

ADDRESS BY THE MEC FOR SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT, MME NKAKARENG RAKGOALE, ON BEHALF OF THE PROVINCIAL GOVERNMENT AT THE OCCASION OF THE INTERNATIONAL DAY FOR OLDER PERSONS HELD AT REGOROGILE MULTI-PURPOSE SPORTS CENTRE, THABAZIMBI LOCAL MUNICIPALITY.

1st October 2019

Programme Director;
The Executive Mayor of Waterberg District Municipality, Cllr. Morris Mataboge;
The Mayor of Thabazimbi Local Municipality, Cllr. John Michael Fischer;
All councillors present here;
Our esteemed traditional leadership;
Representatives of the Older Persons Forum;
Members of the SAPS and sister-departments here present;
Our agencies SASSA and NDA;
Representatives of NPOs;
Ladies and Gentlemen.

Good morning!

Firstly, allow me to say that the Premier of the Province, Mr. Stanley Chupu Mathabatha, would have been here with us today, had it not been for equally important provincial engagements. He has delegated me to bring you this message and he has assured me of his continued commitment towards the wellbeing of the older persons of Limpopo.

Just last week, we gathered in Polokwane to celebrate our centenarians. They are the citizens who have reached the very advanced age of 100 years and more. It made me think how we should treasure our older persons as icons and beacons of indigenous and cultural knowledge. They have a wealth of knowledge that we as the younger generation need to learn from, as we take this country forward. The way they have been doing things: raising children; connecting with their peers and keeping families together through many hard times, should be a template we build our communities from.

I am pleased and honoured by this opportunity to spend this important day with you. It is always beautiful and heart-warming for me to spend some time with our elders who are our living ancestors. We have come here to honour and celebrate your lives.

The 1st of October has been declared by the United Nations as the International Day of Older Persons and the purpose of this day is to recognise senior citizens in the human and economic development of our communities. This day is also about drawing attention to the opportunities and challenges that are faced by

older persons. We agree that older persons make wide-ranging contributions to economic and social development. However, discrimination and social exclusion persist. We must overcome this bias in order to ensure a socially and economically active, secure and healthy ageing population.

On this day we are reminded that we all have a legal duty and a moral obligation to treat Older Persons as human being with full rights.

We are reminded that our society and our communities can only realise the much-needed development only if we take everyone on board and this includes our elderly population.

Older persons enjoy all the rights enshrined in the Constitution particularly the right to have their dignity respected. The Constitution establishes a society based on democratic values, social justice and fundamental human rights and seeks to improve the quality of life of all. The Older Persons Act supplements the constitutional rights as it contains provisions to improve the lives of older South Africans.

The main objectives of the Act are to:

- maintain and promote the status, well-being, safety and security of older persons;
- maintain and protect the rights of older persons;
- shift the emphasis from institutional care to community-based care in order to ensure that an older person remains in his or her home within the community for as long as possible;
- regulate the registration, establishment and management of services, and the establishment and management of residential facilities for older persons; and
- combat the abuse of older persons.

Government has therefore created an enabling and supportive environment for older persons by allowing for, among others, community-based care and services for older persons and by regulating permanent residential facilities for older persons.

The Department of Social Development also funds these facilities to ensure that this care is broadened to more communities within the Province.

We realise in today's day and age with ever changing demographics that it is not always possible for families to care for their older persons at home. It is therefore important to us that our older persons are getting the basic care and comfort they deserve, while partaking in social and other activities in surroundings that will allow them to age with dignity. Our Department of Social Development is subsidising eight residential facilities for older persons and about 133 service centres for older persons are registered with the Department of Social Development, in order to comply with norms and standards.

Since the dawn of democracy, government has also ensured that every elderly person receive the same state “old-age pension”irrespective of race. Government has also significantly changed the lives of older persons for the better through the provision of free essential services such as water, health, housing and energy in various municipalities and districts. I am happy that representatives from SASSA have joined us in this celebration. As government we will continue with our efforts to make life easier for our older persons. They will continue to benefit from social grants from SASSA; indigent services from municipalities; low cost housing from COGHSTA, agricultural programmes from the Department of Agriculture and Rural Development. Even our tourism services are rendered at a discounted price to older persons.

Our Active Ageing programme gives our older persons the opportunity to stay fit and healthy both physically and mentally.

Last month we hosted yet another successful Provincial Golden Games tournament in the capital city of Polokwane and later this month, Team Limpopo, selected after that tournament, will compete in the National Golden Games in the Eastern Cape. Last year, Team Limpopo achieved position one at the Games. This year we are more than confident that we will repeat this performance, judging by the talent and tenacity that is coming from our team of golden girls and golden boys. We once again wish them good luck at the Nationals.

We want our older persons to remain physically active as this has proved to aid in their health and in healthy ageing in general. Our Active Ageing programme also includes the Older Persons Beauty Pageant, which was hosted last Friday together with the Centenary Celebrations. Once again we marvelled in the talent, personality and energy of our older persons as they competed to be the Golden Boy or Girl of the Province.

However, Government will never be able to achieve an enabling environment for the protection and promotion of rights of older persons without the active participation, cooperation and support of the community and especially organisations such as those of civil society and the faith-based sector.

Programme Director,

I am truly pained to image the conditions that some of our parents are being subjected to, as they grow.

Instead of aging gracefully with the love and compassion of their children they are subjected to countless episodes of neglect and maltreatment.

It is heart breaking that there are still those amongst us, who rob our elders of their pension monies, going as far as denying them food. As society we therefore must unite and act together against deplorable tendencies such as the abuse of

our elders, their unjustified discrimination and the general lack of respect for our elders.

Those you abuse or disrespect our elders should know that they are working against the command of God.

The Bible says in Leviticus 19 verse 32 that, and I quote:

"You shall stand up before the gray head and honor the face of an old man, and you shall fear your God: I am the Lord".

Close quote.

Both the Constitution and the Older Persons Act also makes it an offence to abuse or neglect older persons.

But above all of this, it should be against the conscience of every rational human being to abuse a defenceless and most vulnerable person. We call on all South Africans to respect, protect and promote the rights of older persons as contained in our laws. Working together we can ensure that we prevent any exploitation and abuse of older persons. Society also needs to unite and eradicate the scourge of abuse against women and children, particularly elderly women.

We can and must do more to provide services to survivors of abuse and ensure that perpetrators are punished.

Our collective effort through various campaigns can create awareness; reduce the number of sexual offences and attacks on elderly women in our country.

Programme Director;

Today also marks the start of Social Development Month and the Department of Social Development along with its agencies SASSA and the National Development Agency (NDA) use this month to highlight major milestones and also to promote developmental welfare and social security services amongst the elderly, children and people with disabilities.

I would therefore like to take this opportunity to officially launch this month and announce the activities of this month of promoting our services to the people of Limpopo:

- On Friday the 4th of October, we will be receiving a generous donation of ECD equipment from Eskom as part of the Corporate Social Investment programme, at an event in the Mogalakwena Municipality.
- On Thursday 17th October we will be commemorating another international day of significance, namely the International Day for the Eradication of Poverty. This event will be commemorated in Vhembe and will highlight the global fight against poverty as well as government's contribution towards the South African status quo.
- From 26th to 30th October, Team Limpopo will be competing in the National Golden Games in the Eastern Cape.

- The month is further filled with district wide community dialogues, campaigns and workshops regarding gender-based violence; domestic violence; HIV/AIDS; foster care; social and behaviour change and many more.

We hope that our senior citizens gathered here today will continue to join us in some of these and other activities around the districts of Limpopo. We need the wisdom of our elders in all of these matters affecting our communities, as we endeavour to build a caring society! We also need communities to understand that the Department may be approached for a whole range of services including parenting skills, family counselling and individual counselling. The Department offers much more than just NPO funding, social work services and poverty alleviation. We want to make our citizens aware that we are here to serve and assist.

Programme Director;

In conclusion, older persons are custodians of our history. Some of them fought for our freedom and liberation. The majority of our older persons are taking care of grandchildren while their parents have passed on or are working far away from their homes. The majority of governance structures in our communities are also made up of older persons. These include clinic committees, hospital boards, school governing bodies and traditional councils.

I want to invite everyone to join our efforts as government to make life easier and worth living for our elder citizens.

Let us stand together and act against the barbaric abuse of our senior citizens.

Let us ensure that our elderly citizens participate in various recreational activities to keep them healthy.

Let us love and embrace them as our living ancestors.

I thank you!