

**ADDRESS BY FREE STATE MEC OF TOURISM, ENVIRONMENTAL AND ECONOMIC AFFAIRS,
NEO MASITHELA, AT THE INAUGURATION OF THE FREE STATE LIQUOR AUTHORITY,
ZANZIBAR**

25 April 2008

Programme director
Eminent members of the board
Honoured guests
Ladies and gentlemen

Good evening

Surely you will agree with me when I say it has been a long day and the shorter the speeches the better for everyone. In Afrikaans they say; "maak gou jong die vleis brand en die bier word suur."

Be that as it may we have to dispense of the business of the day. And our business ladies and gentlemen is to put in motion today concrete processes that we believe will cleanse the liquor industry in the Free State.

Liquor industry is a massive industry and plays a pivotal role in the economy of the province and specifically in our lives as the citizens of this land. It is common knowledge that in the past this industry was structured and managed in such a way that it was not geared towards developing a moral and peaceful society.

Ladies and gentlemen, the situation related to this industry has been on a downward spiral for a considerable time. It would have been irresponsible of us to watch from the sidelines as this important industry go to waste because of greed and rampant lawlessness.

Following an unprecedented amount of complaints from members of the society, we had to review the legislative framework in order to enable the government and government agencies that operate in this industry to have a tighter grip on the situation. To respond to the deteriorating situation, we placed a moratorium on new applications in October 2006. This was done because of our conviction that something is going horribly wrong and we had to intervene.

Our assessment revealed that there are serious problems with the issuing and compliance and of liquor licences. Matjhabeng and Dihlabeng were identified as the hot spots. Our own administration of the liquor legislation in the Free State was also suspect. It is for this reason that we beefed up the administration to ensure that our response to these problems is adequate.

To get first-hand information, in collaboration with the South African Police Service (SAPS) we conducted raids in the Bloemfontein and Bethlehem areas. Our fears and concerns of the communities were confirmed – operators were just not respecting the law.

Among the problems uncovered, we found out that:

- Operators were not keeping licence at the premises,
- Selling liquor to minors and allowing them in the outlets,
- Contravening the Liquor Act stipulations of on and off consumption,
- Operating without proper or appropriate licence,
- Possession of drugs such as dagga,

- Possession of dangerous weapons and,
- Transgression of licence condition with regard to operating hours.

All these transgressions minor as they may seem, have a negative impact on the lives of law abiding citizens of our province and need to be rooted out. Once an outlet operates outside normal hours of its stipulated hours it becomes a hiding place for criminals who rape, assault and commit other criminal activities in our areas.

Ladies and gentlemen, it is our view that the liquor industry has the potential to generate income and wealth for our people, but this should be done in a responsible manner that will empower communities and not degrade the morale fibre of our society. As it is now, the liquor industry is associated with all sorts of criminal activities and behavioural problems including harbouring criminals and illegal immigrants, domestic violence and abuse of children.

Today, with the inauguration of this board, we begin a new journey where we recommit ourselves to cleaning the liquor industry and ensuring that it regains its good image as a means of economic empowerment and job creation in a responsible manner.

We are further convinced that the new legislation will empower this board to tighten the administration of the liquor industry in this province. I would like to take this opportunity to congratulate the new members of the board and wish them a success in their term of office. I am the first one to acknowledge that there will be difficulties and challenges in the process of executing your mandate but know that you have the departments' and my personal support in everything you do within the framework of the law.

Thank you

Issued by: Department of Tourism, Environmental and Economic Affairs, Free State Provincial Government