

ADDRESS BY PREMIER OF LIMPOPO DR PHOPHI RAMATHUBA AT THE MAIL & GUARDIAN'S 200 YOUNG SOUTH AFRICANS AWARD DINNER, KALAHARI WATERFRONT, NANDONI DAM, THULAMELA

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Programme Directors

The CEO of Mail and Guardian Mr Hoosain Karjieker

The MEC for Limpopo Department of Economic Development, Environment and Tourism

The Mayor of Thulamela Municipality, Cllr Sarah Rammbuda

Chairpersons of Boards of Limpopo Tourism Agency and Gateway Airport Authority Limited

Sponsors of this event as duly acknowledged

Members of the media

The nominees

Ladies and Gentlemen

Ndi Madekwane, Ri Perile, Thobela, Good evening, Goeie Naand!

Welcome to the Kalahari Waterfront, where the stars shine as brightly as the dreams we carry in our hearts. It is an absolute pleasure to stand before you at this esteemed Mail & Guardian's 200 Young South Africans Awards Gala Dinner, celebrating the bright lights of our future - the youth of South Africa!

And what a place to host such an occasion! We are thrilled to be here in Limpopo, the place of the award winning Makhadzi, the trailblazer Sho Majozi, the blossoming Shandesh, the skilful Kharishma, the evergreen King Monada, the timeless Master KG and many other artists.

We also have the pleasure mentioning an array of sportspersons from this are who have made a mark internationally and nationally. The likes of Wimbledon Tennis winner Kgothatso Montjane, boxing legend Phillip Ndou, the late athletics world champion Mbulaheni Mulaudzi, amongst others give us pride in associating with this province.

Isn't it inspiring to see our local heroes shine on international stages? It is evidence to what we can achieve when we embrace our identity and heritage.

Tonight, we gather not just to recognise excellence, but to celebrate the vibrant tapestry of talent, creativity and resilience that defines our youth. As we partnered with the Mail & Guardian for the 20th instalment of these awards, we did so because we understand one paramount truth: the youth are the architects of tomorrow.

Now, let's sprinkle a bit of love for our province: Limpopo is abundant in youthful energy - the lifeblood that will bolster our economic muscles. We have a youthful population that is ready to rise and grind and we owe it to them to create opportunities that echo the greatness rooted in our ancient kingdoms of Mapungubwe where gold was turned

into shining rhino or to the east in Thulamela where various artefacts were beaten into shape to make spears and other functional implements!

But here's the deal: our beloved Limpopo has produced some phenomenal winners in past years, like Lutendo Mugagadeli popularly known as The VenḡaboyPoet, TV Personality Katchie Nzama, the poet Moses Seletiša, Financial Services Advisor Mulalo Nemataheni, Senior Lecturer at UNISA, Napjadi Letsoalo, amongst others. These are examples of how we see the depth that these awards have gone as well as the spread in many facets of our lives. They might have ventured beyond our borders, but they serve as constant reminders of the potential and talent emerging from this province.

Our pleasure is in seeing how these Mail & Guardian Awards have propelled the youth of our province and country to take their rightful place in society, walking with pride knowing that their status in society has been affirmed by their peers.

Tonight, let us embrace the vision that the Mail & Guardian so rightly expresses - these awards embody the dynamic energy of South Africa's future, driven by YOU! I see innovation blooming all around us and innovation is the name of the game if we dream of transforming our socio-economic landscape.

Here in Limpopo, we are not just dreaming; we are turning those dreams into actionable plans. With immense pride and responsibility, we recently launched a stepping stone into the future, the Labour Activation Programme. This initiative will equip an incredible 13,609 young people with the skills needed to revolutionise their destiny. We want to say to our youth: "We see you! We hear you!" Let's brandish our banners of hope and unlock pathways to opportunity together!

Now, while the national unemployment rate stands at a staggering 31.9%, the youth are feeling that pinch harder, with 44.6% unemployment amongst young people. But guess what? We're flipping the script. We're taking the reins and steering ourselves towards economic recovery through investment in agriculture, mining and tourism. Let's tackle those challenges head-on and close the gap between education and employment!

To the youth of Limpopo: whether you're aspiring to cultivate crops in Makhado, create masterpieces in Ribolla Art Route, dive into the digital world in Polokwane or serve delectable dishes in Tzaneen - this is your moment! Grab it with both hands and forge your path. We believe in you!

And let us not forget skills development is not an afterthought; it is the bedrock upon which we build our future. It is the bridge from poverty to prosperity and together, we are laying down the foundation for a brighter, bolder Limpopo.

As we pivot into our road ahead, we are making significant investment in our roads, water, and job opportunities - because these are the engine and wheels of progress. With each project we undertake, we are not just addressing infrastructure; we are elevating lives and creating sustainable communities.

Let this night remind all of us that a united front - government, private sector, civil society, and YOU - can transform dreams into reality. Together, let us not just face the future; let us create it with unwavering hope and courage.

So, here's to the young visionaries gathered here tonight! Your creativity, energy and resilience are the threads that will weave a prosperous tapestry for Limpopo and beyond. We are committed, we are ready, and with your talent lighting the way, we will succeed.

Thank you, enjoy the evening and let us continue to celebrate our incredible young South Africans!