

LIMPOPO PROVINCE PREMIER DR. PHOPHI RAMATHUBA
SPEECH FOR THE LIMPOPO WOMEN'S DAY CELEBRATION

09 AUGUST 2024, THONONDA

Program Director, Ms. Mavhungu Lerule Ramakhanya,
Speaker of the Provincial Legislature, Ms. Makoma Makhurupetje,
Deputy Speaker, Ms. Tebogo Mamorobela,
Members of the Executive Council,
Human Rights Commission Representative, Advocate Sandra Makoasha,
Commission for Gender Equality, Advocate Ntando Gumede,
Vho Thovhele Kennedy Midiyavhathu Tshivhase
Chairperson of the House of Traditional Leaders
Vhembe District Executive Mayor, Cllr Freda Nkondo,
Thulamela Local Municipality Mayor, Cllr Sara Rammuda,
Progressive Women's Movement Representative,
Esteemed Guests,

Ndi Matsheloni, Avuxeni, Thobela, Silotshile, Good Morning, Goie More.

Today, we gather to celebrate a day of profound significance in the tapestry of our nation—a day dedicated to honoring the women of South Africa, past, present, and future. This year's Women's Day holds even greater importance as we mark this celebration at the dawn of the 7th Administration of the Government of National Unity (GNU). We stand together under the theme: "Celebrating 30 Years of Democracy: Advancing Women's Development.

It is truly heartening to witness the strength and unity of the women who have gathered here today at Thononda village, this is a clear reflection of the resilience that defines our province and our nation. Your presence is a powerful testament to the enduring spirit of women across Limpopo and beyond.

Program Director,

Our journey as women has been long, challenging, and often marked by struggles that could have silenced our voices. Yet, we have shown that our voices are not just loud—they are transformative.

Women leaders in South Africa have been at the forefront of radical change, championing laws, policies, and initiatives that have made gender awareness and responsiveness integral to our country's governance. These changes have not only redefined institutional norms but have also opened doors for countless women who were once excluded from leadership and power.

As we celebrate Women's Day today, we reflect on the 30 years of democracy that have shaped our country. We can proudly acknowledge the strides we have made, with women now occupying prominent leadership positions across various sectors. Recently, President Cyril Ramaphosa appointed Judge Mandisa Maya as the first female Chief Justice—a landmark moment in our history. We also have Tsakani Maluleke as the Auditor-General, Kholeka Gcaleka as the Public Protector, and many other women leading as ministers, deputy ministers, MECs, HODs, and DDGs. These are not just individual achievements; they are a collective victory for all women, illustrating that the barriers of the past can indeed be broken.

Program Director,

While we celebrate these successes, we must also confront the stark realities that persist. Many women in our province continue to live below the poverty line, facing daily hardships such as the lack of access to clean water—challenges that we must address with urgency. As a government, we are committed to working closely with relevant stakeholders to tackle these issues head-on. No woman in Limpopo should be deprived of the basic necessities of life, and we will not rest until this is achieved.

These positive changes extend beyond the corridors of power, reaching the lives of ordinary women who are now asserting their rights to land, resources, and financial opportunities. These are the tools that empower women to uplift their families and contribute to the broader socio-economic development of our country.

However, it is a sobering reality that women continue to bear the brunt of poverty, unemployment, and social injustices. Women are often the primary caregivers, raising children with limited resources, including the social grants provided by the government. The high unemployment rate disproportionately affects women, exacerbating the challenges they face daily.

Moreover, women continue to be the most affected by the HIV/AIDS epidemic, often carrying the dual burden of being caregivers for their loved ones while battling the disease themselves. This

reality is compounded by the lack of job opportunities, forcing many into vulnerable and compromising situations.

The scarcity of water remains a critical issue in many communities, with women often forced to travel long distances to fetch water for their households. Similarly, while over 90% of households in our province have access to electricity, there are still communities where women must walk kilometres to collect firewood for cooking, a task that directly affects their well-being.

Program Director,

Gender-based violence remains one of the most pressing issues facing our society. This is a painful and urgent crisis that we must address with unwavering determination. Recently, I met with Provincial Commissioner Lieutenant General Thembi Radebe to discuss strategies for combating this scourge. We need a comprehensive summit dedicated to addressing the crimes committed against women and children—a platform where we can develop concrete solutions to end this violence.

Program Director, our judicial system also plays a crucial role in this fight. Too often, perpetrators of gender-based violence evade justice, aided by legal representatives who manipulate the system. We must be resolute in ensuring that those who violate the rights of women are held accountable, facing the full weight of the law. Our society can no longer afford to be lenient towards those who perpetuate such heinous crimes.

These are the challenges we must confront head-on if we are truly serious about transforming our country. We must create an environment where women can ascend to positions of power in all sectors—whether in politics, the church, the corporate world, or government institutions. The time has come for us to ensure that women are not only participants but leaders in shaping the future of our nation.

Gone are the days when men felt entitled to own and control the lives of women. If we attend the same schools, worship in the same churches, register in the same universities, and are interviewed for the same positions, what justifies the continued inequality between men and women? This is the narrative we, as women, are ready to challenge. We must pave the way for our girls to know that they can compete and excel in any field, even in those traditionally dominated by men.

The path laid by our foremothers—women like Winnie Madikizela-Mandela, Charlotte Mannya Maxeke, Lillian Ngoyi, Adelaide Tambo, Ruth First, Sophie De Bruyn, Joyce Mashamba, Albertina Sisulu, and so many others—cannot be forgotten. These brave women sacrificed their lives for the liberation of our country and the emancipation of women. Their legacy is a powerful reminder that the struggle for true gender equality must continue.

Program Director,

We must acknowledge that much remains to be done to fulfill the dreams of our foremothers. We must drive an agenda that sees women occupying top positions across all sectors. This is not just about fairness; it is a necessity for the progress and prosperity of our province and our nation. As a woman Premier, I am committed to ensuring that gender equality is not just a goal but a reality. We must lead by example, demonstrating that our province is serious about empowering women and promoting gender equity.

In the past month, we celebrated the achievements of two remarkable women from Limpopo who have made us proud on the global stage. Our world-renowned singer, Makhadzi, won the BET Award in Los Angeles, standing tall among the biggest stars in the music industry. And Kgothatso Montjane, who won the Wheelchair Doubles title at Wimbledon, has inspired us all with her determination and success. These women have shown us that neither the color of their skin, their place of birth, nor a disability can limit their potential to reach great heights. Their achievements are a beacon of hope and inspiration for the youth of our province.

As we celebrate Women's Day today, I urge every woman here to uplift one another and to mentor the young girls in our communities. We must embody the spirit of Charlotte Mannya Maxeke, who once said, "This work is not for yourselves—kill that spirit of self and do not live above your people but live with them, and if you can rise, bring someone with you." By living these words, we can shape the communities we live in and inspire a new generation of women leaders who will make our province shine.

In conclusion, I call upon each and every one of us to be the light that brings hope and accelerates progress towards an equal, sustainable, and peaceful future for all. For every woman and for every girl, everywhere, together, it is within our reach.

I thank you.