

SPEECH BY PREMIER DR. PHOPHI RAMATHUBA DURING THE
CELEBRATION OF THE INTERNATIONAL DAY OF OLDER PERSONS
AT MODIMOLLE, AFM FOUNTAIN OF LIFE CHURCH, WATERBERG
DISTRICT

01 OCTOBER 2024

Programme Director,
MEC for Social Development, Ms. Florence Radzilani,
Waterberg District Municipality Executive Mayor, Cllr. Jack Maeko,
Modimolle-Mookgopong Mayor, Cllr. Sechele Sebolai,
Chairperson of the Older Persons Forum, Mr. Kenneth Mamedupi Tjale,
Traditional Leaders present,
Distinguished Guests,
Thobela, Ndi Matsheloni, Avuxeni, Silotshile, Good morning, Goeie more

Today, we proudly join the international community in commemorating the International Day of Older Persons. The United Nations General Assembly designated October 1 as the International Day of Older Persons by resolution 45/106 of December 14, 1990, following earlier initiatives like the Vienna International Plan of Action on Ageing. This significant resolution highlights the importance of recognizing the contributions of older persons and addressing the challenges they face.

Programme Director, as a province, we commemorate this day as part of our National Older Persons Week, which aligns with Social Development Month. This year's theme, "Ageing with Dignity: The Importance of Strengthening Care and Support Systems for Older Persons Worldwide," reminds us to renew our commitment to ensuring that older persons can grow old with dignity and purpose. Our elders have played and continue to play crucial roles in strengthening communities as workers, carers, volunteers, and connectors.

Unfortunately, their contributions are often undervalued, restricted by ageism, and hindered by societal and physical barriers. Today, we reaffirm our responsibility to remove these barriers and support older persons in all aspects of their lives.

Programme Director,

Older persons are not just beneficiaries of social programs but are also active citizens who continue to contribute to national development. In line with South Africa's National Development Plan (NDP) 2030, we are committed to improving the lives of all citizens, including our elders. The NDP envisions a society where older persons can live fulfilling lives, with access to quality healthcare, social protection, and community participation.

Chapter 11 of the NDP emphasizes that vulnerable groups, including older persons, should benefit from services that facilitate access to social care, protection, and a welfare system that caters to their needs. Additionally, Chapter 13 calls for improved collaboration between national, provincial, and local governments to ensure the effective management of social systems that support our elders. We must ensure that our elders live in safety, dignity, and security, as they have earned the right to age with respect and care.

Programme Director,

The Department of Social Development, as the lead department for the care and protection of older persons, plays a pivotal role in raising awareness about the rights of older people and the challenges they face. These include elder abuse, social isolation, and financial insecurity. We are committed to creating an environment where older persons are not only protected but also empowered to live independently and actively participate in society.

To further this commitment, we have implemented several initiatives aimed at promoting the well-being of older persons. We have tasked all departments, local and district municipalities, to submit their annual build-up activity plans for the International Day of Older Persons. These plans outline activities that promote awareness, protect the rights of older persons, and encourage communities to recognize and support our elders. Weekly reports are required to ensure the implementation of these initiatives.

In the lead-up to today's celebration, we have already conducted the following activities:

1. World Alzheimer's Awareness Day
2. Provincial Active Ageing Programmes (Golden Games)
3. International Day of Older Persons Awareness Campaigns

World Alzheimer's Awareness Day was observed on September 21, 2024, in the Sekhukhune District, Zaaiplaas area, where we reached 250 older persons and caregivers. Various stakeholders, including the South African Social Security Agency (SASSA), the Department of Home Affairs, the Department of Health, and NGOs, were present to provide support and information. Our Provincial Active Ageing Programme, held on September 18-19, saw the participation of over 1,000 older persons and their caregivers from all five districts.

Programme Director, while these activities aim to empower and uplift our elders, we must also confront the darker realities they face. Recently, we have seen distressing incidents of violence and abuse targeting older persons. In the Waterberg District, a 92-year-old woman was brutally murdered while sleeping in her home. Similarly, in the Sekhukhune District, a 27-year-old man was arrested for raping a 101-year-old woman. These heinous acts are a direct assault on the dignity of older persons and cannot be tolerated. Our government, through the Office of the Premier and relevant departments, has provided care and support to the affected families. We will continue working closely with law enforcement to bring the perpetrators of these crimes to justice and prevent further tragedies.

Programme Director,

As part of our ongoing efforts to promote active ageing, we have planned several upcoming events that will keep our older persons engaged:

National Active Ageing (Golden Games): October 29-31, 2024, in the North West Province, where all districts in Limpopo will participate.

Older Persons Annual General Meeting: Scheduled for October 18, 2024.

Older Persons Empowerment and Dialogue: Date to be confirmed.

Programme Director, these activities are part of a broader strategy that includes the work of the Limpopo Older Persons Forum (LOPF), established in partnership with the Department of Social Development and the Human Rights Commission. The LOPF provides a platform for older persons to voice their concerns and needs at provincial and national levels. It also advocates for their empowerment, protection, and well-being.

It is crucial to recognize that older persons are integral to the fabric of our society. However, they face numerous challenges, including poverty, elder abuse, social isolation, and ageism. According to recent data, over 73% of older persons in South Africa rely on old age grants for survival, and many live in households where they are the primary breadwinners. This situation often leads to financial insecurity and places a heavy burden on our elders, who continue to support their families despite limited resources. We must address this issue by strengthening our social protection systems and ensuring that older persons receive the support they need.

Programme Director,

To effectively address the challenges facing older persons, we must:

1. Promote social engagement and intergenerational connections: Through community-based programs, we can combat social isolation and foster stronger relationships between generations.
2. Strengthen social protection systems: By improving pensions and social security, we can ensure that older persons live with dignity and independence.
3. Support caregivers: We must provide training, resources, and respite care for both family members and professional caregivers to help them in their vital role.

We urge all sectors of society—government, NGOs, businesses, and communities—to work together in creating policies and programs that address the unique needs of older persons. This includes investing in age-friendly infrastructure, promoting lifelong learning, and fostering inclusive communities that value the contributions of older persons.

Programme Director,

In conclusion, ageing with dignity is not just a governmental aspiration; it is a societal imperative. By strengthening care and support systems, we can create a more inclusive and compassionate society where everyone, regardless of age, can thrive. Let us recommit to ensuring the dignity, safety, and well-being of older persons in South Africa. Together, we can build a future where our elders are valued, respected, and empowered to live fulfilling lives.

I thank you.