

SPEECH BY LIMPOPO PREMIER DR PHOPHI RAMATHUBA DURING THE MEETING WITH
FAMILIES AND RELATIVES OF THE DECEASED N1 BUS ACCIDENT VICTIMS
SILOAM HOSPITAL, MAKHADO MUNICIPALITY, VHEMBE DISTRICT

20 October 2025

Programme Director

High Commissioners from the Republics of Zimbabwe and Malawi,
Executive Mayor of Vhembe District Municipality, Cllr Freda Nkondo,
Mayor of Makhado Local Municipality, Cllr Forcus Mmboyi,
Representatives of the South African Police Service,
Members of the Forensic Pathology Services,
Officials from the Department of Social Development,
Faith-based organisations,
Traditional Leadership,
Families and Relatives of the deceased,
Members of the Media,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

Good morning, Ndi matsheloni, Avuxeni, Thobela.

It is with a deeply sorrowful heart that I stand before you today. No words are strong enough to carry the weight of the pain you are going through. No speech is powerful enough to heal the wounds created by death. Death is a thief, a violent robber of dreams, a destroyer of families, and a silent enemy of hope.

Today, that thief struck at the heart of our humanity and stole 43 precious lives. Sons and daughters, mothers and fathers, brothers and sisters, gone too soon. We cannot begin to imagine the final cries for help when the bus veered down the steep embankment on that tragic morning of 13 October 2025 along the N1 North near Louis Trichardt. Their final moments will forever echo in our souls.

To all the grieving families gathered here, I want you to know that you are not alone. Your pain is our pain, and your tears are our tears. The Limpopo Provincial Government walks this difficult journey with you. We gather not only to perform a process of physical identification of your loved ones, but also to stand together in solidarity, compassion, and dignity.

To the grieving families gathered here today, allow me to take you down memory lane and reflect on the chain of events that unfolded from the moment this tragic accident was reported to date.

The moment the accident was reported, our provincial disaster management system was activated immediately. Within minutes, the Emergency Medical Services (EMS) were dispatched to the scene alongside members of the South African Police Service (SAPS), the Road Traffic Management Corporation (RTMC), and traffic law enforcement

officials. The terrain was difficult, steep and dangerous, yet these dedicated men and women worked tirelessly, risking their own lives to save others.

Our rescue operations stretched into the night. Bodies had to be retrieved from crushed metal; survivors had to be urgently transported to hospitals. We wish to thank Siloam Hospital, Louis Trichardt Memorial Hospital, and Elim Hospital, who received and treated 40 injured passengers with speed and professionalism. All of the victims have since been discharged and reconnected with their families in Zimbabwe and Malawi.

From day one, our priority has been clear: to restore dignity to the deceased, provide care to the injured, and offer closure to families.

In no time, we saw the Forensic Pathology Services team immediately begin the dignified process of retrieving and preserving the remains. Postmortem examinations have now been completed for all 43 victims. The SAPS Victim Identification Centre, working with high commissioners from Zimbabwe and Malawi, has begun scientific identification processes including fingerprints and DNA analysis.

This is important to ensure that every family receives the correct remains of their loved ones, no mistakes, no confusion, no delays in dignity.

While some victims were identified visually, many did not have identity documents, making this process more complex and sensitive. But we are committed to getting it right. There will be no rushed handovers, because every soul deserves to be honourably returned to their family.

Through the Provincial Disaster Management Centre, we have created a coordinated support programme to assist families with logistics, documentation, and repatriation. Working with the Embassies of Zimbabwe and Malawi, we are finalising arrangements to repatriate all victims safely to their home countries.

Our Department of Social Development has deployed social workers and trauma counsellors at all identification centres to provide psychosocial support. They are here with you today, tomorrow, and for as long as you need. Grief is a journey, and no one should walk that journey alone.

We have also been working closely with the National Department of Transport, under the leadership of Minister Barbara Creecy. The RTMC technical report has confirmed that the bus involved in this tragedy was not roadworthy, was overloaded, and was speeding down a mountainous route.

This is not just a tragic accident but it is a preventable disaster. It is criminal negligence, and the government will not allow lives to be lost due to greed, lawlessness, and disregard for human life.

As the Provincial Government, we condemn reckless driving, non-compliance with cross-border transport regulations, and the operation of unroadworthy vehicles. The law

must take its course, and we welcome the Minister's commitment to take firm action against the company involved.

I must also urge all road users: Respect the rules of the road. Do not overload vehicles. Do not speed. Check your vehicle before every journey. Life has no duplicate.

As we begin this painful process of physical identification today, I ask that we carry ourselves with respect and calm. Allow the process to unfold. Allow our teams to guide you. We are doing everything within our power to bring closure, dignity, and justice.

To the families, may God comfort you. May the souls of your loved ones rest in eternal peace. We mourn with you, we stand with you, and we shall not abandon you.

Ladies and gentlemen, as we continue with this task until the repatriation stage, I wish to express our sincere gratitude to all who stood united during this tragedy, from our Emergency Medical Services and hospital teams to SAPS, RTMC, Forensic Pathology Services, Social Development counsellors, and our partners from the Zimbabwean and Malawian embassies.

Your tireless work, compassion, and commitment gave dignity to the departed and comfort to the grieving. May the spirit of Ubuntu that you demonstrated continue to guide us as we move forward together.

I thank you.