

ADDRESS BY DEPUTY PRESIDENT SHIPOKOSA PAULUS MASHATILE AT THE NATIONAL MEN'S PARLIAMENT AND LAUNCH OF THE TAKUWANI RIIME PROGRAMME OF ACTION, MASIA VILLAGE, COLLINS CHABANE LOCAL MUNICIPALITY, VHEMBE DISTRICT, LIMPOPO PROVINCE, 19 NOVEMBER 2023

Deputy Speaker of the National Assembly, Honourable Lechesa Tsenoli;
Deputy Speaker of the Limpopo Provincial Legislature, Honourable Tshitereke Matibe;
Our host, Thovhele Nthumeni Masia and all members of the Masia Traditional Council;
Ministers and Deputy Ministers Present;
Premier of the Limpopo Province, Mr Stanley Mathabatha;
Members of Parliament and all Legislators;
Mayors and all Councillors Present;
Traditional Leaders, Religious Leaders, Business Leaders & Organised Labour;
Leaders of the Civil Society Men's Movement and all Civil Society Leaders Present;
Developmental Partners and the United Nations Family;
The Leadership of organisations working with men and boys;
SANAC Men Sector, Deputy Chairperson, Dr Matome Kganakga;
Members of the Media;
Ladies and Gentlemen,
Avuxeni! Thobela! Ndaa! Ndi Masiari vhathu vhothe!

It is my distinct honour and privilege to be part of this men's gathering where we will be launching the Takuwani Riime Programme of Action for the period 2023 – 2025, under the theme of "Term of Community Men's Parliaments".

The sitting of this sectoral Men's Parliament today is a vital step in our ongoing commitment to fostering positive masculinity in our society.

Takuwani Riime is a call for us as men to stand united, in responding to the multiple gendered challenges that exist in our society.

This national call is aligned with the global calls to end Violence Against Women and Girls, as championed by the African Union and the United Nations.

It is important that we understand violence against women as a global phenomenon, and also appreciate through concerted efforts we can bring an end to this scourge.

We know that Gender Based Violence has negative impacts on the socio-economic status not only of women and girls but on men as well. Ending this scourge is therefore urgent, and critical for our development as South Africa and Africa.

This gathering takes place a week before the African Union's 3rd Men's Conference on Positive Masculinity under the theme; "Consolidating Commitments Towards the African Union Convention on Ending Violence Against Women and Girls.", co-hosted

by 2023 AU Chairperson H.E. President Azali Assoumani of the Union of the Comoros, and H.E. President Cyril Ramaphosa.

These gatherings are critical steps in addressing some of the social ills that exist and are perpetuated by patriarchy in our communities.

I am delighted that as men, we have convened today to engage in an open dialogue amongst ourselves, to deliberate introspectively, and tackle the responsibility that we bear in moulding the trajectory of our country's future.

We are here to say that, we will not sit back and watch the futures of men and women in our country be destroyed by the scourge of violence.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Over the past few days, I had the privilege to interact with some of the Traditional leaders in the province, and I want to assure them that their concerns will not be ignored by the ANC-led government. We will continue to collaborate with the Institution of Traditional Leadership on all issues of concern in our society including the issue of land restitution and redistribution.

I wish to also take this opportunity to appreciate the support that our government receives from the Traditional Authorities who play a critical role in the response to Gender-Based Violence. In our continuous engagements with Traditional Leaders, the issue of Gender-Based Violence and Femicide is a key focus area. In this regard, the Department of Social Development provides training to Traditional Leaders and their spouses to further support the work done in this area.

We thank our Traditional Leaders, Faith-Based Organisations, and NGOs for the role they play in fighting this scourge in their communities. The transformation of our society certainly relies on multi-stakeholder collaboration across all sectors.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

It is indeed our moral responsibility, collectively as men specifically, to have a say in the safety concerns, socio-economic & and political issues that confront our nation.

We are also currently guided by progressive policies such as the National Strategic Plan on Gender-Based Violence and Femicide, and the National Strategic Plan for HIV, TB, and STIs in shaping a safe and healthy future for ourselves.

In anticipation of World Aids Day, we must use this opportunity to highlight the challenges we have with men within the context of our HIV response. HIV prevalence in Limpopo is the highest in men between the ages of 35 and 59. Across the province, new infections are the highest in men between the ages of 20 and 44.

Allow me to say that there is absolutely no need for this, given the extensive HIV education and treatment that the government has provided over the past 19 years.

As men, we have a role to play in reducing HIV infections by simply enrolling and being consistent in taking treatment and ensuring that we use condoms and freely available preventative measures such as Pre and Post Exposure Prophylaxis (commonly known as PrEP and PEP) among others.

We must do this to protect not only ourselves but future generations!

Ladies and gentlemen,

Regarding the launch and implementation of the Takuwani Riime Programme of Action, under the oversight of the Men's Parliament.

I applaud the work that has been done and also urge that the resolutions of this year's sitting of the National Men's Parliament should mark an important turning point in the course of the Men's Movement, as we enter a phase of implementation at the grassroots level.

We encourage all traditional leaders, religious leaders, ward councillors, principals of educational institutions, and all men from diverse backgrounds to respond to the call of the Takuwani Riime Men's Movement and unite as engaged citizens in the global expansion of a responsive men's movement.

Vhanna vha Afrikha Tshipembe,

It is unacceptable that our country has the highest female homicide rate among the five countries with the highest annual murders.

We cannot continue to be silent when 70 lives will be violently ended by the end of today - three children are killed daily, a woman is abused every 63 seconds and eight women are murdered every day in our country.

Like all cases of Gender-Based Violence, the broad daylight stabbing of Ms Sinxolo Myalo, at the Cape Peninsula University of Technology last week is a tragedy that requires all of us, as men in South Africa, to examine our role in this heinous crime against humanity.

It is imperative that we engage introspectively by asking ourselves important questions that force us to reflect on;

1. How do we as men contribute to the prevalent culture of Gender-Based Violence in South Africa?
2. In what ways have we normalised the culture of Gender-Based Violence through the problematic language of sexist jokes, victim blaming, and rigid gender stereotypes that devalue girls and women?

3. Why do we allow the loss of women's freedom at the hands of our male friends, colleagues and family members who exploit young women through sexual coercion, who boastfully relate stories of date rape, and who won't take no for an answer?

As part of our concerted effort to eradicate societal problems, we must specifically target the pervasive problem of rape against vulnerable groups, such as women with disabilities, children, the elderly, and the LGBTQIA+ community.

There is no denying that Gender-Based Violence and Femicide have reached a tipping point. Government has been responsive to curb GBV and to this effect, from a legislative point of view, President Cyril Ramaphosa has assented to:

- (i) the Criminal Law (Sexual Offences and Related Matters) Amendment Act Bill,
- (ii) the Criminal and Related Matters Amendment Bill, and
- (iii) the Domestic Violence Amendment Bill

While legislation plays a critical role in dealing with violence against women and girls, grassroots interventions that support this process are equally important.

It is therefore this approach that provides for the Men's Parliament and initiatives such as this one to exist that will enhance our efforts going forward.

The Takuwani Riime Programme of Action recognises that to end GBV, we must dismantle the culture of violence by being intolerant to subtle or socially accepted attitudes, beliefs, and actions that tolerate, excuse, and condone violence.

The Takuwani Riime Programme of Action is thus critical in facilitating dialogue and positive social change. Through the Men's Parliament, the underlying principle is to ensure mainstreaming, coordination and implementation of coherent men's movement activities, using the Men Championing Change Programme to address concerns that affect men such as:

- Men lagging behind in educational attainment, particularly in higher education, which can have long-term economic and social consequences.
- Issues such as unemployment, wage gaps and occupational hazards that disproportionately affect men in various sectors.
- Men facing health inequities driven by poor health-seeking behaviour and unique health concerns, including prostate cancer and heart disease.
- Men confronted by stigma around mental health issues, leading to high rates of depression and suicide.

As men, we have to talk about mental health!

South Africa is ranked number 10 on the list of countries with the most suicides with 23,5 people per 100 000 population. Of the 13 774 suicides reported, 10 861 were men, whilst 2 913 were women!

This is concerning and highlights that as a nation we are faced with a serious problem that, requires as a start, a platform that can facilitate ongoing engagement.

We commend the Takuwani Riime Men's Movement for the efforts to roll out Community Men's Parliaments, which is the last tier of the Men's Parliament framework extending from national to community settings.

This inclusive community initiative seeks to create a designated platform in Traditional Councils, Wards, Institutions of Education, and any other self-described community for men to convene on Wednesdays.

The platform will provide a consistent and predictable schedule for men in fostering dialogue, collaboration and resolution of issues that impact them and their communities. It will also allow men to be vulnerable in a society that demands that men be tough.

Through this platform, we aim to emphasise that, there is no need to endure hardships in silence.

Gentlemen,

As men, we must confront the anguish we have caused on women and children. We need to get together to pause and reflect on the agony, and the heinous physical and mental abuse we have perpetrated on our society.

We have to meet to admit our wrongdoing and deal with the entrenchment of male power, privilege and patriarchy. It is imperative that we assume collective responsibility, establish boundaries, and declare that "enough is enough"!

As we cascade the Men's Parliament to the provincial, district, local, ward, and community levels, we must work to become credible role models for young boys so that they can learn how to become better men.

We also need to hold each other accountable for our actions and behaviours and redefine what it means to be the protector, provider, and caretaker of the family and society in our modern lives.

Let the "Term of Community Men's Parliaments" be the turning point that redefines the identity of South African men.

We must be confident in who we are as men, and we must take actions that will help us to create a positive "new normal". As we prepare as a nation for the 16 Days of Activism against Women and Girls campaign, may today's session provide us with a collective mandate as men that we will carry out during this period and beyond.

Takuwani Riime! Let us stand together to Institutionalise a Responsive Men's Movement!

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Let me conclude by taking this opportunity to thank those who dedicated their time to go and register to vote during this voter registration weekend.

I also urge those who have not yet done so to register at the voting station for the voting district where they live before they close at 17h00 tonight.

It is of utmost importance that every eligible citizen exercises their democratic right and fulfils their civic duty by participating in the electoral process and registering at the appropriate voting station is an essential prerequisite to ensure that one's voice is heard and their vote is counted in the upcoming elections.

Your voice counts in making our country a better, and prosperous nation.

Ndo Livhuwa.