department's Policy and Budget speech, which she declared 2015 as a year of zero-death against the loss of lives in the initiation schools.

Today, we stand before you with humility to declare that the aspirations of the leadership of the province has been achieved. We have come to declare that Mpumalanga has a recorded a milestone achievement of zero-death in the initiation schools.

The implementation of the Ingoma Act, of 2011 by the Premier, remains key to this achievement as ingoma practitioners had to comply with the act. The act regulates the operation of the schools and we have realized that it served as an intervention to mitigate death cases in the schools this year. By promulgating this piece of legislation, the Premier closed the legislation gap which gave school owners a leeway to avoid prosecution in the past.

This achievement could have not been possible without the support of Amakhosi, law enforcement agencies, our communities and parents of the initiates. We would like to thank the Hon. Premier, DD Mabuza for promulgating the Ingoma Act.

The act would have been meaningless without the support of Amakhosi/Makgoshi who created awareness about it during cultural festivals (ummemo). We commend Inkhosi Mbuyane, Kgosi Mogane and members of the task team established to monitor compliance to the act. They played a pivotal role in monitoring compliance.

We commend MEC for Co-operative Governance and Traditional Affairs, Hon. Refilwe Mtshweni for her support. Furthermore, we commend MEC for Health, Hon. G Mashego for his support. Under his leadership, the Health Department worked 24 hours monitoring the conditions of our initiates and providing proper health care. He visited several initiation schools as part of his oversight role and monitoring and provided intervention in several cases.

I must indicate that we were disturbed by the death of one boy in the Nkangala District, whose death was linked to the initiation process. Our investigation showed that the victim did not die in the initiation school as was incorrectly reported. As a matter of fact, a post-mortem confirmed this. Our sincere condolences to his bereaved family.

The zero-death is a sign that **'Working together, we can do more to prevent further deaths in future'**.

### **3. CLOSING DOWN OF ILLEGAL SCHOOLS**

Several initiation schools, considered as illegal, were clamped down. This was the results of vigorous and continuous community awareness campaigns held in the entire province regarding the unlawful initiation schools, forced attendance at the Ingoma and ill treatment of initiates. This was done in an effort to prevent a potential loss of lives.

Five such schools were closed down with the help of the law enforcement agencies. The owners of the schools are now facing cases for contravening the ingoma act. Two owners were arrested in Balfour and in Masoyi respectively. We are monitoring these cases closely. We support the rule of innocence until proven guilty. By the same token we believe that a successful prosecution will send a strong message that our kids are not 'ATMs' as some of the owners are treating them.

We are still going to come down very hard to people who operate illegal schools. We cannot afford to loose lives every year because of unscrupulous individuals who do not follow proper procedures. This poses a threat and indignity to our beautiful culture and tradition.

End.

#### **ISSUED BY:**

**The Department of Co-operative Governance and Traditional Affairs**

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**Date: 17 August 2015**