

**STATE OF THE PROVINCE ADDRESS DELIVERED BY THE
PREMIER MR. CHUPU STANLEY MATHABATHA TO THE
LIMPOPO PROVINCIAL LEGISLATURE AT THE JACK
BOTES HALL IN POLOKWANE.**

29 February 2024

Speaker of the Legislature, Honourable Rosemary Molapo;
Deputy Speaker, Honourable Tshitereke Matibe;
Honourable Members of the Legislature, our MPLs;
Members of the Executive Council;
Executive Mayors and Mayors;
The leadership of the ruling party, the African National
Congress;
Leaders of opposition political parties;
Chairperson of Limpopo House of Traditional Leaders;
Our Esteemed Traditional Leaders;
Former MPs and MPLs;
Director General and Heads of Departments;
Stalwarts and veterans of our struggle;
Provincial Commissioner of South African Police Services;
Heads of our Chapter Nine and Chapter Ten institutions;
Leadership of our faith-based communities;
Leadership of organised business and labour;
Youth, women and community leaders;
Members of the Media;
Distinguished Guests;
The people of Limpopo;
Ladies and Gentlemen, esteemed guests, and all the people of
our vibrant province,

Good morning, Avuxeni, Goeie morê, Ndaa, Thobela, Silotshile!

As I stand before you today, on this significant occasion of delivering my last annual State of the Province Address, I am filled with a profound sense of gratitude and reflection. It has been an honour to serve as the Limpopo Premier since 2013, leading our fifth and sixth administrations through their journeys of transformation and renewal.

What is more profound is that our being here marks 30 Years of Democracy in South Africa. It has been an illustrious 30 Years of responding to the needs and expectations of the people of Limpopo – altering their economic conditions, upgrading them their socially, affirming their belonging to this beautiful province and country.

We are therefore reminded of the scenes that characterised the first non-racial, non-sexist, and democratic elections in April 1994.

The journey of stabilising and growing Limpopo over the years is the evidence of our commitment to good governance, sustainable development, including the provision of public goods and services. The amalgamation of three Bantustan governments and the Transvaal provincial administration marked a significant step towards unity and progress. It laid the foundation for a single, inclusive, and integrated province.

Consolidating Limpopo was an important part of nation building. It was a key strategy to dismantle the racial and ethnic divisions erected by the apartheid regime. We have gone a long way in fulfilling the constitutional mandate to:

“Heal the divisions of the past and build a society based on democratic values, social justice and fundamental human rights.”

The journey we have travelled covered transformation and development in critical areas, such as the economy and the provision of public goods and services, like water, electricity, roads, education, health and homes. Let us delve into some facts and figures that highlight the progress we have made since our hard-won April 1994 democratic breakthrough.

The first democratic elections in April 1994 resulted from our liberation struggle, against colonial and apartheid forces and their beneficiaries. It is surprising that sections of these categories still want us to go back. They spread the false notion that colonialism and apartheid brought about development and a better life. Meanwhile, life for the oppressed was synonymous with living in hell.

Our democratic breakthrough ushered in our current constitution. This was the first delivery following the first democratic elections in April 1994. Through the constitution, we delivered fundamental human rights to all, regardless of race, gender, and creed. Please allow me to pay tribute to our heroes and heroines. I am going as far back as the kings and queens who led our wars of resistance against colonisation. I salute the stalwarts who carried on from 1912, January the 8th, by leading our liberation struggle. Our message of heartfelt condolences goes to all the families who lost their loved ones, going back to the beginning of our wars of resistance against the heartless systems of colonisation and apartheid.

When we achieved our April 1994 democratic breakthrough, less than 30 per cent of rural households had access to electricity. Today, we have electrified at least 94.6 per cent of rural households in Limpopo, marking a significant improvement in access to electricity.

People in rural areas overwhelmingly depended on firewood to cook, using three leg pots. There was deforestation, impacting trees and other plants, an important source of oxygen supply for human life, and a key resource of environmental conservation. Forests have risen in various areas that were affected, thanks to our massive household electrification programme.

In healthcare, it is pleasing that we currently have 476 clinics in Limpopo. Two hundred and sixteen of our healthcare centres, that is 45 per cent, operate 24 hours a day.

In 2010, we reached 80 per cent of access to water, reaching more communities and improving public health outcomes. However, because of various countervailing factors, we have experienced a decline to 69.1 per cent. We are worried about this, and we are hard at work with authorities in the water provision space to improve the situation.

It is important to note that we have improved access to sanitation, to 63.1 per cent, up from 26.9 per cent in 2002, and up from a far lower baseline in 1994.

Our tarred road network has significantly expanded since April 1994. It is now covering rural areas that were neglected before. Through this progress, we have enhanced connectivity and improved transportation efficiency, facilitating economic

development in Limpopo. At present, our target is to surface 13,800 kilometres from gravel to tar.

Ladies and gentlemen,

We have worked very hard in education. Our efforts are now visible in improved matric results. We have improved from a 38 per cent matric pass rate in 1996. At 79.5 per cent in 2024, our matric pass rate now approximates our 80 per cent target.

Madam Speaker,

Limpopo's contribution to national economic output over the past three decades has improved. In 1996, Limpopo contributed 5.3 per cent to the national GDP. Despite global economic and pandemic crises, our contribution to national GDP reached 7.3 per cent by 2023. This reflects the strategic efforts undertaken by the province to harness its vast natural resources, develop critical sectors, and attract investment.

The demographic landscape of Limpopo has undergone a remarkable transformation over the past 30 years. This is evidenced by the consistent increase in the number of our households.

From just over 911 thousand households in 1996, we have increased to over 1.8 million households in 2022. This substantial growth in households highlights Limpopo's growing population. We have now reached over 6 million people, according to the latest census.

Our population growth underscores our evolving socio-economic dynamics and governance environment. Particularly,

it underlines the expanding demand for public goods, government services and infrastructure development.

The latest census report highlights Limpopo's economic growth, with various sectors contributing to employment creation and development. However, it underscores the importance of addressing the challenge of youth unemployment, as well as education and skills development.

The provincial nodal development strategy has identified Polokwane, Fetakgomo-Tubatse and Thulamela as among the most populated 17 municipalities in South Africa, highlighting the growth and potential of these regions.

Limpopo has established a firm role in food security in our country. Twenty-nine per cent of our households grow food within their yards. This is a testament to the fact that we have an active citizenry in food production. We remain determined to support our people in food production.

Together, let us build on the progress we have made, harnessing the potential of our youth, investing in infrastructure, fostering industrialisation and promoting sustainable development.

Surely, you will agree with me, regardless of party-political affiliation, that we have made progress in addressing the legacy of colonialism and apartheid. We also all acknowledge that there is still a lot of work to be done. I am sure we all agree that the road to success is a journey, not a sprint.

Honourable members,

We reaffirm what His Excellency, President Matamela Cyril Ramaphosa, said during the State of the Nation Address earlier this month, that the ANC strove for a non-racial and non-sexist democratic South Africa. This government has transformed the lives of millions of our people.

The President further outlined the challenges our country faced. Various events countervailed our march to prosperity. These include state capture and other forms of corruption, gender-based violence, global economic crises, and the COVID-19 pandemic. The President said:

While each of these events has left its mark, our country has weathered every storm. Yes, we have the scars to show. But in every case South Africans have been resolute. We have not only persevered, but we have come back stronger and more determined.

All these efforts have demonstrated how South Africans value the freedom that was won after decades of struggle.

These words reflect the journey we have traversed since 2013 when we took office as the fifth administration.

We have made distances.

In 2013, Limpopo was at a critical juncture. Five departments were under national administration. Confidence in our provincial administration was waning. Our task was clear, yet daunting. It was to breathe life back into these departments and restore confidence in our governance. It was a journey akin to the

mythical phoenix rising from the ashes, a symbol of renewal and resilience that resonates deeply with the spirit of Limpopo.

In this journey of transformation, I am reminded of the words of the renowned South African poet, Lebogang Mashile, who once said, "We are all broken vases trying to keep flowers alive." This metaphor beautifully encapsulates the state of Limpopo when we began our work. We were a province striving to nurture growth and prosperity, despite the cracks of past challenges. Yet, like the resilient vase that holds the water nurturing the flowers, we too held onto hope and determination.

Over the past decade, we have worked tirelessly to bring stability and sound administration to our province. Through collective effort and unwavering commitment, we have seen remarkable improvements in audit outcomes and overall provincial performance. The once prevalent disclaimer audit opinions are now a thing of the past in our departments, public entities and municipalities. No department is under administration.

As we reflect on the progress we have made, let us also look to the future with optimism and determination. The story of Limpopo's renewal and development is far from over. It is a continuous journey, one that requires an active citizenry, and the collective effort of every community and leader. Together, we can build on the foundation we have laid, striving for even greater achievements and a brighter future for all who call Limpopo home.

Our trajectory towards a Limpopo that we all yearn for is taking shape during an unfavourable, harsh global reality. The global economic outlook is severely affected by the NATO-Ukraine

and Russia war, Western unilateral sanctions outside the United Nations legal and multilateral frameworks, and the genocidal Israeli military campaign against the Palestinian people. Our national government took a good decision to refer this matter to the International Court of Justice, to stop the genocide.

Under the circumstances, we need to build greater self-reliance and increase our share of value addition in finished products. It is important to continue our efforts to achieve manufacturing localisation, to deepen and expand domestic beneficiation of our minerals and primary agricultural products, industrialise and drive large-scale employment.

Ladies and gentlemen,

The Limpopo population landscape has changed. Since 2022, we are now the fifth largest province in South Africa. Although we have moved from the fourth spot, we have become the largest contributor to Gauteng's population. Our economic and social development programmes should help us retain our youth, while protecting their freedom movement.

Democracy has brought about many shifts. More people stay where they want to. Over 60 per cent of South Africans are staying in urban centres or peri-urban centres. This is linked to an increased movement of people from rural areas and urbanisation.

However, Limpopo remains youthful, with a greater proportion of our population still between 18 and 34 years old. This calls on us to strengthen programmes that will address the challenge of youth not in employment, education or training. The

programmes include our Youth Development Strategy, including skills development, placements in work, and youth empowerment.

From the year 2000, mining became the largest contributor to our economic growth. Mining contribution to our GDP rose from below 20 per cent in 1999, reaching a peak of 28.1 per cent in 2008. The 2008 global economic meltdown affected our economy, resulting in a decline in many sectors. At 25.6 per cent, mining reached a new peak of its contribution to our provincial economy in 2019.

The rise of mining in Limpopo has led to the positive economic developments that are witnessing along the Dilokong Corridor in Fetakgomo-Tubatse, Sekhukhune, and in Waterberg District. It is important to distribute economic development evenly, to do away with the legacy of uneven development.

These developments, driven by strategic planning and investment mobilisation, underscore the importance of a focused approach to regional economic development. Every district in Limpopo has something to offer. By developing their potential advantages, the government shall lift up the economies of all districts and improve the quality of life of our people.

Madam Speaker,

We are products of hope that see in the budding spring leaf upcoming summer harvest. We see in the dry beds of our rivers simmering springs as rains begin to fall, regenerating the wetlands that had temporarily gone to sleep. The hope is borne

out of the significant contribution that the mining sector is making to our provincial economy.

General government services are the second largest contributor to our provincial economy, after mining. The government is followed by finance, real estate and trade, catering and accommodation, reflecting the importance of the tourism sector in Limpopo.

I am pleased to report that Limpopo has seen a growth in investments. Our annual investment conferences, beginning with the first in 2021, have contributed over R280 billion in investment pledges. The difference that these pledges brought about is reflected in their immediate implementation. These investments include mining, agriculture, agro-processing, green energy, property development, as well as trade, catering and accommodation. Rising investment is a sign of confidence and is important for us to address unemployment and poverty.

We experienced an increase in employment from 2019 to 2023. Limpopo is in the top three provinces that have shown rising employment. Although we lost 40,000 jobs in the last quarter, we have created 182,000 jobs in 2023, making us the second largest province in job creation.

The provincial government has implemented enterprise development and support programmes. These programmes support local enterprises, including small, micro and medium enterprises, as well as co-operatives. We achieve this through access to finance, markets, training, and essential business equipment. We have established partnerships with organisations such as Impact Catalyst, Coca Cola Business South Africa, and the SAB Foundation, to implement enterprise

development programmes, targeting youth, women, people with disability and graduates interested in new venture creation.

Madam Speaker,

In August 2023, the Provincial Government of Limpopo took a significant step towards regulating the liquor industry by enacting the Limpopo Liquor Act, Act number 9 of 2009. This legislation was put into effect in alignment with the requirements set forth by the National Liquor Act of 2003 and the National Liquor Norms and Standards. The implementation of the Limpopo Liquor Act commenced on 1 August 2023, marking a pivotal moment in the province's efforts to ensure responsible and regulated liquor consumption.

One of the key aspects emphasised by the Limpopo Liquor Act is the protection of the rights of individuals to a peaceful environment. This includes regulations on operational times, noise pollution, and adherence to trading hours, all aimed at promoting responsible alcohol consumption and minimising negative impacts on communities. By enacting and operationalising the Limpopo Liquor Act, the Provincial Government is taking proactive steps to ensure a well-regulated and harmonious liquor industry that prioritises the well-being of residents and communities.

Honourable members,

The Limpopo Provincial Government is taking steps to ensure the sustainability of entities under the Limpopo Economic Development Agency (LEDA). These include establishing a Provincial Public Finance Management Act 3D Entity Monitoring and Evaluation Task Team. The purpose of the

Task Team is to monitor the implementation of the LEDA Group and GAAL sustainability and financial recovery plans. Here we are strengthening institutional governance and performance management.

Limpopo is known as a province where agriculture plays a pivotal role. In the first quarter of 2020, up to the third quarter of 2021, agriculture was the third largest contributor to employment in our province, after community and social services, as well as trade. It was overtaken by construction in the last quarter of 2021. In the first quarter of 2022, agriculture returned to the third spot in the province's sectoral employment contribution.

We have made significant progress in agriculture. We implemented agricultural support programmes, such as the Land-Care Programme, the Revitalisation of Agriculture and Agro-Value Chain Plan, and the market access certification programme. Efforts in climate-smart agriculture, skills development, research, and infrastructure development have contributed to agricultural production.

Our commitment to agricultural education and livestock disease control, in addition to other policy interventions, further demonstrates our resolve to build a prosperous and inclusive agricultural sector.

Ladies and gentlemen,

Today, I stand before you filled with a profound sense of pride and accomplishment, as we reflect on the strides we have made in the realm of public works and infrastructure development. Over the past four years, under the Sixth

Administration, our collective efforts have borne fruit, contributing to the transformation of our province's landscape and the quality of life of our people.

We embarked on a journey in 2019, with a clear vision of delivering socio-economic infrastructure to serve as the backbone for service provision across our province. I am thrilled to report that we have successfully delivered 50 socio-economic infrastructure projects, showing our dedication to the people of Limpopo.

Many of us, seated here today, are beneficiaries of the expansion of our road infrastructure network by over 6,000 tarred kilometers since 1994.

We sometimes just have to step out of this hall to see how the 15 km N1 Bypass ring road transformed the outlook of Polokwane or the ease of flow of traffic in Fetakgomo-Tubatse after the expansion of the R37 road. Go to Musina and many other villages in our province. We have made them attractive and accessible. People are no longer afraid of buying luxury vehicles in those villages.

During the State of the Province Address last year, we mentioned on our road infrastructure projects. I am pleased to report on the progress we have made thus far.

The upgrade of Road D4180 from Atok Mine to Ga-Selepe is in the final stages of design. Work will commence on this crucial road shortly after the design is completed and a contractor of appointed.

Road D4260 from Malope to Phokwane has already had the contractor appointed and construction has started. This upgrade will significantly enhance transportation in the area.

Regarding roads D4090, D4093, D4094, and D4096, known as Malemate roads, the contractor has been appointed.

The scope of works and preliminary design reports for roads D4199 from Apel to Ga Nkoana and D4190 have been approved. The consulting engineer is currently working on the detailed design report for these roads.

We have already made significant progress on priority roads in the province. Among others, the construction of road D3278 from Blouberg Hospital to Buffelshoek in the Capricorn District is well underway.

Road D3561 in Segole 1 and Segole 2, from N11 to Masebe Nature Reserve in the Waterberg District, is progressing.

We have also commenced work on road D3669, known as Mavhunga Access road, in the Vhembe District.

Road D3734, also known as Tshatshama, in the Mopani District, is currently under construction.

The construction of roads D3436, D3428, and D5007 in Ga-Ramoshwane, Ga-Rammetlwane, and Ga-Ramotlokwana in the Capricorn District is progressing well.

Similarly, the construction of road D3248 from Thapane access to Nwamitwa in the Mopani District is underway.

We have also commenced work on road D4283 from Glencowie to Malaka in the Sekhukhune District.

The construction of road D3671 from Musekwa to Maranikwe in the Vhembe District is progressing.

Similarly, the construction of road D4109 from Mamatonya to road D885 in the Capricorn District is underway.

We have created employment in all road infrastructure projects where construction has begun.

The Ga-Malekane Steelpoort bridge, situated on road D2219 connecting to the R555 in the Sekhukhune district, is a joint effort between RAL and mining companies in the Fetakgomo Tubatse Municipality. I am pleased to announce that this project has achieved a 35 per cent progress and is on track for completion in November 2024.

In the Waterberg district, RAL has entered into a Memorandum of Agreement with Northam Platinum, securing R41 million in funding, entirely provided by Northam Platinum. This initiative aims to enhance a bridge and upgrade a three-kilometer stretch of Road D2357 connecting to road R511. Having commenced in November 2023, the project is presently at a 32 per cent completion stage. The target is to complete it in August 2024.

In the Mopani District, RAL has signed a Memorandum of Agreement with Palabora Mining Company to rehabilitate and upgrade road D3786 in Mashishimale and road D4424 in Lulekani, with a combined value of R 205 million. RAL and the mining company have agreed to contribute R105 million and

R100 million, respectively. The project will commence in March 2024, aimed to be completed in September 2025.

Additionally, we have allocated resources for road maintenance and rehabilitation. This will improve the overall quality of our infrastructure and contribute to the longevity of our road network.

We have also given 19 roads to be maintained by the South African National Roads Agency Limited to leverage on its capacity.

Madam Speaker,

Education saw remarkable progress with the completion of 12 schools that had been devastated by severe storms. Schools like Nwaridi Secondary in Vhembe and Khetho Nxumalo in Mopani, among others, stand today as symbols of resilience and hope for our children and communities.

Our cultural heritage and governance structures were also strengthened with the delivery of traditional council offices, including the recently completed Raphahlelo, Bakone ba Matlala, Davhana and Bakwena ba Matsepe Traditional Councils.

In our quest to promote culture and knowledge, we have completed new library facilities in Seleteng, Mavalani, and Runnymede. We have also embarked on the construction of four new libraries in Tshaulu, Sekhukhune, Botshabelo, and Vleifontein.

Our commitment to public safety and agriculture saw the implementation of the Limpopo Traffic College projects and the construction of agricultural service centre offices.

Healthcare infrastructure received a significant boost with upgrades to laundries at various hospitals and the construction of new medical facilities, ensuring that our communities have access to quality healthcare services.

We have refurbished the Schoemansdal Museum and the Thohoyandou Government Complex.

Through these projects, we have created over 21,800 work opportunities, empowering women, youth, and people with disability.

As we look to the future, we remain committed to our infrastructure development agenda. Just last week we have conducted sod turning on the site of the Limpopo Provincial Theatre. This construction will unearth new talent and position our province as a key player in the creative arts economy.

Honourable members,

Census 2022 shows that 69.1 per cent of our households have access to water. However, amid growth in the number of households, 20.5 per cent of our households has not yet been connected to piped water. In addition, lack of adequate bulk infrastructure and reticulation capacity remain a significant challenge in ensuring universal access to water. This is despite the fact that our dams have recorded the average storage capacity of 81.8 per cent as at the January 2024.

As I said earlier, to tackle these challenges head-on, we strengthened our engagements with water service authorities. Since 2013/2014, the province has spent R26,6 billion on Municipal Infrastructure Grant (MIG), with the majority of this spending going to water.

Recent figures show that, during the period 2023-2024 financial year, the provincial MIG allocation is approximately R3,52 billion. Nine out of 25 municipalities, that is 36 per cent, with allocation above R100 million have a combined total of approximately R2,7 billion, that is 96 per cent of the provincial allocation. Sixty-eight per cent of the provincial Municipal Infrastructure Grant is allocated to nine water service authority municipalities.

In the main, this allocation is meant for provisioning of basic services such as water, sanitation, electricity and refuse removal. Therefore, a failure to spend these allocated budgets implies we are depriving our people of the much-needed public goods and services.

Ladies and gentlemen,

Allow me to take this opportunity to correct misleading information desperately spread by some minority section of this august house about Limpopo's spending. Spreading misleading information from this house negatively impacts on its integrity and standing in society.

The fact is that we have fought against underspending, as we did against disclaimer audit outcomes. Finally, in the past two years, we realised progress in curbing underspending. Our efforts have brought underspending within the national norm of

2 per cent of the total budget. In 2022/2023 financial year, Limpopo surrendered only 0.15 per cent of its over R70 billion budget.

The province has improved spending, resulting in receiving an additional R250 million this year for human settlements grant. Our emphasis on spending has nothing to do with expenditure for its own sake. It is essentially a means to deliver public goods and services. That is our ultimate mandate.

Madam Speaker,

Through our social cluster programme, we have made significant strides in the areas of co-operative governance, human settlements, and traditional affairs over the past five years. This journey has been marked by achievements such as municipalities attaining clean audits, improved disaster management co-ordination, and the introduction, as well as the implementation, of the District Development Model.

Our focus includes transforming informal settlements through formalisation, infrastructure connection, and servicing of sites. Approximately 31,000 households have benefited from housing programmes.

The institution of traditional leadership has received substantial support. From 2014, we have been allocating vehicles to deserving senior traditional leaders to enable them to perform their work. We are honoured that in 2023, we have allocated a further 102 vehicles to deserving senior traditional leaders. Our target is to complete the allocation by the end of March 2024.

I want to take this opportunity to express my sincere gratitude to our traditional leaders for running initiation schools in ways that make us the best in the country. We wish the 2024 initiation season a great success, characterised by zero death. Working together with traditional leaders, as the custodians of our culture and heritage, the provincial government will clamp down on illegal initiation schools.

I still urge traditional authorities to find a lasting solution to matters of succession and dispute resolution on their own. As the government, we would like to stay clear from being entangled in disputes arising from traditional leadership succession. The government does not identify senior traditional leaders to recognise. Our role is limited to fulfilling our legislative recognition after the royal families and royal councils have themselves determined who their senior traditional leader is.

The journey towards a better future for all residents continues, with a strong emphasis on governance, development, and community well-being.

Ladies and gentlemen, esteemed educators, hardworking school governing bodies, dedicated learners, and the resilient people of Limpopo,

We are now left with 80 schools to complete the elimination of pit latrines, from 380 schools identified in 2017 as having inappropriate sanitation. This is notable progress.

Our Sixth Administration carries pride in offering the best results in the 30-year history of Limpopo.

In addition to the commendable improvement in the matric pass rate of 2023, we have realised an increase in bachelor passes.

To move with the times, especially the digital technological revolution, we have provided 35,000 tablets to Grade 1 and Grade 6 learners. This initiative goes far beyond the gadgets. It equips learners with digital skills and prepares them for the evolving demands of the modern economy. By implementing digital technology in education, we are ensuring that our learners are well-prepared for the skills of the future.

Currently, Limpopo boasts 23 focus schools, comprising 15 technical high schools and eight agricultural schools. Our approach ensures that each district in our province benefits from hosting a focus school.

We have graciously received a donation from China, earmarked for the construction of an engineering and technical high school. A dedicated Task Team is now identifying a suitable site for this pivotal project.

Our focus schools have played a crucial role in nurturing talent and providing specialised education in areas such as science, technology, engineering, and mathematics. Our aim is to develop these schools to serve as centres of excellence, empowering our learners to excel in their chosen fields and contribute meaningfully to society.

Special thanks to the Statistics South Africa: under the stewardship of Mr Risinga Maluleke as the Statistician-General, StatsSA has donated tablets to Limpopo from the census 2022.

We have established partnerships to steer Limpopo's skills development initiatives, ensuring that all Sector Education and Training Authorities, along with key stakeholders, such as TVET colleges, Community Education Training Colleges, universities, and trade unions, as well as government departments, are aligned in our mission to uplift the youth through skills development.

From 2021 to February 2024, over R1.2 billion has been invested in skills development in the province, benefiting over 26,000 learners and students, primarily the youth. This substantial investment underscores our commitment to empowering our young people.

Looking ahead to the 2024/2025 financial year, we are excited to launch our flagship skills development programmes, with merSETA funding amounting to approximately R137 million. These programmes target 960 learners across various critical sectors, including apprenticeships in motor mechanics, diesel mechanics, mechanical fitting, welding, and electrician trades.

The merSETA supported programme also targets artisan recognition of prior learning for 70 workers and learnerships for 250 learners in new venture creation. It further targets support for 10 small, micro and medium enterprises, as well as co-operatives, in product standardisation and technical capacity building. It includes short skills development programmes for 130 workers in solar installation. This initiative is crucial for skills development, youth empowerment, and employment.

Honourable members,

Our path has been marked by significant milestones that have shaped healthcare in our province.

We have made remarkable strides, particularly in reducing the HIV positivity rate among the 15 to 24 years age group from 1.9 per cent to 1.3 per cent. This surpassed our target. Our Antiretroviral Therapy has expanded, ensuring broader access to HIV treatment.

Our efforts in TB treatment and maternal healthcare have positioned Limpopo as a provincial leader in these areas.

Our infrastructure development efforts have been robust as well. We have commenced construction for the Limpopo Central Academic Hospital. The construction of the Limpopo Central Academic Hospital reflects our dedication to expanding and modernising our healthcare infrastructure and training of healthcare professionals, including the much-needed specialists. The impact of this hospital will be profound, offering state-of-the-art healthcare services and serving as a hub for healthcare training and research.

The upgrading of the Siloam Hospital, as well as other healthcare facilities, will improve the provision of healthcare in our province.

The acquisition of 566 ambulances in the current financial year will enhance our Emergency Medical Services, underscoring our commitment to provide timely and efficient emergency care to our people.

Our Rural Health Matters Programme has contributed significantly to reducing the backlog of surgery, taking quality healthcare to the people.

The journey ahead is filled with challenges, but our resolve is stronger than ever. Together, we will continue to build a healthcare system that is resilient, inclusive, and capable of meeting the needs of our people. Our commitment to the healthcare and well-being of our people is unwavering, and through the National Health Insurance, we shall ensure that no one is left behind.

Our journey is far from over, but with the continued support of our dedicated healthcare workers, partners, and the community, I am confident that we will achieve even greater milestones in the years to come. Together, let us continue to work towards a healthier Limpopo.

Madam Speaker,

Our journey towards creating a safer, more efficient transport system has seen significant milestones in the 2023/2024 financial year.

We have embarked on a transformative journey to bolster our fight against road fatalities. The recruitment of 150 young workers for our traffic learnership programme marks a pivotal step in this direction. These learners, currently receiving a stipend, are being equipped with the skills necessary to enhance our traffic management capabilities by 2025. This initiative addresses the urgent need for capacity and opens opportunities for our youth.

We have reinforced our commitment to road safety through the appointment of 274 road safety ambassadors. Deployed across all our five districts, these ambassadors play a crucial role. They safeguard pedestrians and improve the flow of traffic during peak hours.

The refurbishment of the Limpopo Traffic College, including the construction of new residential and catering facilities, underscores our dedication to maintaining high standards of training. This investment not only ensures compliance with health and safety standards but also positions the college as a premier traffic training institution in the region.

The Shova Kalula bicycle project distributed 2,197 bicycles to learners in rural areas over five years to promote non-motorised transport. This has an added spinoff of a healthy lifestyle.

Our journey towards a safer, more efficient transport system is ongoing.

Ladies and gentlemen,

Our commitment to the well-being and care of older persons has been unwavering. Through our efforts, 533 older persons now have access to residential facilities, and 13,665 benefit from community-based care and support services.

We have championed the rights and well-being of persons with disability, providing care for 294 people in residential facilities. We have ensured that 3,514 have access to services in protective workshops.

In fighting HIV and Aids through social development programmes, we have trained 750 implementors on social behavioural change and provided psycho-social support services to over 10,000 beneficiaries. Our family preservation initiatives have engaged approximately 74,000 family members in services, reunited 219 members with their families, and facilitated the participation of over 29,000 in parenting programmes.

Through the Expanded Public Works Programme, we have created over 1,500 work opportunities.

We have empowered vulnerable individuals and communities, with 7,200 households gaining access to food through our food security programmes.

Together, let us continue to build a brighter future for the people of Limpopo through social development.

Madam Speaker,

Since 2013, the Provincial Government has made significant progress towards building a capable, ethical, and developmental state. As part of this crucial imperative, we committed ourselves to fight against corruption in government, wastage, and mismanagement of public funds.

During the State of the Province Address last year, we gave a report to this august house on the progress we have made, working together with the Special Investigating Unit. In addition, we are pleased to report that we are also working together with Chapter 9 institutions, such as the Public Protector and the Human Rights Commission.

For those who do not know, these are the institutions which have been established by this democratic government since the 1994 democratic breakthrough. They were never there during the colonial and apartheid regimes. The decision of this progressive government to establish these institutions was fundamental to ensure that the rule of law is adhered to.

Progress to date is that, working together with the Special Investigation Unit, the Provincial Government has implemented its recommendations into the COVID-19 funds, and appropriate sanctions are being muted against all those who were found guilty of wrongdoing. Notably, some government officials are facing criminal investigations.

Similarly, we are currently implementing the Public Protector's recommendations on irregularities at the Department of Social Development, in the main, and other departments in general.

In the same spirit, we are calling upon on all our municipalities and other water services authorities implicated in the water provisioning report by the commission last year, to co-operate fully with the commission.

In the same vein, I want to send a strong message to all those in the public service, particularly those who are prone to commit corruption, fraud and maladministration, to desist from committing those activities.

Ladies and gentlemen,

During the State of Province last year, we reiterated our commitment towards embracing and acknowledging the pivotal

role played by our military war veterans in the struggle for freedom and democracy. This programme of action has been under implementation since 1994. We know and we equally acknowledge that the plight of the military war veterans is the collective responsibility of our government.

I am honoured to report that the Provincial Inter-Ministerial Task established by the Honourable Deputy President, is progressing with no hinderance.

Similarly, we are pleased to report that our decision to mandate all MECs to put specific plans to support our military war veterans is being implemented.

Furthermore, our government continues to provide educational and skills development interventions, housing and grants for all deserving military war veterans.

Our resolve is guided by the imperative to implement focused interventions aimed at improving the living conditions of our military war veterans. We are precisely doing that. Once again, we dip our revolutionary banners in honour of all the heroes and heroines of our liberation struggle, who laid down their lives for the democracy that we are enjoying today.

Honourable members,

I want to take this opportunity to congratulate Bafana Bafana on restoring our pride in the football fraternity by achieving a bronze medal in the 2024 African Cup of Nations. We are proud of the significant number of players in Bafana Bafana from Limpopo.

I also wish to thank other stars who make Limpopo proud in other sport codes, arts and culture, both nationally and internationally.

Madam Speaker,

As part of the duties of the Premier, I have concluded several special projects, which are in the main humanitarian in nature. I am pleased to report that since 2017, working with good Samaritans, some of whom are within our midst today, we have recorded enormous achievements. My special word of gratitude goes to everybody who contributed immensely towards initiating this robust programme, aimed at eliminating the imbalance of the past by uplifting the socio-economic conditions of Limpopo residents.

The Premier's Special Projects are commitments and pledges made by the Premier and they have been implemented accordingly. I am pleased to announce the following Special Projects as duly completed:

The Premier has built and handed over a house to the family of Vusi Ramusi on 22 September 2022. This was an intervention after the stalwart of our struggle for democracy untimely passed away.

Similarly, the Premier built a house in honour of another hero of our struggle for democracy, Ephraim Phorogohlo Mogale, in Botha Village, Ephraim Mogale Municipality. The house was handed over to the family on 25 September 2022.

The Premier donated an amount of R300,000 to the St Mathews Anglican Church in January 2023.

In 2021, during President Ramaphosa's visit to Precious Ramabulana's family in Tshikuwi Village, Makhado Municipality, the President expressed a wish for a house to be built for the Ramabulana family. The Premier fulfilled the President's wish, and the house has since been built and handed over to the family. Precious Ramabulana was a student at Capricorn TVET college. She was brutally murdered in gender-based violence.

In 2023, the Premier has donated a house to the family of Inah Mabasa in Matolokwane Village, Makhuduthamaga Municipality, to improve the living conditions of the family.

The premier has donated Braille Laptop to a learner at Rivoni School for the Blind. This is a single laptop; however, the cost is prohibitive.

The Premier has donated air conditioners on the 25 July 2017 to Thobela Secondary School.

The Premier donated a complete set of school uniform to Kefiloe Moukangoe in Kgaladi Primary School, Mamone Village, in Makhuduthamaga Local Municipality, on the 06 April 2022.

At Rivoni School for the Blind, twelve state-of-the-art classrooms, girls' and boys' hostels, and a house for the manager of the facility have been successfully completed. In addition, the Science Laboratory and the Administration Block have also been completed in December 2023. As we speak now, the Dining Hall facility is near completion.

The following are outstanding Premier Special projects, which are currently under implementation.

Eight Southern Limb mining houses contributed over R127 million to the Malekana Bridge. The Sod turning ceremony occurred on 21 February 2023. Currently, the bridge is under construction and upon completion, the long wait to pass through the much-used Steelbridge will be a thing of the past.

A memorandum of understanding has been signed by SANRAL and RAL to build the Moria Interchange Bridge for the St Engenas ZCC. SANRAL is completing detailed designs of the project. As soon as that is completed, we will add another modern road infrastructure in Limpopo.

From 2018 to 2023, the Premier's Bursary Fund has awarded bursaries to 48 learners to continue their studies in higher education and training.

Madan Speaker, honourable members, the people of Limpopo, ladies and gentlemen,

I am reminded of the words of another great South African artist, Johnny Clegg, who sang about the spirit of the great heart. It is this spirit, the great heart of Limpopo, that has guided us through our challenges and triumphs. As I prepare to pass the baton to the next Premier, and together with the current Executive Council to the next Executive Council, I am confident that this spirit will continue to guide our province towards greater heights.

I would also like to send my words of special appreciation to the governing African National Congress, for the responsibility entrusted to me as the Premier for the past 11 years. The ANC

did not bring me on board as a messiah, but my glorious movement brought me in as a servant of the people.

I wish to acknowledge Premier Advocate Ngoako Ramatlhodi, Premier Ambassador Sello Moloto, and Premier Mr Cassel Mathale, for laying the foundation and steering the ship called the Limpopo Provincial Government.

I also wish to thank the Honourable Speaker, the Deputy Speaker, and all the honourable members of this august house.

To all political parties which were represented in this august house before and now, I thank you for our relationship, which was both complementary and contradictory.

I thank the Director-General of the Provincial Government, Mr Nape Nchabeleng, and all heads of departments, and the entire complement of public servants for their support throughout our journey of transformation and development.

Thank you to our traditional authorities.

I also wish to thank civil society organisations for their contributing in building the much-needed social compacts in our province.

To the people of Limpopo, I wish to say a big thank you for the support, co-operation, and encouragement. It was worth it.

Finally, I wish to pay special tribute to my late wife, the First Lady of Limpopo, Margret Mathabatha, who was my pillar of strength, from the first day as I took over the responsibilities as Limpopo Premier. Your support was not limited to my

responsibilities as the Premier, you were also a dependable ally, a beautiful wife, my comrade, a caring mother to our children, a pillar of strength to the impoverished, a gender-based violence activist, and a darling of my family, relatives and the people of Limpopo.

Madam Speaker

With your due indulgence, of course, I wish to dedicate this speech to Mma Maggie Mathabatha. May her beautiful soul rest in peace.

With these words, I say thank you, Limpopo, for your trust and your unwavering spirit.

It has been my greatest honour to serve you.

I thank you, from the bottom of my heart.