

KEYNOTE ADDRESS BY LIMPOPO PREMIER DR PHOPHI RAMATHUBA
ON THE OCCASION OF THE INTERNATIONAL DAY OF OLDER
PERSONS, PHALABORWA, MOPANI DISTRICT

01 OCTOBER 2025

Programme Director,
MEC for Transport and Community Safety, Ms. Violet Mathye,
MEC for Health, Ms. Dieketseng Mashego,
Mopani District Executive Mayor, Cllr Pule Shayi,
Ba-Phalaborwa Municipality Mayor, Cllr Merrium Malatjie,
Traditional Leadership,
Faith-Based Leaders,
Our Esteemed Elders,
Distinguished Guests,
Ladies and Gentlemen,
Members of the Media,

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

I am grateful to be standing here before you on this great day for our elders, a day set aside to honour the pillars of our families, our communities, and indeed our nation. This day reminds us that the story of who we are cannot be told without the wisdom, the sacrifices, and the resilience of our older persons.

They are the guardians of our heritage, the teachers of ubuntu, and the living testimony that endurance and love can shape generations. Today, we not only celebrate their presence among us, but we recommit ourselves to ensuring that they live with dignity, safety, and joy in the land you helped to build.

Programme Director, allow me to paint a picture of this beautiful place where we are gathering today. Phalaborwa, the gateway to the world's greatest wildlife sanctuary, the Kruger National Park. Here, the air carries whispers of ancient wisdom from the baobab trees, standing tall like the very elders we celebrate today.

Phalaborwa is a land where the sun rises generously, blessing the soil, the rivers, and the people with warmth. It is a place where nature's abundance reminds us of resilience, continuity, and the gift of life's seasons. And so, it is no coincidence that on this sacred soil, we celebrate the International Day of Older Persons, because just like the land, our elders are the true heritage and backbone of our communities.

Today is not merely another date on the international calendar. It is a day when the world pauses to say to our mothers, fathers, grandmothers, and grandfathers: We see you. We honour you. We cherish you. The International Day of Older Persons is a global reminder that the greatness of any society is measured by how it treats its elderly citizens. If we fail to protect and respect them, we fail ourselves and future generations.

Our elders are the living libraries of wisdom, the custodians of our heritage, and the teachers of ubuntu. They are not relics of the past, but bridges to the future. Their sacrifices raised families, sustained communities, advanced our democracy, and shaped the values that continue to guide this province and our nation.

In the build-up to today, we have already been mobilising around the well-being of older persons. We commemorated World Alzheimer's Awareness Month in Sekhukhune, supporting both older persons and their caregivers. We hosted the Provincial Golden Games at the Old Peter Mokaba Stadium, where older persons from across Limpopo showcased their talents, resilience, and energy with pride and dignity. In the coming weeks, Limpopo elders will participate in the National Active Ageing Program in Cape Town, where once again they will prove that active ageing is not a dream but a lived reality.

As a government, we reaffirm today that protecting our elderly is not charity, it is justice. It is not a favour, but our responsibility. That is why we are deeply disturbed by reports of abuse, including rape and sexual assault, against elderly women. This is not only a crime but a shameful betrayal of our humanity. Working with the Department of Social Development, SAPS, traditional authorities, and civil society, we are intensifying prevention, detection, and rapid response systems. No elder should live in fear.

We are also strengthening geriatric care at clinics and hospitals, supporting home-based care, and assisting families who carry the noble responsibility of looking after their elderly. Every older person deserves accessible healthcare, safe housing, and dignified support in their later years.

At the same time, we refuse to see elders as a burden. They remain contributors to our cultural, social, and political life. Through forums, intergenerational dialogues, and cultural programs, we are ensuring that their voices shape the decisions of today.

Programme Director, in many households, it is the pension of an elder that sustains entire families. Government remains committed to strengthening

social grants and development programs that bring stability to homes across Limpopo. But the government cannot walk this journey alone. Families, churches, traditional leaders, and civil society must lead in creating caring communities. Ubuntu must not remain a slogan; it must be lived daily in how we treat those who once carried us.

When we hear of a grandmother being raped, we are not just hearing of a crime, we are hearing of the collapse of our humanity. We are called to rise, as a society, to say “Enough is enough.” We must unite — government, SAPS, communities, and families, to ensure that no predator feels safe in targeting the vulnerable. Protecting our elderly is protecting the very soul of our nation.

As life expectancy increases, the number of older persons in our province will continue to grow. But it also calls for careful planning. We must plan for healthcare systems that serve an ageing population, for infrastructure that accommodates mobility challenges, and for social participation that keeps elders central to community life.

To our elders present here today, we bow our heads in gratitude. Your footsteps paved our path. Your hands built our homes. Your courage defended our democracy. Your wisdom continues to guide us. You are not invisible. You are not forgotten. You are the foundation of who we are, and the compass of where we must go.

As we leave this gathering, let it not be said that we simply celebrated a day. Let it be said that we renewed a covenant, a promise to ensure that every older person in Limpopo lives with dignity, safety, and pride. Let us build a province, a nation, and a society where elders do not whisper their pain in silence but instead speak their joy in celebration.

To our elders: May your days be long, your health be strong, and your joy be full.

And let us remind ourselves of the words of President Nelson Mandela, who said: “A society that does not value its older people denies its roots and endangers its future.” Let us value them, protect them, and honor them for in their wisdom lies the strength of our tomorrow.

I thank you. Rea Leboga. Ri a livhuwa. Ha khensa.