

Safety & Security Annual Remembrance Day Service and Wreath Laying Ceremony – 27 July 2024

Speech by JP Smith

Families of officers and colleagues here remembered,
Mr. Mayor, councillors and aldermen,
Members of the Safety & Security Portfolio Committee,
Executive Director Botto,
Commissioner Robbie Robberts,
Chiefs, Deputy Chiefs, Assistant Chiefs, managers and heads,
all supervisors and members of the extended family of the Safety & Security Directorate,
members of the media
Master of Ceremonies,
ladies and gentlemen:
good morning, molweni, goeie more.

I warmly welcome you to the fourth Safety and Security Annual Remembrance Service.

Since your first memorial service in September 2021 we have gathered here twice, to pay our respects to and to remember those firefighters, law enforcement, traffic and metro police officers, disaster management officials and other members of our Safety & Security family who lost their lives in the line the of duty.

In 2021, I said that heroism doesn't always happen in a burst of glory.

Sometimes small triumphs and large hearts change the course of history.

Bravery is not the absence of fear, but the willingness to act in the face of it, especially when it is unexpected.

Last week and Friday, on 19 July, in the morning, over 30 shots rang out across the community of Hanover Park, detected by our ShotSpotter system.

LEAP and Metro Police officers responded, directly into the battle zone of opposing gangs. One of the gunmen ran directly past our officers, who began chasing him. He opened up fire on the officers, who returned fire and injured the suspect. After arresting the suspect and securing the firearm, a large number of members of the community turned on the officers and began assaulting them, including throwing bricks and stones at them, leaving some injured.

Officers were forced to retreat from the scene, with several of our vehicles severely damaged by the attack.

My anger at the incident was matched by widespread condemnation on social media and I returned to the area that evening, to go door-to-door to, asking residents for information.

I explained that if we cannot protect our enforcement staff, we cannot protect the communities who depend on them.

We offered a R20 000 reward for any information that led to the arrest of the attackers.

Within hours, leads started coming in and soon, under the cover of darkness, our teams returned along with SAPS Flying Squad and the National Intervention Unit. Four suspects were identified and taken into custody.

We were not done yet and a couple of days later, through information from a brave member of the community, we arrested the man who attacked Officer Lubabalo Mphontsana.

I cannot explain to you my anger and dismay with what happened that day in Hanover Park and has happened 21 times since January across our city:

- Once each in Delft, Gugulethu, Harare, Khayelitsha and Mitchells Plain
- Twice each in Mfuleni, Bishop Lavis and Lavender Hill
- Three times in Atlantis
- And seven times in Hanover Park!

We will not win the war against crime if we have to fight the criminals and "the community" at the same time. But, it is a mistake to say the attacks were by "the community", in quotes. It is by a small group in that neighbourhood and as we saw in Hanover Park, it is wholly and fully rejected by the broader community who turned these deplorable persons in, at the very first chance they had.

This has committed me to do more to speak to the good and decent people in our communities and not allow those who are compromised by crime or a collapse of their values, to be the face of or speak for such communities.

Yesterday, I reached agreement with senior staff that we will introduce this as a new SOP in our directorate – we will go after the attackers with every incident with the same zeal that our SSIU have gone after each of the persons responsible for the death of one of our staff.

With that we must then also continue to ensure the best possible training, best resources, best equipment and best management that we can – never accepting anything but the best for those who expect to run into a fire or face a gang fight or respond to a disaster or pursue a criminal at high speed. The men and women of our enforcement services who ran into that conflict did not pause to wonder if they were being brave or would be safe – they just did what was necessary. I therefore want to pause to honour not only the bravery of those that have fallen, but also those that are out there daily facing the danger.

I want to say to all our officers that they are appreciated – they are appreciated very much.

Let us also remember the families and loved ones left behind, who have endured great pain and loss. They, too, have made sacrifices. They have kissed their loved ones goodbye and have held back tears and put on brave faces, supporting our heroes as they embarked on their duty to protect and serve. We stand with them today and offer our support and gratitude.

Martin Luther King Jr. said "Injustice anywhere is a threat to justice everywhere." Let us remember these words as we strive to create a world in which the sacrifices made were not in vain. May their lives spur us on to work for a safer, more just and more compassionate Cape Town.

Master of Ceremonies, I was asked to provide the background of this memorial service today and to explain the various symbols we use in this commemoration.

There are five aspects of today's ceremony that are especially important: Before 2020 we acknowledged that we needed a space where we could honour the officers that paid the ultimate price, who lost their lives protecting the public, their colleagues and the City.

We wanted to have a place where we could assemble annually to pay homage to our own and pause to remember those that had fallen. And we wanted this space to be visible and safe and be in plain sight before us so we could never forget.

The first element is therefore this commemorative wall on this concourse - there for all to see and to always be present right here in the heart of the City. The names of every officer in our Safety and Security family, who passed in the line of duty, since the turn of the previous century, are recorded here.

The second aspect is the 2 minutes of silence that we will observe later on in the ceremony. The first minute is to acknowledge members who have passed away. The second minute of silence is to acknowledge members who are currently in service in the line of duty. During these minutes of silence we will pause to think of the courageous people whom we have lost.

The third aspect is the Last Call. This is a tradition started by the Fire Department where the bells, which have in time been replaced by electronic sirens at the fire stations, are rung at the start of a shift as well as when the shift has ended.

The ringing bell signifies the call to deploy to a fire or special service call. The City's Police Training Academy has expanded on this concept of ringing the bell for each of the Safety and Security Directorate's operational services: Fire, Traffic, Law Enforcement, Metro Police, Disaster Risk Management and other departments in acknowledgement and unification of them into one directorate.

A powerful act of acknowledgement, which we uphold in the Safety & Security directorate of Cape Town, is the radio call, which will sound out to all staff across this City today and allows them all to share this moment with those here assembled.

Finally, bringing these things together, we have chosen to dedicate a day in the year which we call Remembrance Day so that we may jointly remember the Safety and Security staff within the City of Cape Town that have died in the line of duty as well as those that have succumbed to COVID-19 while on duty.

On Saturday 4 September 2021, we started a new tradition in the City, to annually commemorate and remember those who made the ultimate sacrifice by calling together all those that remember them.

Now in 2024, we honour that tradition, that will for many years to come offer the respect and dignity to the names and memories of our past officers and staff.

Every year we shall pause to honour them and in honouring them remember our own duty and oaths: that we are, above all, committed to the service, protection and safety of others.

To the families who joined us here today and those watching via the livestream, know that your loved ones are Never Forgotten. We honour their names still - whether their names are engraved on the memorial wall or in our hearts, may they never be forgotten. Again, let us say: Until Valhalla!