

SPEECH BY LIMPOPO PREMIER DR. PHOPHI RAMATHUBA DURING THE PROVINCIAL  
HUMAN RIGHTS DAY COMMEMORATION AT MAKONDE VILLAGE, THULAMELA  
MUNICIPALITY, VHEMBE DISTRICT

21 MARCH 2025

Programme Director,  
MEC for Economic Development, Environment and Tourism, Mr. Tshitereke Matibe,  
Deputy Speaker of the Limpopo Legislature, Ms. Tebogo Mamorobela,  
Vhembe District Executive Mayor, Cllr. Freda Nkondo,  
Thulamela Local Municipality Mayor, Cllr. Sara Rammbuda,  
Councillors,  
Mailausumbwa, MKP Tshivhase,  
Limpopo Human Rights Commission Representative, Mr. Victor Mavhidula,  
Commission for Gender Equality Representative, Advocate Ntando Gumede,  
Members of the Progressive Women's Movement,  
Representatives of Chapter 9 Institutions,  
Faith-Based Organisations,  
Distinguished Guests,  
Ladies and Gentlemen,

Ndi matsheloni, Avuxeni, Thobela, Good morning, Goie more,

Today, we have gathered here to commemorate Human Rights Day on the sacred soil of Makonde, a land rich in history and spiritual significance. Oral tradition tells us that this was once the dwelling place of Nwali, the great deity who communicated with the Venda people, leaving behind his giant footprint as a mark of his divine presence.

Makonde was known as a place of worship, a revered shrine where priests gathered to seek guidance and offer supplications for rain and prosperity. The Ravhura clan, the custodians of this spiritual heritage, were known for their wisdom, healing powers, and deep connection to the divine.

Hafha ndi he nwali a vha a tshi wanala hone, thavhani dza Makonde.

Beyond its spiritual significance, Makonde is also home to heroes of our liberation struggle, men and women who sacrificed their lives for justice and freedom. The likes of Amon Mbedzi and Peter Dambuzza Malada stood against the oppression of our people, confronting the forces of injustice with unwavering determination. Their courage reminds us that human rights were not given to us freely; they were fought for with blood, sweat, and tears.

Programme Director, this year's Human Rights Day is commemorated under the theme: "Deepening a Culture of Social Justice and Human Rights." This theme challenges us to reflect on the progress we have made in building a just and equal society while acknowledging the work that still lies ahead.

We gather here today to reaffirm our commitment to the Bill of Rights, as enshrined in Chapter 2 of our Constitution, which guarantees every citizen fundamental rights such as equality, dignity, freedom, and security.

As we commemorate this day, we cannot forget the tragedy that occurred 65 years ago in Sharpeville. On that fateful day, innocent men and women who were protesting against unjust pass laws were met with brutal force.

The massacre of 69 people, with many more injured, remains a dark stain on our history. It is a painful reminder of the human cost of oppression and the importance of protecting the rights we now enjoy.

Even today, we continue to witness acts of racial violence that seek to undermine the dignity of our people. Just six months ago, right here in our province, we were horrified by the killing of two black farmworkers whose bodies were thrown into a pigsty. Such despicable acts of racism have no place in our society.

We must be vigilant and resolute in condemning all forms of discrimination and injustice, ensuring that our province remains a place where every person, regardless of race or background, is treated with respect and dignity.

Programme Director, the Constitution of our country remains a powerful shield that protects the rights of all citizens. It prohibits unfair discrimination on the basis of race, gender, religion and other factors.

It guarantees equality before the law, ensuring that no one is above the law and that justice is accessible to all. However, the mere existence of these rights is not enough; we must actively work to ensure they are realised in the daily lives of our people.

Human rights are not just theoretical concepts; they are the foundation of a just and humane society. They include the right to life and liberty, freedom from slavery and torture, freedom of opinion and expression, and the right to work and education.

These rights must be protected and upheld at all costs. They mean that every person should be able to love who they choose, work where they are qualified, and live without fear of discrimination or violence.

Despite our democratic gains, we continue to face significant human rights challenges.

Violence against women and girls remains a national crisis, placing South Africa among the countries with the highest rates of femicide.

Gender-based violence is an urgent human rights issue that impacts the lives of women and girls across all communities. It undermines their social, economic, and political participation and must be eradicated.

We must ensure that women and girls are safe in their homes, workplaces, and communities.

These challenges require collective action. As a government, we are committed to working with civil society, business, and all stakeholders to address these pressing human rights issues.

Programme Director, we cannot speak of human rights without addressing the need for social cohesion and unity. Sadly, we are witnessing a decline in the spirit of Ubuntu, the generosity, kindness, and respect that once defined us as Limpopo people.

It is disheartening to see divisions and intolerance growing in our communities. Issues of tribalism are raising an ugly head at some quarters. Therefore, we must reclaim our values and restore the spirit of togetherness that has always been our strength.

As the 7th Administration, we are working tirelessly to improve the lives of our people. We have recently approved the Limpopo Development Plan (LDP), which serves as our guiding framework to build an ethical and developmental state, reduce poverty, and create sustainable employment opportunities.

We recognize that access to basic services remains a challenge for many of our people, particularly water shortages. To address this, we have established a War Room on Water to fast-track interventions and ensure that no community is left behind. Water is a basic human right, and we will not rest until this issue is resolved.

Programme Director, let us also take a stand in defense of human rights defenders, activists, and whistleblowers who continue to face threats and intimidation. Their courage and sacrifices contribute to safeguarding democracy and ensuring that justice prevails.

Programme Director, all human rights are interconnected, whether social, economic, civil, cultural, or political. When one right is undermined, all rights are weakened. We must stand firm and defend the principles of justice and equality for all.

Let us use this day as a call to action, to reach out, to connect, and to strengthen the movement for human rights in our province and beyond.

Together, let us deepen the culture of social justice and human rights. Let us build a society where every person is treated with dignity, where no one is left behind, and where freedom truly belongs to all.

I thank you.