

SPEECH BY PREMIER DR PHOPHI RAMATHUBA DURING THE
PHALABORWA ROTARY CLUB FUNDRAISING GALA DINNER
CAJORI HOTEL, BA-PHALABORWA MUNICIPALITY, MOPANI DISTRICT

17 OCTOBER 2025

Programme Director,
Past President Mr Conspire Mabaso,
Mopani District Executive Mayor, Cllr Pule Shayi,
Mayor of Ba-Phalaborwa Municipality, Cllr Merriam Malatjie,
Traditional Leaders,
Members of the Phalaborwa Rotary Club Executive,
Business Executives and Mining Representatives,
Faith-Based and Civic Organisations,
Members of the Media,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

Ri perile, Ndi madekwana, Thobela, Good Evening, Goeie naand.

It is with great honour and deep appreciation that I stand before you tonight. This is more than a gala; it is a gathering of purpose, a meeting of hearts determined to restore hope, restore dignity, and restore possibility. Tonight is a reminder that leadership is not only found in high offices and public platforms, but it lives right here among ordinary men and women who choose to take extraordinary action to change lives.

Ladies and gentlemen, there is something profoundly beautiful about great people coming together to raise funds for a good cause. It is one of the purest acts of humanity, giving not because we have much, but because we understand that none of us are free until all of us are uplifted.

Fundraising for humanity is like planting seeds of light in the darkest valleys of despair. It is like giving water to a thirsty future. The late Archbishop Desmond Tutu once said, “Do your little bit of good where you are; it’s those little bits of good put together that overwhelm the world.” Tonight, we gather to overwhelm the world with good.

Programme Director, the Phalaborwa Rotary Club has, since its charter in 1989, been a beacon of service and compassion. Guided by the powerful Four-Way Test—Is it the truth? Is it fair to all concerned? Will it build goodwill and better friendships? Will it be beneficial to all concerned? This Rotary Club has become not just an organisation, but a moral force. A force that does not ask who is responsible for a community’s suffering but asks how we, together, can be part of the solution.

This evening is no exception. We are here to support a cause that touches the essence of life itself, the gift of sight. When I heard of the scheduled campaign to reduce the backlog of over 400 cataract operations at Maphutha Malatji Hospital, I was excited about the news because I know how far it goes towards humanity.

I know that when we talk of backlogs in the medical fraternity, we do not only talk about statistics, but we talk about numbers that represent our grandmothers, grandfathers who can no longer see the smiles of their grandchildren, fathers who cannot work due to blindness, and young people whose dreams are dimmed by preventable blindness. This is not just a medical backlog; it is a backlog of hope.

As the Provincial Government, we are grateful to the Phalaborwa Rotary Club, under the leadership of President Thabiso Mkhombo, who did not turn a blind eye. Instead, they reached out to the Provincial Department of Health and called for a partnership in reducing the cataract backlog. And tonight, we too are called to join this mission.

Ladies and Gentlemen, each cataract operation costs R7 630 per person, so the club has set a noble target of R763 000 to restore the vision of 100 patients each year. Tonight, let us refuse to leave this room until we have reached this target because these are not just numbers, these are lives waiting to see light again.

I want to be very clear tonight; charity is not dependency. Helping others is not a weakness and investing in people is not a burden. It is the highest return on investment any society can make. Let us not wait for foreign donors to come and solve our problems. Those days are gone. We are the help we have been waiting for. We are the ones who must build clinics, equip hospitals, strengthen schools, and uplift the poor. That responsibility rests with us.

To the mining sector here tonight, let me speak to you directly. Corporate Social Investment is not a box-ticking exercise. It is a partnership for shared prosperity. Mines do not operate in isolation, but they operate in communities that give them labour, peace and social license to exist.

Tonight, I urge the mining houses in this room to invest not only in extraction beneath the ground, but in the potential of the people above the ground.

To the business community, let us invest in human dignity. Let us invest in life-changing interventions like this cataract surgery drive. Let us invest in water and sanitation, education, maternal health, literacy and poverty alleviation because these are not Rotary's priorities alone. These are the six pillars of nation-building. These are the building blocks of a just and caring society.

Ladies and gentlemen, every generation has a mission. Ours is to restore the soul of Ubuntu, mutual care, human solidarity, and shared destiny. Ubuntu teaches us that "Muthu ndi muthu nga vhathu"—a person is a person through others. When we give sight, we restore humanity. When we invest in health, we invest in hope. When we invest in people, we build a nation.

Let us open our hearts. Let us open our hands. Let us make tonight a turning point. The dream of raising R763 000 is not a dream, it is a decision. Let us choose tonight to make that decision a reality.

I thank you.