

WELCOME REMARKS BY THE PREMIER OF LIMPOPO DR PHOPHI RAMATHUBA AT THE G20 HEALTH MINISTERS MEETING, THE RANCH RESORT, POLOKWANE

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Programme Director, Dr SSS Buthelezi, Director-General: Health
Minister of Health in South African Dr Aaron Motsoaledi
Esteemed G20 Health Ministers
Deputy Minister of Health in South Africa, Dr Joe Phaahla
Ladies and gentlemen
Distinguished guests,

Avuxeni, Good Morning, Goie More, Ndi Matsheloni, Thobela, Silotshile!

We are delighted to welcome you to Limpopo, even more pleased that you have chosen our province to host this critical G20 Health Ministers meeting, a gathering that shines a spotlight on our collective commitment to accelerating health equity, solidarity and universal health access.

It is befitting to welcome you to the home of the only Rain Queen in South Africa, Modjadji the Seventh. Over the past two days, we have been blessed with good rain - a blessing that nourishes our land and sustains our people. Indeed, rain symbolises not only the physical nourishment of our crops but also serves as a powerful metaphor for our aspirations in health and economic development.

Rain is quite important for us as people in Southern Africa, especially for us in Limpopo where some of the areas are semi-dry and arid. Yet, we have some of the best climate to produce Grade A potatoes in the Blouberg area, wholesome bananas and avocados in the Luvuvhu and Makgobaskloof valleys, the highly sought after tomatoes from the ZZ2 farms sprawled across the Capricorn, Vhembe and Mopani Districts. Citrus from Sekhukhune as well as table grapes from that end keeps our people happy and healthy.

The soothing rains provide a backdrop to our wildlife-rich ecosystems, from the tranquil beauty of the Kruger to Canyon biosphere to the Waterberg biosphere, where life abounds. Here, nature thrives alongside us, reminding us that we are stewards of both our health and the environment. As health practitioners, your work is significantly supported by sustainable agricultural practices, which contribute to improved life expectancy and well-being among our people.

As we embrace this metaphor of rain, we acknowledge that its essence flows into the critical work of the Health Working Group. Under the theme "Accelerate Health Equity, Solidarity, and Universal Health Access," we are called to focus on universal health coverage, strengthening human resources for health, stemming the tide of national communicable diseases, and pandemic prevention preparedness. These areas are interconnected, just as the water cycle nourishes our land and communities, weaving a web of health and prosperity.

Reflecting on our progress, at the dawn of our democracy in 1994, life expectancy stood at a mere 56 years for men and 59 for women. Today, I am proud to announce that women in Limpopo live an average of 67 years, while men reach 64 years. This remarkable growth is a testament to our relentless efforts in combating diseases like HIV/AIDS and enhancing maternal and child health.

Our initiatives in expanding access to antiretroviral therapy and comprehensive HIV prevention have drastically improved health outcomes. Our focus on prenatal care and vaccination campaigns has led to a significant reduction in infant and maternal mortality rates.

However, we stand at a precipice where challenges persist. The gap between those with access to healthcare and those without remains distressingly wide. This must galvanise our efforts around national health insurance, ensuring that quality healthcare is not a privilege determined by one's economic status or background. Just as we fought against apartheid to secure equality, we must now strive to eradicate health disparities that persist today.

As we welcome you to Limpopo, let us share in our vision to build a healthier future. Together, we can cultivate an environment where health equity flourishes like the abundant rain that nurtures our land—a future where every South African, regardless of their background, has equitable access to quality healthcare.

Thank you for joining us today, and I look forward to fruitful discussions that will spur action and cooperation for the betterment of our communities, our province, and our beloved South Africa. Welcome to Limpopo!