

SPEECH BY PREMIER DR PHOPHI RAMATHUBA DURING THE COMMEMORATION OF FREEDOM DAY AT NORTHAM SPORT GROUND, THABAZIMBI

27 April 2025

Programme Director, MEC for Sport, Arts and Culture, Mr Jerry Funani Maseko, Deputy Speaker of the Limpopo Legislature, Ms Tebogo Mamorobela, All MECs present, Waterberg District Executive Mayor, Cllr Jack Maeko, Thabazimbi Local Municipality Mayor, Cllr Tumisang Pilane, Councillors, Limpopo Human Rights Commission Representative, Commission for Gender Equality Representative, Members of the Progressive Women's Movement, Representatives of Chapter 9 Institutions, Faith-Based Organisations, Distinguished Guests, Ladies and Gentlemen,

Thobela, Ndi matsheloni, Avuxeni, Good morning, Goeie more.

In the western side of the Waterberg, where the mighty mountains rise like ancient sentinels of the land, rich with the veins of platinum, chrome, and iron, we gather in a landscape that mirrors the strength and resilience of our people.

These mountains, majestic and mineral-rich, have long whispered the stories of our forebears, their struggles, triumphs, and dreams for a liberated South Africa. From the depths of the earth to the spirit of the people, this land tells a story of unyielding hope and courage.

Today, we are gathered here in Northam to commemorate 31 years of freedom and democracy under the theme: "United in Resilience for the Defence of Our Freedom and Democracy." This day is not merely a mark on our calendar; it is a profound reminder of the long road we have traveled from the shadows of oppression to the light of freedom.

Freedom Day holds deep significance. It symbolises the end of a painful chapter in our country's history and the beginning of a new era—an era born of hope, dignity, and opportunity for all. It reminds us of the sacrifices made by generations of brave women and men who dared to dream of a South Africa where everyone, regardless of race or background, would be free.

We cannot tell the story of our freedom without acknowledging the immeasurable sacrifices made by countless heroes who fought against a brutal and unjust system. These include Nelson Mandela, Oliver Tambo, Walter Sisulu, Winnie Madikizela-Mandela, Lillian Ngoyi, Chief Albert Luthuli, Peter Nchabeleng, Ephraim Mogale, Frans Mohlala, Mbulaheni Dambuza Malada, Tshifhiwa Muofhe, and Onkgopotse Tiro. Their blood watered the tree of liberty whose shade we enjoy today.

It is because of their sacrifices that we stand tall and free. We gather not only to honor them but to recommit ourselves to the ideals they lived and died for.

But even as we celebrate, we must confront the reality that many challenges persist, poverty, unemployment, gender-based violence, crime, and unequal access to basic services such as water and housing. These are not just statistics; they are lived experiences of the people of Limpopo and across our country.

Yet, we take courage in the knowledge that our forebears showed us what is possible when we are united in purpose. They taught us that with resilience, dedication, and unity, we can overcome any challenge.

Programme Director, 27 April 1994 marked a historic turning point. It was the day South Africans of all races stood in long lines to cast their votes in the country's first democratic election. It marked our collective rejection of hatred, division, and racial discrimination. It was the beginning of a democratic order founded on justice, equality, and human dignity.

Let us never take our freedom for granted. Let us never forget how we were once systematically stripped of our human rights, denied the right to vote, displaced from our land, and deprived of our dignity.

The adoption of our Constitution in 1996 gave legal effect to the vision of the Freedom Charter and enshrined our commitment to a society rooted in equality, human rights, and the rule of law.

Both the Freedom Charter and the Constitution are the cornerstones of our democratic journey. They are the blueprints of our aspiration to build a just,

inclusive, and equitable society. As we close the chapter on celebrating 30 years of freedom, we are reminded that our journey is far from over.

Limpopo is a province rich in diversity and heritage. We are home to the Vhavenda, VaTsonga, Bapedi, Ndebele, and Afrikaner communities. We celebrate our cultures, our languages, and our shared humanity. This is the spirit of ubuntu that binds us together.

According to Statistics South Africa, access to basic services in the province has improved significantly. More households now have electricity and access to formal housing. However, disparities remain especially in access to clean, piped water. It is our task, as the government, to accelerate the pace of transformation and ensure that the dividends of democracy are enjoyed by all.

We must continue to build an economy that creates jobs and provides opportunities for our youth. The gains of our freedom must translate into real change in schools, in clinics, in households, and in communities. We are working to reform state-owned enterprises to make them more effective and responsive to the needs of our people.

We are also intensifying our fight against crime, particularly organised crime, illegal mining, and extortion at construction sites. Together with law enforcement agencies, we are reclaiming safety and security in our communities.

Gender-based violence remains one of the darkest stains on our democracy. We must respond with urgency and compassion. Our criminal justice system must be strengthened, and survivors must be supported. This is a fight we must all commit to as leaders, communities, and families.

As we commemorate this important day, let us remember the words of President Thabo Mbeki who said: "The time will come when our nation will honor the memory of those who walked before us... when we shall be able to say that we have built a society in which the people govern, a society founded on equality, justice, and freedom."

Let us carry the torch of freedom with honor. Let us keep building a South Africa that works for all. Let us live in unity, peace, and dignity. And let us never lose sight of the long walk that brought us here.

Let us, together, defend our freedom. Let us, together, deepen our democracy. Let us, together, build the Limpopo and South Africa we want.

I thank you.