

Speech by Limpopo Premier Dr Phophi Ramathuba on the Occasion of National Children's Day, Waterberg District

01 November 2025

Programme Director,
Members of the Executive Council,
Waterberg District Executive Mayor, Cllr Jack Maeko,
Modimolle-Mookgopong Mayor, Cllr Aaron Sebolai,
Councillors,
Representatives from the Human Rights Commission,
Traditional and Faith-Based Leaders,
Representatives from Civil Society,
Business Community,
Officials from the Department of Social Development,
Parents, Educators, and most importantly,
Our beautiful children,

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

It is my pleasure and reverence that I stand before you today on this great day where we celebrate our children, the heartbeat of our nation and the promise of our tomorrow. Children are the purest expression of hope.

They are living poems written by the hands of God, each line filled with potential, each smile carrying the dream of a better South Africa. Their laughter is the melody that reminds us that life renews itself, and their curiosity lights the path to our collective future.

Programme Director, our children are our greatest treasure, the most precious jewels in the crown of humanity. As a society, our worth is measured not by the wealth we accumulate, but by the care, safety, and opportunity we provide to those whose voices are still soft but whose dreams are infinite.

As the great Oliver Reginald Tambo once reminded us, "A society that does not care for its children does not deserve its future." These powerful words challenge us today to reflect not only on how we celebrate our children, but on how we protect, nurture, and empower them to become the architects of the South Africa we envision.

Programme Director, today, we gather under the theme "Planning and Budgeting for Children's Rights: Progress Since 2010." This theme calls upon us to reflect on the strides we have made over the past fifteen years in upholding and advancing the rights of our children and to confront the unfinished work that still lies ahead.

National Children's Day, commemorated every first Saturday of November, is not merely a date on the calendar; it is a moral reminder of our constitutional duty to ensure that

every child in South Africa is loved, protected, fed, educated, and given an equal chance to thrive.

Our Constitution, through the Bill of Rights, clearly enshrines the protection of children. Section 28 states that every child has the right to a name and nationality, to family care, to be protected from maltreatment, neglect, abuse, or degradation, and to receive basic nutrition, shelter, healthcare, and social services. This is not a privilege; it is a right. And as a government, we are the custodians of these rights.

The protection and well-being of children remain a core priority for the Limpopo Provincial Government. Through our Department of Social Development, the Office on the Rights of the Child, and our close collaboration with law enforcement, we continue to monitor, respond to, and prevent incidents of abuse, neglect, and exploitation.

Our data reveals both progress and pain. In partnership with the Department of Social Development, the Office of the Premier continues to track six major forms of abuse — physical, sexual, emotional, neglect, abandonment, and exploitation. While we are proud of improved reporting and awareness, we remain deeply troubled by ongoing cases in some of our districts.

We have witnessed cases that have shocked our collective conscience:

A 66-year-old man arrested for the rape of a three-year-old girl in Botlokwa.

A school principal accused of sexually assaulting a learner in Lebowakgomo.

A father sentenced to life imprisonment for repeatedly violating his own daughters.

These are not mere statistics, these are stories of pain, betrayal, and injustice. And today, as we stand on this sacred soil of Waterberg, we say enough is enough. The abuse of our children is an unforgivable crime. We will continue to work with the Family Violence, Child Protection and Sexual Offences (FCS) Units, with our Social Workers, and Community Policing Forums to ensure that perpetrators face the full might of the law.

We must never fear to report such acts. Silence is complicity. When we speak out, we stand with the child who cannot yet stand for themselves. Let us report without fear or favour to protect our nation's future.

Programme Director,

Our commitment to children goes beyond protection, it extends to their social and economic well-being. Over the past fifteen years, Limpopo has made tremendous progress through key social protection programmes that have changed millions of lives.

Our Child Support Grant, Foster Child Grant, and Care Dependency Grant continue to serve as a safety net for vulnerable families. As of 2025:

Nearly two million children benefit from the Child Support Grant.

The Care Dependency Grant has grown by 43%, ensuring children with disabilities are not left behind.

The Foster Child Grant, though declining, reflects a positive trend in family reunification.

These programmes collectively represent an investment of over R1.2 billion, a tangible demonstration that Limpopo places its children at the centre of development. They not only alleviate poverty but also affirm our government's unwavering commitment to ensuring that no child is left behind.

Ladies and Gentlemen, no government, however capable, can raise a child alone. It takes families, communities, and a nation to nurture a generation. Parents must remain the first teachers, the first protectors, and the first source of love. Families must be sanctuaries of safety and compassion, not spaces of fear or harm.

Our traditional leaders, faith-based institutions, and civic organisations have a moral duty to speak out and act decisively against abuse, early child marriage, substance abuse, and all social ills that threaten our children's future.

Ubuntu teaches us that "a child is everyone's child." In the spirit of Ubuntu, let us look beyond our own households and extend our care to every child in our streets, schools, and villages. When we raise children collectively, we raise a nation with unity, empathy, and purpose.

Allow me to recognise and celebrate our Limpopo Child Ambassadors who represented the province at the National Children's Parliament in Cape Town.

We are proud of:

Kelebhone Dymond – Elected Speaker of the National Children's Parliament.

Funzani Phalandwa – Deputy Speaker.

Lefentse Mashishi, Chantelle Mabunda, and Zahraa Essop – our shining provincial ambassadors.

You have carried our flag high and reminded us that leadership knows no age. You are proof that when children are empowered, they lead with honesty, empathy, and conviction. Keep inspiring your peers and continue to make your voices heard.

Programme Director, our vision is clear: a Limpopo, and a South Africa where every child is safe, healthy, educated, and free to dream.

To achieve this, we will:

Strengthen community-based child protection forums.

Expand access to early childhood development and special needs services.

Improve data collection to reach unreached children.

Continue awareness campaigns against all forms of abuse.

Deepen partnerships between government, civil society, and the private sector.

These actions are not promises they are our solemn duties as leaders, parents, and citizens.

As we celebrate National Children's Day, let us recommit ourselves to a vision where no child sleeps hungry, no child suffers abuse, and no child's dream is extinguished by poverty or violence.

Let us remember the timeless words of Nelson Mandela, who said, "There can be no keener revelation of a society's soul than the way in which it treats its children."

Let us therefore be the generation that protects that soul by loving, educating, empowering, and defending every child with courage and compassion. In protecting our children, we are protecting our future.

Thank you.