Remarks by the Minister of Police, Nathi Mthethwa, MP at the 10th ICPC Colloquium & Governance Meetings, Upper Eastside Hotel, Woodstock, Cape Town

Theme: “Filling the Gaps: Integrated Approaches to Crime Prevention and Safety”

22 February 2012

President of International Centre for the Prevention of Crime: Canada, Ms Chantal Bernier;
Director of UN Regional Office for Africa, Ms Axumite Gebrer-Egziabher;
All SAPS Lieutenant Generals and senior management present;
Executive and Members of the ICPC;
All Conference delegates from across South Africa and internationally;
Ladies and Gentleman;
Members of the Media;

As the police leadership we welcome an opportunity to address this august gathering; and are humbled to be in the presence of distinguished local and international scholars. We cannot begin to over-emphasize the importance the coming together of such think-tanks in our shores as they help our cause in the development and reconstruction of our country.

As experts in your different fields, you still share a common vision with our government: that of creating and ensuring safety of all humanity. We know that crime is a scourge that respects no borders with criminals worldwide desperately trying to undermine any effort of building flourishing economies. But through the resolve and commitment of all of us who are pro-safety, we remain focused on a goal of a safe and secure humanity.

This is a goal which as the government of South Africa, have prioritized and began putting in place various mechanisms to support our mandate: to ensure that all people in South Africa are and feel safe.

We understand that International Centre for the Prevention of Crime (ICPC) is a unique international forum and resource centre dedicated to the exchange of ideas and knowledge on crime prevention and community safety. If is further
encouraging to learn that the ICPC seeks to promote crime prevention, encourage the development of inspiring practices, and foster effective exchanges between criminal justice systems and civil societies across countries and cities.

As a collective that convenes and facilitates interactions involving large and small organizations, governments, local authorities, professionals and inclusive range actors of prevention who wish to develop and sustain safety responses to crime; we value your decision to host this meeting in our country. But we will further caution against turning this into ‘yet another talkshow’ and that is why we are anxiously looking forward to receiving your post-conference resolutions.

The Colloquium’s theme: “Filling the Gaps: Integrated Approaches to Crime Prevention and Safety” stimulates an interesting and fundamental discussion on how as the government and other developing and developed countries, do to prevent crime before it happens. It raises key questions on the processes, resources and more importantly, the role of each one of us in the fight against crime.

The challenge confronting all of us is to transform South Africa; to make of her the place of hope, security and human fulfillment. The dawn of democracy, led by the African National Congress implored a creation of a united and non-sexist South Africa. To achieve this goal, we needed to ensure that policing represents the will and goodwill of the majority of our citizens.

We approached all these tasks with all the seriousness they demanded. Our programmes seek to address the desperate needs and concerns of our citizens. However criminal acts deny and take away the most elementary human rights from our citizens; and we vowed as government that we shall not allow criminals to rule our streets, homes and businesses hence began concerted efforts of fighting crime smartly and toughly.

Perhaps from an onset, we want to reiterate our firm stance of a community-policing philosophy which is anchored around partnerships. Key in the partnerships are the very same communities that we serve and protect. This partnership must answer this crucial question: is there a harmonious and symbiotic relationship between the police and communities? Empirical evidence that indeed such a mutual relationship exists as seen in the latest crime statistics which indicated that in areas where there are effective community policing forums (CPF's), we have experienced crime declines.
Perhaps in better understanding some of the challenges, it is important to reflect on the road we have traversed. Policing in South Africa was traditionally authoritarian, with total disregard of human rights. Whilst these characteristics ensured that the police were effective under apartheid in controlling the political opponents of the government, it meant that they were poorly-equipped for crime control and prevention in the new democracy.

The cornerstone of our strategy is community policing, which is the central plank of our approach to policing. We have seen the positive results of this approach in the past three years. This is informed by the recognition that it is not police alone who combat and prevent crime. The police are, and always must be, subject to the will of the people they serve.

One of the most effective forms of crime prevention has been police visibility. A lot of work and resources have gone into strengthening visible policing. One of the objectives of this approach has been to ensure that police remain in touch with their communities, being welcome at community gatherings, and not, as in the past, lurk in armoured cars and barbed wires.

To give effect to this CPF approach, we have also decided to ensure that the CPF system is reflective of the people, so that we have people who lead these structures constantly and democratically elected and that they continue to be an additional arsenal to our cause, not an opposition to our mission. In addition, CPF Board now also reports to the Minister as opposed to the SAPS, as we believe this independence from the department is essential in ensuring effectiveness. This is what we believe must inform to future of crime prevention.

These CPFs are a necessary instrument to achieve the goal of a society where the members of the public are active participants in deciding matters of safety and security, and where there is accountability of the law enforcement agencies.

Government remains committed to ensuring that policing becomes a professional activity with more emphasis on better training and recruitment programs. We have now tasked the police management to prioritize training and discipline, which must be underpinned by a deeper commitment to the Constitution and a culture of service to the people. There must be a good appreciation of the distinction between the need to use maximum force against violent criminals and, minimum force in dealing with fellow citizens.
One of the important areas that we will be focusing on going forward revolves around our engagements regarding detective services, technology alignment and integration within the Justice, Crime Prevention and Security (JCPS) which enable us to fight crime smarter and the improvement of our forensic capacity.

Amongst the things that the current government will continue to do is to provide police with the requisite resources and equipment to meet their constitutional obligations to the nation. This includes prioritization of building of new police stations in areas where, for whatever reason, they were previously neglected.

Since the hosting of a secure and safe 2010 FIFA World Cup, we have gone a long way in ensuring we sustain not only this perception but ensure that South Africans continue to feel safe and secure. That is why as the police leadership we have emphasized to management that the resources that were secured must now benefit all citizens. That contribution went a long way in even dispelling the negative perceptions about crime in South Africa and we must keep it that way.

We want also to focus all our energies in ensuring that we do not only arrest those who are on the wrong side of the law, but mainly secure convictions. In order to do that, we need to re-enforce our detective and investigative arms. All members of the police from now henceforth will be introduced to basic detective work, whether in the final analysis they end up operating in detectives or not.

The success of the South African Police Service (SAPS) must now be judged according to the number of successful convictions we make. The harsher sentences imposed upon criminals must be influenced by the kind of detective work conducted by police. That is precisely why training must be ongoing because like any other, science it is always under construction.

At the moment we are busy with the process of reviewing the White Paper on Safety and Security, South African Police Act 1995 and the Private Security Industry Regulation Act, 2001. This initiative is aimed at bringing these legislations into line with the challenges we face today.

Some of the challenges and the impact of changes on the current South African context include that in line with the Constitution, the police have been established as a National competency which has been structured at national, provincial, cluster and police station level.
The police must therefore be professional, uphold the Constitution and show respect for human rights at all times. Such a professional cop will therefore ensure we achieve our goals, not just as police but as a JCPS cluster. The establishment of the inter-governmental cluster approach has fostered an integrated approach to governance that is aimed at improving government planning, decision making and service delivery.

Parallel to this process, we continue to ensure we strengthen civilian oversight of the police. We have strengthened the oversight through the introduction of the Civilian Secretariat for Police and Independent Police Investigative Directorate Acts of 2011.

These pieces of legislation remove the Civilian Secretariat and the Independent Police Investigative Directorate (previously known as the Independent Complaints Directorate), and its budget in the case of the Secretariat, from the control of the SAPS and clearly defines the powers, roles and functions of these two entities.

Whilst the causes of crime are complex and diverse, it is acknowledged that there are a host of factors which impact on crime. These include inadequate access of basic services such as housing; education and health; social services; as well as unemployment.

Therefore, improved planning and co-ordination is required to enhance the conditions of safety. The strengthening of partnerships and co-operation among relevant organs of state at local, provincial and national spheres of government, including community stakeholders also has an impact on the approach of addressing crime. To deal with this, Community Safety Forums (CSFs) we have been identified as a vehicle to enhance community safety in an integrated and coordinated manner, with the emphasis on safety and security deliberations at a local level. These CSFs are designed to coordinate, integrate and implement multi-sectoral crime prevention and community safety initiatives within the JCPS and relevant organs of state in enhancing the quality of life of communities.

Thus, the tougher stance on crime is directed to those heavily armed militarized criminal elements and opportunists who seek to divert democratic processes, but such approach must be balanced and scrutinized against the stronger civilian oversight role, checks and balances and a smarter approach to fighting crime.
We are pleased to learn that since its creation, ICPC has worked to make the knowledge base for strategic crime prevention and community safety better known and more accessible worldwide. Furthermore that ICPC has continuously provided up-to-date descriptions and analyses of national crime prevention policies for member governments in several key publications.

The challenge we would like to pose before the ICPC: how has your contribution impacted on the safety of South Africans? We are further aware that you have participated productively in the White Paper on Safety and Security for the Ministry of Safety and Security in 1998. As we are currently reviewing this paper, we once again urge you to become part of this process as we believe your contribution will go a long way in the reduction of crime and all its forms.

Some of the aspects as we look into the changing nature of crime, you would recall that 10 years ago, government did not utilize a cluster approach in the fight against crime. The current challenges such as cyber crime have also necessitated a shift in the approach in fighting crime.

What new innovations can South Africa draw in our goal of reduction of crime? Due to the shifting nature of crime, what information, communication and technology expertise can ICPC help with?

What role can ICPC play in the prevention of crime particularly, focus on prevention issues for youth, violence and schools, local government, policing, violence against women, hate crimes, community safety audits and monitoring and evaluation?

In the final analysis, as government we remain optimistic that the tide against crime is turning and that more and more South Africans are joining the crusade to reduce crime. We shall continue to sharpen our arsenal, identify and consolidate the current partnerships, improve training of our personnel, and improve our forensics, detectives in order to secure more convictions.

We shall continue to improve our all-round performances, whilst fully cognizant that the prevention of crime cannot just be police duty alone – that all of us in our different spheres have a crucial role to play.

The democratically-elected government, under the leadership of the Ministry of Police therefore represents the hopes and aspirations of the majority of South Africans. The vision we share of a truly non-racial, non-sexist and democratic
society cannot be realized if we do not address successfully the issue of crime and criminality within our society.

I thank you.