

**MESSAGE OF SUPPORT BY THE FIRST LADY OF LIMPOPO MRS MAGGIE MATHABATHA ON THE OCCASION OF THE CENTENARIAN CELEBRATION AND CHOIR COMPETITION ORGANISED BY THE LIMPOPO DEPARTMENT OF SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT**

05 April 2016

Programme Director;

MEC, Mme Joyce Mashamba;

Executive mayor for Polokwane Local Municipality, Mme Thembi Nkadimeng;

Members of the Polokwane Mayoral Committee;

Head of Department, Mme Daisy Mafubelu and your senior management team;

Leadership of the Older Persons Forum;

Our elderly persons, batswadi ba rena,

Invited guests;

Ladies and Gentlemen:

Let me start first by thanking the MEC, Mme Joyce Mashamba for your thoughtful and generous invitation.

Let me again thank you for organising this special event for our senior citizens.

Our HOD, Mme Mafubelu has already explained the importance of this day.

My task here today is simply to offer a message of support.

As you know, I am here representing the Limpopo First Lady Trust.

Trust it is always humbling to be afforded an opportunity to spend our time interacting with our elderly in this fashion.

As you know, older persons remain my great source of inspiration and motivation. In them I see the grace and mercy of our creator.

They are our knowledge bank, and the custodians of our history and traditions.

They are our living libraries and monuments.

It is for this reason that I wish to salute the MEC and her team for creating time to honour and celebrate the lives of our elders.

Event such as this are important in ensuring that our elders are not aging in solitude.

As the First Lady Trust, our work is mainly with women organisations, children and our most treasured assets, which are our senior citizens.

Activities such as this centenarian celebration resonate very well with our objectives.

Programme Director;

It is therefore befitting that I should also extend our deepest appreciations to the partners such as SASSA and the National

development Agency for partnering with the Department and making this day possible.

For us this day is about giving hope and cementing a smile on the faces of our senior citizens.

**Madam MEC;**

While we are here celebrating, we know that in some corners, our elders have to endure the indignity of life of solitude and isolation because of societal stereotypes.

It is for this reason that our greatest mission as the First Lady Trust is about the restoration of hope amongst the most vulnerable members of our society.

Nothing gives us so much joy and pleasure than to work with vulnerable members of our society.

Our work is about bringing life to the constitutional call that everyone has an inherent dignity and the right to have their dignity respected and protected.

**Programme Director;**

Part of the issues that affect our elders have been summarised by the former Secretary General of the United Nations, Mr Kofi Annan when he said 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."***

The truth is that we all carry the responsibility to ensure that our parents' age with grace and compassion.

Part of what we can do as the government, NGOs and as families is to design programmes that will encourage the concept of active ageing.

We must also emphasize family ties and support for the family unit as the primary source of care for older persons.

We must do this as opposed to subjecting our elders to the indignity of aging alone in solitude without proper care and support.

As younger generations, we must not allow a situation where our elders are made to resign from life simply because of old age.

I want to say to our elders that life begins at birth and ends at death, not with old age.

We want you to remain active members of the society; we know that there is a wealth of knowledge and experience that we can and must learn from you.

We call you elders not merely because of your age, but also because of your individual and collective wisdom.

From you we can harvest a lot of wisdom.

### **Programme Director;**

I am truly pained to imagine 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 heartbreaking that there are still those amongst us, who rob our elders of their pension monies, going as far as denying them food.

These deplorable tendencies need to stop.

We cannot treat our parents as if they are some sort of sub-human beings merely because of old age.

Some of us treat our senior citizens as if we are going to remain forever young.

**Programme Director;**

I do not intent to speak for a very long time because today is not reserved for such long speeches.

Mine was indeed just to extend a word of support.

My special plea is for everyone who is here to remember that we can all make a difference.

It does not matter how small your contribution can be; even if it means just volunteering your time once in a quarter to come and just interact with our elders.

We all have it within ourselves to can become good Samaritans who can change the lives of other people for the better.

I thank you!