

SPEECH BY LIMPOPO PREMIER DR PHOPHI RAMATHUBA INTERNATIONAL WOMEN'S DAY CELEBRATION, MARULENG LOCAL MUNICIPALITY, MOPANI DISTRICT

07 MARCH 2026

Programme Director,  
Members of the Executive Council,  
Executive Mayor of Mopani District, Cllr Pule Shayi,  
Mayor of Maruleng Municipality, Cllr Tshelo Musolwa,  
Councillors,  
Sectors representing Women,  
Representatives of the Chapter 09 and 10 Institutions,  
Traditional Leadership,  
Faith-Based Leaders,  
Business Community,  
Members of the Communities,  
Members of the Media,  
Ladies and Gentlemen,

Avuxeni, Thobela, Ndi Matsheloni, Good Morning, Goeie More.

Programme Director,

A woman is the quiet architect of life. She is the gentle strength that nurtures generations and the steady flame that lights the path for families and communities. Like the roots of a great tree that remain unseen yet hold the entire structure firm against the storms, women are the foundation upon which societies are built.

From the first lullaby sung to a newborn child, to the wisdom passed from one generation to the next, women carry the rhythm of life itself. They nurture dreams, protect families and shape the moral fabric of our communities.

Today, we gather here in Maruleng not only to celebrate women, but to honour their enduring spirit, their resilience and their immeasurable contribution to the progress of humanity.

International Women's Day is therefore more than a date on the calendar. It is a day deeply rooted in history. More than a century ago, women across the world began to raise their voices against injustice, demanding fair working conditions, the right to vote, equal opportunities and dignity in society.

In 1908, thousands of women marched through the streets of New York demanding better pay and improved working conditions. Their courage ignited a global movement that led to the first observance of International Women's Day in 1911. Over time, this day became a global platform to reflect on progress made, acknowledge challenges that remain and renew our collective commitment to achieving gender equality.

Programme Director, as South Africans, we carry our own proud history of women who stood firmly against oppression and injustice.

We remember the heroic women who marched to the Union Buildings in 1956 in protest against the oppressive pass laws. The names of Charlotte Maxeke, Lillian Ngoyi, Helen Joseph, Rahima Moosa, Albertina Sisulu and many others are permanently written in the history of our liberation struggle.

These women did not march for themselves alone. They marched for the dignity of every woman and every girl who would come after them.

When they boldly declared “Wathint’ Abafazi, Wathint’ Imbokodo,” they reminded the world that when you strike a woman, you strike a rock.

Their courage helped shape the democratic South Africa we live in today, a nation founded on equality, human dignity and freedom.

Programme Director, allow me to also recognise the countless women whose names may never appear in history books, yet whose contributions sustain our communities every day.

Let me reflect on the story of a woman from a rural village not far from here in Maruleng.

Every morning before the sun rises, she wakes up to prepare her children for school. She tends to her small vegetable garden, cares for livestock, participates in community activities and sometimes runs a small informal business to help provide for her family.

Late in the evening, when many are resting, she is still working, helping her children with homework and planning for the next day.

She may never stand on a public platform like this one. She may never hold a political title. Yet she is a pillar of strength in her household and in her community.

This woman represents the spirit of women across our province, Limpopo.

Programme Director, while we celebrate progress made in advancing women’s rights, we must also confront the challenges that many women continue to face.

Women remain disproportionately affected by unemployment and economic inequality. Many continue to carry the burden of poverty while striving to provide for their families.

Equally concerning is the persistent scourge of Gender-Based Violence and Femicide which continues to threaten the safety and dignity of women and girls across our communities.

These realities remind us that the struggle for gender equality is far from over. It calls on all of us — government, traditional leaders, faith-based organisations, civil society, and communities, to work together to protect, empower and uplift women.

Programme Director, the Limpopo Provincial Government remains committed to ensuring that women participate meaningfully in the development of our province.

Through the Department of Economic Development, Environment and Tourism, we continue to support women-owned businesses, cooperatives and entrepreneurs in sectors such as tourism, manufacturing and services.

We are strengthening partnerships with institutions such as the Small Enterprise Finance Agency and the National Youth Development Agency to ensure that women, particularly young women, have access to funding, mentorship and business development opportunities.

In agriculture, women farmers are receiving support through farming inputs, training and access to markets so that they may contribute meaningfully to food security and rural economic development.

We are also expanding opportunities for women in education, skills development, entrepreneurship and digital innovation because we recognise that empowering women is key to building a prosperous province.

Programme Director, hosting this celebration here in Maruleng reminds us of the important role played by rural women in the development of our province.

Rural women are the backbone of agriculture, the guardians of food security, and the drivers of many local economies. Their work sustains households and strengthens communities.

Yet many of them continue to face barriers in accessing land, finance, technology and markets.

As government, we remain committed to addressing these barriers so that rural women can fully realise their potential.

Programme Director, allow me to take a moment to speak directly to the young women and girls present here today.

Your dreams are valid.  
Your voice matters.  
Your future is limitless.

We encourage you to pursue education, innovation and leadership with courage and determination. Limpopo needs young women who will become scientists, engineers, entrepreneurs, farmers, educators and leaders of tomorrow.

Do not allow circumstances to define the boundaries of your dreams.

Programme Director, as we commemorate International Women's Day, let us remember that empowering women is not an act of charity.

It is an investment in the future of our province and our nation.

When a woman succeeds, a family becomes stronger.

When women are empowered, communities become more resilient.

And when women rise, nations prosper.

Let us therefore commit ourselves to building a society where no woman is left behind, where every girl has the opportunity to pursue her dreams and where violence against women has no place in our communities.

Before I conclude, allow me to say:

“Loko hi tlakusa wansati, hi tlakusa tiko hinkwaro.”

When we uplift a woman, we uplift the entire nation.

Happy International Women's Day.

Ndza khensa,

Kea Leboga,

Ndo livhuwa