

REMARKS BY THE MEC FOR FINANCE, ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT AND TOURISM, Ms. NE HLOPHE, MPL, DURING THE OCCASION OF THE CROWNING OF MISS MPUMALANGA 2024 HELD AT COMMUNIO CHURCH, MBOMBELA, CITY OF MBOMBELA LOCAL MUNICIPALITY

Saturday, 16 March 2024

Programme Director;

Chairperson of the Board of MER, Ms. Nomthandazo Shirinda;

Other MER board members present;

Chairpersons of the Boards of our other two (2) Public Entities; namely, MEGA and MTPA;

CEO of MER, Mr. Vusi Mtsweni;

CEOs of MEGA and MTPA;

CEO of Mzimari Productions, who are the organisers of this prestigious beauty pageant, Ms. Gugu Nyarenda;

Officials from our Department and MER;

Our Top 10 finalists for the coveted crown of Miss Mpumalanga, who brought us here tonight, and their proud parents;

Members of the media;

Ladies and gentlemen;

Lotjhani!

1. Programme Director; one Solange Nicole once said, and I quote: ***“A diamond doesn't start out polished and shining. It once was nothing special, but with enough pressure and time, [it] becomes spectacular”***, unquote.

2. In the context of this quotation, we are, therefore, all gathered here this evening, to **unveil one polished diamond** which is now ready to face the world.
3. I am not implying that those who will not become victorious tonight are not diamonds; **they are diamonds too**; it is just that the **nature of the pageant does not allow for everyone to be crowned** Miss Mpumalanga 2024.
4. Programme Director; next month we will celebrate 30 years of freedom and democracy. To our diamonds of tonight, **the freedom we gained in 1994 did not for free**; it was gained through the blood of others who died for you participate in such activities today.
5. This is because, prior to 1994, young black women were barred from entering all-race inclusive pageants. Today, every young woman irrespective of their race, colour or creed, can enter any beauty pageant of their preference without any prohibition. **Let's embrace and celebrate this freedom!**
6. In the tourism space, events like Miss Mpumalanga Beauty Pageants, are **crucial in marketing, promoting and creating exposure** for our Province. They have the power to attract potential visitors and tourists alike, from outside our Province. Through such events, we can grow our tourism industry, thereby contributing to job creation and economic growth.

7. Programme Director; over the years, we have **witnessed the transformative power of the Miss Mpumalanga Beauty Pageant**, in empowering our young women and showcasing the richness of our cultural heritage.
8. Allow me, therefore, to **congratulate and pay homage to the organiser of this prestigious event, Ms. Gugu Nyirenda**, through her company Mzimari Productions, for the sterling job she continues to do in sharpening the talent of our young women.
9. As a woman herself, she has for quite a number of years, **managed to nurture and expose the talent** of our young women. Through this pageant, she has **produced confident young, fine ladies**, some of whom even went as far as representing our Province at the national level.
10. Through this pageant, Ms. Nyirenda continues to shape the future and opens doors of success for many of these young women. I am talking of the likes of **Ntandoyenkosi Kunene, who was Miss Mpumalanga 2013**, and went on to be crowned Miss South Africa 2016. The talented and gorgeous Ms. Kunene hails from Mkhondo, in our Province.
11. Programme Director; in recognition of her contribution in empowering our young women and shaping the future of our country, **may I request Ms. Nyirenda to take a bow!**

12. We are proud of her, and **wish her well** for the future. We hope you will **continue to empower our young women** through this life-changing initiative, which has taken many of them off the streets, where they could have been easily tempted to do awful things.
13. Ladies and gentlemen; pageants are not merely about beauty, but they are **about the contribution young women can make within their communities.**
14. To me, our Top 10 ladies are all beautiful, in such a way it would be difficult for me to choose one amongst them, if I was a judge. Thankfully I am not one of the judges, who will have a difficult task of selecting one amongst the ladies tonight.
15. Programme Director; the one lady who will be crowned Miss Mpumalanga 2024 tonight, has the mammoth task of becoming an **Ambassador for our Responsible Gambling and Drinking Campaigns.**
16. As a caring and responsible government, we want our people to understand that **gambling is just a game**, and should be treated as such. Ardent gamblers should, therefore, not utilise all their hard-earned money on a game, and ultimately cause suffering for their innocent families. **Winners actually know when to stop!**
17. Likewise, the **consumption of alcohol should only be for recreationally purposes.**

18. As government, we remain concerned that the excessive and irresponsible drinking of alcohol which sometimes lead to women and child abuse.
19. Our whole trust is on the young women who will emerge victorious tonight, **to assist us in spread this message.**
20. Programme Director; tonight is not about long speeches, but it is about celebrating beauty and brains. It is about celebrating our young women who have reached the **Top 10 stage of this prestigious beauty pageant.**
21. Some might ask whether beauty pageants are still relevant in this day and age? My response is a big YES! They are much still relevant, as they acknowledge our young women, and assist to build their confidence and ultimately their profile.
22. Once your confidence is boosted, you will have much courage to face any life challenge. Assertively, I can say beauty pageants prepare our young women to face life challenges in general.
31. As I close, on behalf of our Department, represented by our Public Entity, MER, who are the main sponsor of this Pageant, I would also like to express our gratitude to the outgoing Miss Mpumalanga 2023, Bokamoso Machika, for the sterling role she played as the ***Ambassador of our Responsible Gambling and Drinking Campaigns*** during her tenure on the crown.

32. Thank you very much for the sterling job you have done during your reign; we will wish well for the future, and we hope that the Miss Mpumalanga title has opened many doors for you.
33. Programme Director; before I retreat from the stage, it would be remiss of me, as a leader in government, if I don't remind our young ladies, as well as all of you, to go and strengthen our democracy by voting on the 29th of May. ***It's Your Democracy; Own it!***
34. I leave you with the inspiring words of Ellen Johnson Sirleaf, who once said and I quote: "***the size of your dreams must always exceed your current capacity to achieve them. If your dreams do not scare you, they are not big enough. If you start off with a small dream, you may not have much left when it is fulfilled because along the way, life will test your dreams and make demands on you***", unquote.
35. And to all our Finalists, **you are all winners for having walked the road** to this level. Unfortunately there can only be one winner; your chance is coming as well!
36. I wish you all best of luck for tonight. **May the best lady win!**
37. ***Leave No One Behind, as We Grow Mpumalanga!***

Ngiyathokoza!