

Safety & Security Remembrance Day address

Good morning, ladies and gentlemen,

Thank you for coming out here this morning for what is both a sad and an incredibly inspirational occasion, as we reflect on the lives of the men and women who paid the ultimate sacrifice while executing their duties in service of the people of this city.

To the family members and close friends who are with us this morning, I want to say that we feel your pain and your loss. We share your grief and we carry some of it in our own hearts too.

They were your sons and daughters, mothers and fathers, husbands, wives, brothers and sisters, but they were also our colleagues and friends. And they were our heroes.

That word – “heroes” – is used very easily these days. We have sports heroes, music heroes, even celebrity heroes. And while I agree that it's important to have role models and people we aspire to, I also think we need to reflect on what it truly means to be a hero.

Real heroes are people who are admired for their qualities like bravery, selflessness, sacrifice and strength of character.

Heroes think of the wellbeing of others before they think of themselves. They are the kind of people who would take risks and put their own lives in danger if it meant helping someone else.

Heroes aren't passive people. They don't wait to see who else might step into the breach when help is needed. They are the ones who take that step first. They're active people.

That's not to say they don't have fear, but their sense of duty is stronger than their fear, and they think of the danger afterwards.

That's what heroes do.

The men and women we are honouring today were such people. Each one of them was a hero to someone or some community, and they made the greatest possible sacrifice anyone can make in executing their duties.

But their heroism didn't start that day. It started when they signed up for the task, because they knew that these jobs in law enforcement or in fire and rescue services or disaster risk management come with big risks.

Not everyone is prepared to take those risks, but a special few are. And we are eternally grateful to them.

I want to tell the families of these fallen heroes who are with us today that your loved ones were special to us too. They were part of a bigger family here in the City and they leave behind a void that won't easily be filled.

Losing a colleague is always hard, but this is especially true for those who work in uniform, in jobs that demand selfless service and a disregard for personal danger.

These people in uniform often develop a bond that goes deeper than most working relationships. United by a strong service ethic and an expectation of courage and bravery, they have each other's backs in ways many of us won't ever fully understand.

When they lose a co-worker in the line of duty, the loss is deep and personal. And so I want to include the men and women of the City's Metro Police, Traffic Services, Law Enforcement, Fire & Rescue Service, and Disaster Risk Management when we speak of the loved ones left behind. Because you were like family too, and you are also mourning.

But I also want to assure you that their sacrifice was not in vain. They will live on in our memories, and they will remind us of what it is we're trying to achieve here in this city.

Our mission is to build a City of Hope for all who live in Cape Town. Part of that job is physical building – the pipes, roads, and houses that make up the physical city we live in, and which we need to greatly expand to make everyone's quality of life better here.

But part of that is also a psychological or emotional building. We need to make Capetonians believe that a better future is not only possible, but that it is in fact busy happening. We need to make the people of this city believe in hope.

And there is no greater symbol of hope than the courage and humanity we see in our heroes.

People who set out for work every day, hoping to return home after their shift, but knowing that their work could put them in danger. And still doing it.

That's inspirational, and it's enough to make anyone believe in hope.

I salute Cape Town's fallen heroes. You will not be forgotten.