

SPEECH BY PREMIER DR PHOPHI RAMATHUBA DURING THE 102ND  
BIRTHDAY CELEBRATION OF GOGO NELLIE NOMGQIBELO  
MAHLANGU, ZAAIPLAAS VILLAGE, ELIAS MOTSWALEDI  
MUNICIPALITY, SEKHUKHUNE DISTRICT

13 AUGUST 2025

Programme Director, Constable Mphahlele,  
The Mahlangu Family,  
MEC for Transport and Community Safety, Ms Violet Mathye,  
SAPS Provincial Commissioner, Lieutenant General Thembi Hadebe,  
Sekhukhune District Commissioner, Major General Lehabe Metsi,  
Councillors,  
Traditional Leaders,  
Faith-Based Organisations,  
Members of SAPS,  
Distinguished guests,  
Ladies and gentlemen,

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

Today, the sun rises over Zaaiplaas with a special warmth. It rises to honour a woman whose life stretches over a century, whose eyes have seen the world change in ways many of us can only read about, and whose resilience stands as a beacon for all of us. We gather not only to celebrate the incredible gift of 102 years of life for Gogo Nellie Nomgqibelo

Mahlangu, but to affirm a truth that cannot be erased, that our elders are treasures, deserving of our love, respect, and protection.

Gogo Mahlangu's story is one of dignity, perseverance, and courage, but it is also one that reminds us of the darkest shadows still haunting our communities. We are not here to hide from the truth: Gogo Mahlangu is a survivor of a brutal attack and rape in her own home, a crime that shook all of us to the core. She was hurt where she should have been safest, within her own walls.

That attack was not just on her body. It was on her spirit, on the safety of our elders, and on the very fabric of who we are as people. And yet, here she is today, surrounded by her family, her community, and her government, standing tall in her humanity, reminding us that no act of violence can erase the worth of a human life.

Ladies and gentlemen, I must commend the South African Police Service for their swift and determined work in this case. Thanks to the diligent efforts of our SAPS members, supported by forensic pathology experts, DNA evidence linked the perpetrator directly to this horrific crime.

The culprit has been arrested, convicted, and will be sentenced on 27 August 2025. We look forward to seeing justice done, not out of vengeance, but out of the deep need for closure, healing, and a clear message that such crimes will not be tolerated in our province.

Today, we celebrate Gogo Mahlangu's life. But let me be clear: we also stand here to say that what happened to her must never happen to another woman, child, or elder in our communities.

Gender-based violence and femicide are not a women's issue, it is a societal crisis. It has reached pandemic levels. In Vhembe District alone, we have recorded 10 deaths from gender-based violence in the past few days. This is not just statistics. These are mothers, daughters, and sisters who perished. And if we do not act with urgency, this poison will continue to spread to other districts, until no corner of our province is safe.

What makes this scourge even more painful is that the majority of cases, are perpetrated by men who should be protectors, brothers, fathers, and partners. Instead, they become the source of pain and death. This is a shame we can no longer ignore, excuse or sugarcoat.

I want to speak directly to the men here and those listening: if your relationship is failing, if your pride feels wounded, if your emotions feel overwhelming, there is help. Seek counsel from your elders, your faith leaders, and your friends. Walk away. But do not, under any circumstance, take another person's life or dignity. That is not strength. That is cowardice.

We must also acknowledge the role of community in ending this scourge. Safety is not built in police stations alone. It is built in homes, in streets, in schools, in churches, and in traditional councils. It is built when neighbours refuse to turn a blind eye, when family members speak up, when faith leaders address the uncomfortable truths from the pulpit, and when we all use our voices, including on social media to condemn these acts loudly and consistently.

This fight requires us all: SAPS, the judiciary, community leaders, and every ordinary citizen. We must leave no stone unturned in our pursuit of justice, safety, and the protection of the vulnerable.

Today, as we gather to sing happy birthday to Gogo Mahlangu, we are also making a pledge: that her experience will fuel our determination to build a province where women and children and indeed our elders can live without fear.

Gogo, you have lived through a century of history. You have seen wars, freedom struggles, the birth of democracy, and now, the digital age. You have carried the wisdom of generations and the scars of justice, and yet, you are still here, still smiling, still teaching us about courage.

On behalf of the people of Limpopo, I want to say thank you for your life, for your resilience, for your example. We are deeply sorry for the pain you have endured, but we promise that your story will not be in vain. We will fight harder. We will speak louder. We will protect better.

Let us also be honest: the work ahead is not easy. It will require confronting uncomfortable truths, challenging cultural norms that excuse violence, and reimagining what it means to be a man in our society. We must cultivate men who find pride in protecting, not harming; in building, not breaking; in loving, not destroying.

As Premier, I call upon all traditional leaders, healers, and community structures to denounce these heinous acts. Let us unite in naming and shaming the perpetrators, in protecting the survivors, and in creating safe spaces for healing and accountability.

Gogo Mahlangu, today we bring you flowers, songs, and our love. But more than that, we bring you a promise that the people of Limpopo will work tirelessly to ensure that no other grandmother, no other woman, no other child suffers as you have.

Happy 102nd birthday, Gogo. May your days ahead be filled with peace, love, and the comfort of knowing you are cherished.

I thank you.