

OPENING ADDRESS BY PREMIER DR PHOPHI RAMATHUBA AT THE 5TH LIMPOPO INVESTMENT CONFERENCE, THE RANCH RESORT

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Programme Director, Mr Freddy Greaver
Minister of Electricity, Dr Kgosientso Ramokgopa
Speaker of the Limpopo Provincial Legislature, Dr Makoma Makhurupetje
Members of the Provincial Legislature
Members of the Executive Council
Deputy Speaker, Ms Tebogo Mamorobela
Ambassadors
Executive Mayors and Mayors
Councillors
Director General
Chairperson of the LEDA Board
Chairperson of the LTA Board
Heads of Department
Members of the Limpopo House of Traditional and Khoi-San Leadership
Faith-Based Organisations
Business Community
Members of the Media
Ladies and gentlemen,

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

It is with immense gratitude and excitement that I welcome you to the 5th Limpopo Investment Conference. We gather here today not only to celebrate our achievements and share our dreams but also to sow the seeds of a brighter future for the province of Limpopo - Africa's new investment frontier.

Ancient wisdom teaches us that our elders would place their ear to the ground to predict the approaching rain during times of drought. This imagery is powerful and profound. It takes me back to the thoughts of our resilient South African writer, Bessie Head, whose seminal novel, *When Rain Clouds Gather*, encapsulates the hope and resilience we need in times of uncertainty. Her narrative resonates deeply with Limpopo's current trajectory as our province experiences a significant revitalisation in its economic fortunes after a period of instability and doubt.

In Head's poignant story, the arrival of rain clouds symbolises transformation and renewal, a crucial motif reflecting the potential for growth and prosperity after prolonged hardship. Today, like those rain clouds gathering on the horizon, Limpopo is experiencing its own momentum of development -marked by increased economic activity and a rising contribution to South Africa's GDP.

When I say Limpopo's fortunes are changing, I should share with you exciting news about Keletso Monareng, a PhD candidate in Physics at the University of Limpopo, who

was recently named one of the winners of the 7th L'Oréal-UNESCO For Women in Science Awards 2025.

Her work focuses on sodium-ion batteries, a safer, cheaper, and more eco-friendly alternative to lithium batteries. Instead of toxic lithium, these batteries use salt, making energy storage cleaner and sustainable. The news on their own tell of a greater potential that this province can do with available natural resources, coupled with correct skills and guidance towards harnessing full potential.

The Department of International Relations and Cooperation (DIRCO) has reported that: “a new stone fruit trade agreement between South Africa and China has opened the massive Chinese market to SA's 5 types-apricots, peaches, nectarines, plums & prunes- for the first time (unlocking R400 million+). It is the first time China has allowed access for multiple fruit types from a single country under a single agreement.”

What I find more interesting is that in Limpopo we produce apricot and nectarines. We have a favourable climate condition for these, largely in the Waterberg and some small scale in Capricorn and Levubu valley in Vhembe. With this trade pact with China providing market access, production can be increased by both commercial and emerging farmers. So next time when someone says “Mmotong-wa-Perekisi” let us take advantage of the rich soil and grow those peaches indeed.

In 2024, Limpopo emerged as the best-performing economy in South Africa, with a growth rate of 0.9%. Our contribution to the national GDP has increased from 7.2% to 7.8%. This momentum brings us closer to our target of averaging 2.2% economic growth over the next five years, with the creation of more than 520,000 new jobs. However, we recognise that despite our upward trajectory, addressing our high unemployment rate remains a priority.

Currently, our unemployment rate stands at an alarming 35.1%, higher than the national average of 33%. Within this troubling statistic, youth unemployment is particularly high, presenting us with a critical opportunity to address this issue head-on. Our forward trajectory signals that we can and must turn this around.

Our province is committed to inclusive growth and job creation. We have adopted a comprehensive industrialisation strategy, focusing on consolidating our economic cluster programmes to maximize our comparative advantages in agriculture, mining and tourism.

We are aware that for us to succeed, we must transform our special economic zones and industrial parks while addressing obstacles that hinder our progress, particularly in the Musina-Makhado SEZ. We eagerly await feedback for the final designation of the Fetakgomo-Tubatse Industrial Park as a SEZ, aiming to unlock its potential for economic transformation.

This 5th Limpopo Investment Conference arrives at a defining moment - when global investors are increasingly seeking scalable, sustainable returns in emerging markets.

In the past 4 years we have counted over R280 billion in investment pledges with 20,000 jobs having been created.

Undoubtedly the investment that you have made in these years has seen us improving conditions of lives of our people, placing Limpopo on the path for growth. There are a few examples that come to mind as we look back with pride in the trust you have shown in our province: the Nkuna City Development in Collins Chabane Municipality, the ZZ2 Packhouse in Greater Letaba Municipality, Shekinah Game Reserve and SAMPADA Abattoir in Modimolle-Mookgophong Municipality, the Steelport Bridge in Fetakgomo-Tubatse Municipality, Provincial Theatre and Provincial Academic Hospital in Polokwane, the Exxaro Renewable energy plant in Lephalale Municipality are but some of the few indication of the reality of the investment pledges that have been made.

Limpopo, endowed with unmatched natural wealth, fertile land and a youthful workforce, is shifting from potential to performance.

Under the theme “Limpopo Rising: Africa’s New Investment Frontier,” we aim to solidify our position as a leading investment and tourism destination.

The Limpopo Development Plan (2025-2030) is our blueprint, aligning with the Presidential Investment Drive and continental frameworks such as AfCFTA and Agenda 2063. Of importance we have in our midst the representatives of the African Export-Import Bank (AFREXIMBANK) whom we met earlier this year in Algeria. They are a financial provider to African governments and private businesses in support of intra-African and Caribbean trade. We see in them and other financial developers a great potential to bring our LDP to fruition. We are committed to agility, innovation and partnership in driving catalytic, investor-ready projects - from farms to factories, mines to markets.

As we unveil the Limpopo Investment Prospectus 2025 today, showcasing over R32 billion in investment opportunities across various sectors, we reaffirm our commitment to fostering a climate conducive to private sector investment. Our government has embarked on initiatives to create an enabling environment - streamlining business operations and supporting long-term growth through our InvestSA One-Stop Shop.

In the past year we assisted and continue to do so those who have made investment pledges but are delayed by bureaucratic processes. We have brought Mayors and councillors to this session so that they begin to see the value you are placing and investing in their areas, that way their support to your projects should be foremost to bring them to reality.

As I intoned earlier, Bessie Head’s novel also explores the importance of community and collective action in overcoming adversity. In the context of Limpopo, this theme underscores the collaborative efforts of the provincial government with local communities and businesses, driving initiatives that stimulate growth and create jobs. The province's renewed focus on infrastructure development and sustainable practices

mirrors the novel's message about the necessity of working together to effect meaningful change.

Moreover, just as characters in Head's work navigate the complexities of their environment to forge a better future, Limpopo's ascent reflects a similar journey. The province is actively carving out its identity in the national economy, embracing opportunities and confronting challenges head-on to enhance its residents' quality of life.

Finally, I urge all investors and stakeholders to join us not just in discussion, but in action. We invite you to engage with our initiatives and to seize the opportunities that Limpopo has to offer. By placing your ear to the ground, you will undoubtedly hear the sounds of forthcoming rain - the promise of abundant opportunities and prosperity for all.

Let us work together as we embrace this moment of resilience and transformative hope. Together, we can cultivate the future we envision for Limpopo, turning challenges into triumphs and dreams into reality.

Thank you for your attendance and growing interest you continue to show on our province and welcome to the Limpopo Investment Conference!