

SPEECH BY PREMIER DR PHOPHI RAMATHUBA DURING THE  
FUNERAL OF THE 1ST PRINCE ELIAKIM MATLALA, GA-MATHAPO  
(BAVARIA), GA-MATLALA

06 JUNE 2025

Programme Director, Mr Motlafela Mojapelo,  
The Matlala Royal Family,  
The House of Traditional and Khoi-San Leadership Representatives,  
Mayor of Mogalakwena Local Municipality, Cllr Ngoako Taueatsoala,  
Fellow Traditional Leaders and Royal Houses,  
Leaders of Faith-Based Organisations,  
Members of the Executive Council present,  
Members of the Matlala community,  
Distinguished Guests,  
Fellow Mourners,  
Ladies and Gentlemen,

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

A dark cloud has descended upon the sacred hills of Ga-Matlala, the drumbeats of Bakone have fallen silent in mourning, for a mighty tree has fallen not with a thunderous crash, but with a regal grace, as only a Prince can bow before eternity. The wind whispers of Prince Eliakim Matlala, a son of the soil who walked with grace, whose footsteps have left an indelible mark on the heart of our people.

Today, we do not just gather in sorrow, but we gather in reverence, in honour of a son of the soil, a bearer of heritage, a living bridge between the ancient wisdom of our ancestors and the progressive dreams of a thriving tomorrow.

Prince Eliakim Matlala walked two paths with equal grace: the noble path of tradition and the disciplined corridors of justice. He pursued the legal fraternity not out of personal ambition but out of a yearning to serve. In a field often driven by competition, he chose service. He co-founded Khanyago and Matlala Attorneys not just as a business venture but as a beacon of hope for access to justice in our communities. His commitment to the legal profession mirrored his deep commitment to fairness, development and empowerment.

He was a man who understood that true leadership lies in action. His work was not confined to courtrooms or legal chambers. He was a dedicated businessman, a visionary determined to see Ga-Matlala flourish. He believed that development must begin at home and to that end, he inspired the youth, uplifted the vulnerable and contributed to the economic wellbeing of the Bakone royal household and council. In every meeting, every initiative, every act of service, Prince Matlala reminded us that greatness is not in titles but in how one uses them for the greater good.

In his role within the royal council, Prince Eliakim brought structure, vision and purpose. His interest in economic development was not just rhetoric but a daily commitment. He championed initiatives to reduce unemployment, supported entrepreneurs, and encouraged sustainable livelihoods in and around his community. He led by example, showing us that true patriots do not wait for the state, they partner with it.

As a government, we mourn the loss of a partner, someone who understood that development is a collective responsibility. We need more of his caliber: leaders rooted in their culture yet dynamic enough to embrace change; royals who are not aloof, but accessible; visionaries who build bridges between tradition and progress.

And so, as we gather in this sacred space to celebrate a life well lived, we must also reflect on the responsibilities left behind. Our country is under siege from the triple threat of crime, unemployment, and social fragmentation. We wake up to stories of homes being broken into, people being mugged, hijacked, even killed.

The question is no longer whether crime is a problem, but it is how we confront it together. It is here that our traditional leaders must rise. The institution of traditional leadership has both the authority and the moral standing to safeguard our people. Let no one occupy land within the jurisdiction of a traditional leader without permission. Let every household be known and accounted for. Let criminals not find shelter among us.

Just as urgently, we must confront the scourge of gender-based violence and femicide that continues to terrorize our communities. This plague is not just a government problem; it is a societal one. We must be vigilant, proactive, and united. We must report abuse before it turns fatal. Silence is complicity, and while we respect traditional dispute resolution, gender-based violence must be reported to the police. Our traditional leaders, revered and respected, must stand on the side of justice, protection, and accountability.

As we commemorate Youth Month, let us use this moment to speak directly to our young people. Your responsibility to this province, to your communities, is immense. You must not be passive observers. Engage.

Learn. Start businesses. Join agricultural initiatives. Participate in politics, governance, and civil society. Use social media not just for trends but to showcase the beauty and potential of our province. Let the world see Ga-Matlala through your lens and let that lens show pride, possibility, and purpose.

To the Matlala family, we say: your grief is our grief. Your loss is the province's loss. Thank you for sharing him with us. Thank you for allowing him to walk the path of leadership and transformation. Know that as you mourn, you do not mourn alone. Limpopo mourns with you. Ga-Matlala mourns with you. South Africa mourns with you.

I thank you.