

STATEMENT BY THE MEC FOR HEALTH AT THE PREMIER'S AND CABINET'S UNANNOUNCED VISIT TO THE GALE STREET MORTUARY

9 February 2010

Good day;

We are pleased to announce that what was potentially becoming a crisis has since been resolved. To lose someone is tragic in itself. Losing someone in unnatural circumstances is worse!

We are satisfied that the various stakeholders in the situation worked as a team and have resolved the matter. It has been our aim to be completely transparent with each other and it is for that reason that we invited you, ladies and gentlemen in the media, to join us today to check on the progress achieved thus far.

I am pleased to report that since the matter hit the public domain, the interdepartmental task team has done the following;

- *All 212 bodies have been removed from the mortuary (19 of which are still to be identified and three brought in by special investigating unit),*
- *Burial is our preferred method of body disposal however the circumstances have compelled us to dispose of the bodies in pauper graves.*
- *There has been great cooperation between the Department of Health, eThekweni Municipality and the South African Police Services, and*
- *We thank all the staff who assisted during the 'clearing' and psycho-social sessions have been organized for their debriefing.*

I must emphasize that the underlying principle is to provide secure mortuary services even where burial or cremation are likely to be delayed. In this environment we must ensure that our staff has access to regular psycho-social services.

We are also going to scale-up efforts where our workers internalise and respect the wishes of the bereaved families, and to observe whatever cultural and religious rituals practised on death. This is important in helping people deal with the psychological effects of death.

Our service will from this day forward be based on the following fundamental principles;

- Respect for the dead,
- Identification of the dead as immediately as possible,
- Responding to the wishes of the family,
- Respect for cultural and religious beliefs, and
- Provision of psycho-social support services for the staff.

Thank you.