



LIMPOPO

PROVINCIAL GOVERNMENT
REPUBLIC OF SOUTH AFRICA

RESPONSE TO THE DEBATE ON STATE OF THE PROVINCE ADDRESS BY THE PREMIER OF LIMPOPO, DR PHOPHI RAMATHUBA

Limpopo Legislature, Lebowakgomo

17 March 2026

Honourable Speaker,
Honourable Members of the Legislature,
Members of the Executive Council,
Traditional Leaders present,
Director-General and the leadership of our Administration,
And the people of Limpopo,

Avuxeni! Thobela! Goie More! Ndi Matsheloni!

Honourable Speaker, we take this opportunity to thank members of the legislature for taking their time in engaging on the plans we have put before this august house and the people of Limpopo through the State of the Province Address on 05 May 2026. We love the support we received on the day, with various members of the public joining us to mark that historic day before transitioning into the new financial year.

Let me begin where we must always begin in a democracy: by affirming that debate is healthy and scrutiny is necessary. I therefore thank all Honourable Members who engaged the SOPA with seriousness, with evidence and with a shared concern for the lived realities of our people.

If anything, we draw comfort in that the debate has shown that we are united in purpose of building **a Limpopo that works for all**. We are united in engendering inclusive growth and creating jobs.

Even more important, is the commitment to bring services that will fight poverty and curb the high cost of living. Only a capable, ethical developmental state would achieve such noble intentions. It is upon this foundation that we continue to build this province.

We say this because honourable members came out in support of the commitment we have made in closing all the gaps, to begin the process of industrialisation of our province to have inclusive growth and job creation. They have adequately traced the steps and actions we have taken to revive long-stalled projects that have in the past made our pronouncements sound like poetic refrains. We are now counting, day-by-day how we have closed those gaps - in roads, in projects and in intentions and policies.

Allow me Speaker to quote the Honourable Monama who said: “The reality is that things are significantly shaping up hence there is now an urgent need for us collectively to find meaningful ways within this tight fiscal space, to boost the economy and protect jobs, curb poverty while reducing inequality. As the ANC, we are unequivocal in support of the 2026 SOPA statement.”

The statement and utterances by Honourable Members of this house equally warn us against complacency, against believing that we have arrived, it allows us to mark the strides that we are making having given people hope and choices to stay in this province without feeling inferior. The complacency we shall fight is that we should make sure that services are brought to the people in timely way, that health care is a right that is enjoyed by everyone.

But, Honourable Speaker, it must also be said: there is a difference between oversight and opportunism; between holding government accountable and simply holding a

microphone; between offering alternatives and howling. And our people can see that difference very clearly.

We welcome robust criticism. What we will not accept is a politics that feeds on despair, a politics that because of its innate nature is just meant to oppose government to sound relevant. Limpopo does not need permanent commentators. Limpopo needs builders.

Honourable Speaker, you and I have put our intentions clear, that we can be held to account and we are not afraid of scrutiny.

1. We are in charge and the facts are on the table

Honourable Speaker, some of the commentary in this debate was presented as if we are a government that speaks in slogans and survives on public relations. That may be the comfort zone for some, but it is not how we govern.

We govern with plans, budgets, timelines, contracts, consequence management and measurable outputs.

When we assess the performance of our provincial economy, we look at four indicators: **GDP growth, the unemployment rate, employment numbers and poverty levels.**

Interestingly, a recent survey by IPSOS, an internationally recognised research organisation, says that Perils of Perception index, South Africans are the most propagandised people in the world. There is a huge gap between what they believe and what actual data shows.

In multiple versions of the IPSOS study, South Africa has ranked at the very top, meaning its citizens are among the most “misinformed” or “disconnected from reality” regarding the state of their own nation. We were hoping that this study would have been wrong about

some honourable members of this house, but emanating from some the debates it confirms that people argue out of unsubstantiated grounds.

I am surrounded by a young Doctoral graduate from the US as my Special Advisor on economic affairs, Dr Hope Muronga-Schluter, who gets surprised that honourable members would boldly stand before this house and the public and postulate about matters of the economy which they have no slight inclination nor even baseline research about.

And because certain members prefer rumours to research, let me repeat what I said clearly in SOPA and what I will repeat today. Even in class we oftentimes accept that there are slow learners:

- **The unemployment rate declined from 35% in Quarter 2 to 29.2% in Quarter 3, and further to 28.2% in Quarter 4 of 2025.**
- **In 2025, Limpopo created 64,000 jobs.**
- **Our province performed better than the national average on the latest GDP data.**
- **Limpopo recorded the largest provincial decline in poverty, down by 18.4%.**

Honourable Members, these figures are not manufactured in our offices. They are reported by Statistics South Africa, the official and credible authority on national statistics.

So, to Honourable Mapoulo and Honourable Wilson: you are entitled to your own opinions, but you are not entitled to your own facts. Please work with us to dispel the negativity that is giving this province a bad image, because a positive image of Limpopo is good for you, your children and generations to come.

2. On “expanded unemployment” - let’s be honest with the public

Some members of this house, having realised the decline in unemployment, insist we must only speak using the expanded unemployment definition. Honourable Smalle, whilst

we enjoyed your manner of debate, we equally understand why that argument is politically convenient: it makes the picture look worse, even when progress exists.

Stats SA follows International Labour Organisation standards to ensure comparability. The expanded measure includes people aged 15-64 who report that they want to work but are not actively looking for a job. It also includes people who are not currently searching for work but say they are available to start working.

We, therefore, report the official unemployment rate, which represents people who are actively participating in the job market.

At the same time, we recognise our country's demographic realities. South Africa has a large share of young people aged 15-24 who are still in school or higher education and are therefore not yet fully participating in the labour market.

That is why we also track an indicator that gives us a clearer picture of youth participation: the share of young people who are not in education, employment or training - the NEET rate.

And here too, Limpopo has improved: NEET numbers (age 15–24) declined by 44,000, from 382,000 in Q1 2025 to 338,000 in Q4 2025.

We will not hide the pain in our labour market. But we will also not allow a politics of denial to erase progress and demoralise our people. Our target remains clear: drive unemployment below 20% through growth, skills and industrialisation.

3. Timelines and delivery - not theatre

Honourable Speaker, Honourable Mapoulo says government avoids committing to timelines.

Here is the truth: we commit to timelines where the scope is complete, designs are finalised, procurement is concluded and funding is confirmed - because government must be firm, but also responsible.

We will not do “campaign timelines” that collapse the moment there is a variation order or a design flaw. We will do delivery timelines, those that stand up in court, in audits and on the ground.

That is why you are seeing stalled projects move again, not in speeches, but on sites.

Allow me to provide the House with an important update regarding the operationalisation of the Lebowakgomo Abattoir, which was raised during the debate on the State of the Province Address.

I am pleased to report that the abattoir is now fully operational and the activities taking place there demonstrate the progress we committed to when we spoke about strengthening the agricultural value chain in our province.

As part of the commissioning process, a trial slaughter was conducted, during which 1,500 chickens were successfully slaughtered. This test confirmed that the facility, equipment and operational systems are functioning effectively.

Following this successful test phase, the abattoir immediately proceeded with 23,500 chickens that were ready for slaughter, bringing the total currently being processed to 25,000 chickens.

Honourable Members,

All these chickens are supplied by Beatitudes Farm, located in the Sekhukhune District Municipality. Importantly, all the farms that are currently supplying chickens to the abattoir were renovated and revitalised by the Limpopo Department of Agriculture and Rural

Development, ensuring that these facilities are fully functional and able to participate in the provincial poultry value chain.

The Mashashane Hatchery has now been fully refurbished and is operational. The facility currently hatches approximately 37 000 eggs per cycle, marking an important step in rebuilding the provincial poultry value chain. Since the refurbishment and operationalisation of the facility, the hatchery has successfully completed four hatching cycles, producing a total of 150 000 chicks to date. At full operational capacity, the hatchery will be capable of incubating up to 100 000 eggs at a time.

Yes, heavy rains have damaged roads. That is not propaganda; it is engineering reality. But the answer is not to say “it will take 1000 years”, as if exaggeration is an alternative to a plan.

Honourable Speaker, we are a little concerned that we may now have to explain idiomatic and metaphoric expressions. When we said that we shall fix roads, one-village at a time, we meant that we are not going to stop, even with the budgets we have, we shall make strides, like we have done with the 21 projects where we have committed five (5) kilometres on each road. This is to enable progress whilst we mobilise resources to tar the rest of our province.

What we are saying is that people of Tshimbupfe don't have to be throwing stones and hurling insults when they see us in Taaibsoch in Blouberg, their turn will come and they too will get that tar road that the whole province requires. Isn't it Africans who said: “I rema nga lunwe mbevhana mulindi wa vhuya wa dala?” “Bietjie bietjie maak meer” “Motsopa o mongwe le o mongwe o chela noka” “Nambu wu tala hi magova.”

As we speak floods continue to wreak havoc in our communities. When the waters retreat and the skies clear, they leave behind roads broken, bridges wounded and communities searching for certainty.

And so, Limpopo will rise to rebuild - to repair the roads that were washed away, to restore the bridges that once carried neighbours to one another, to rebuild broken houses and to bring back the services that sustain the rhythm of daily life.

But rebuilding is not only about roads, house and bridges. It is about people. It is about standing beside families who lost their homes, holding the hands of those whose livelihoods were swept away and ensuring that no village, no street, no community walks the road to recovery alone.

For the duty of government is not only to respond to disaster - it is to restore hope.

The answer is to strengthen stormwater systems, improve maintenance cycles, enforce axle-load control and build climate resilience into our designs.

And where contractors underperform or abandon sites, they will face penalties, blacklisting and replacement. That is what being in charge means.

4. Acting allowances and labour stability - we agree

On the matter of officials acting in positions and not being paid: we agree that it cannot become a culture of exploitation.

We have directed departments to: **audit all long-term acting appointments, regularise critical posts within the prescripts, ensure that legitimate acting allowances are processed and hold managers accountable where there is deliberate administrative delay.**

A capable state is built on a respected workforce, not a frustrated one.

5. Fruitless and wasteful expenditure - consequence, not commentary

Yes, fruitless and wasteful expenditure is unacceptable. But what our people want is not “perverse” adjectives; they want corrective action.

We are strengthening consequence management through tighter contract management, improved supply chain compliance, early warning systems and disciplinary steps where negligence or wrongdoing is proven.

And where there is criminality, we refer matters for investigation and prosecution. Nobody must hide behind politics.

6. GBV: we do not “massage” cases - we strengthen systems

Honourable Speaker, to suggest that this government “massages” GBV cases is not only false; it is reckless, because it undermines victims and empowers perpetrators.

This administration has expanded victim support services, strengthened shelter and referral pathways, implemented year-long GBV programming, not seasonal activism, supported protection order processes and aligned departments to a single coordinated response.

We have actively participated in dialogues against GBV led by the ANC in Vhembe District where these incidents are prevalent. The question would be to those who are asking seated on high walls, what have you done to fight the scourge of GBV?

If any member has evidence of manipulation of GBV statistics or cases, bring it forward through the proper channels. But do not use survivors as props in political theatre.

7. Water: from begging to binding accountability

Honourable Speaker, on water - especially Polokwane and Giyani - let me be direct. We undertook in this house that on 06 March 2026 we are going to continue with the meeting

with the Minister of Water and Sanitation to assist in resolving challenges of water in the City of Polokwane. That meeting has taken place and a subsequent media briefing on 11 March 2026 with the Deputy Minister of Water and Sanitation, Lepelle Northern Water and the Executive Mayor of Polokwane confirmed that our intervention has borne fruit. The crisis is not over yet, but there is better management of the water supply with many areas now able to receive water. In addition, there is a monitoring system that members of the public may access to view reservoir levels to also assist in preserving water.

And politics will not be allowed to stand between a household and a tap.

In Polokwane, Lepelle Northern Water is the bulk supplier; municipalities must meet their obligations; and every party must perform. That is why the Office of the Premier has intervened: to stop the cycle of blame and replace it with a cycle of delivery.

On Giyani: the people deserve answers and they deserve water. That project has taken too long. Honourable Mapoulo those newspaper headlines about 16 years must not block your view of the recourse that has enabled over 20 villages in Giyani to access water so far. We are driving resolution through intergovernmental coordination and strict implementation monitoring. Where there is wrongdoing, it must be investigated. Where there is incompetence, it must be corrected. Where there is underperformance, it must be replaced.

8. Musina-Makhado SEZ: we will not abandon industrialisation

Honourable Members, on the Musina-Makhado SEZ: we reject the narrative that says because a project faces challenges it must be declared a failure. We had put a timeline that by the time we come to this house in 2026 there should have been visible progress. I almost said that dust fills skies of Musina as graders are building that township for Musina-Makhado SEZ but was quickly reminded that the torrential rains may have stopped the dust but have certainly not stopped our progress there. We have clearly

illustrated the work that is going on there that some members here thought it was AI, no, it is reality, MMSEZ is on track.

Industrialisation is not a weekend event. It requires bulk infrastructure, permitting, investor engagement and alignment across spheres of government.

We are not building an SEZ for speeches. We are building it for jobs, suppliers and long-term growth.

9. Agriculture and land matters: we will protect livelihoods and restore productivity

On Zebediela Citrus, Limburg and other land reform and CPA-related challenges: we will not pretend that community tensions do not exist. They do. But we will also not allow instability and mismanagement to collapse productive land and destroy livelihoods.

Our approach is: strengthen governance and mediation, support compliance and financial management, enforce accountability and restore production through viable partnerships that protect community interests.

Land reform must produce farms, not fights.

10. Marapong CRU and Tshikota CRU: people need homes, not explanations

On stalled CRU projects: we accept the frustration of communities. We are accelerating project resolution through improved contract management, monitoring of implementing agents and escalation mechanisms where projects are stuck. Where contractors fail, they will be removed. Where officials fail, they will answer.

A dignified life starts with a dignified home.

11. Traditional leadership: respect is not a slogan — it is our practice

Honourable Speaker, there were claims that traditional leaders are not respected and that they do not have medical aid.

Honourable Members, I must also emphasise that Senior Traditional Leaders receive medical aid. However, the real issue before us is broader. While some Honourable Members focus on medical aid, our priority must be to ensure quality healthcare for everyone, including the millions of people who do not have medical aid.

Let me place this on record: We work closely with the House of Traditional Leaders, led by Hosi Ngove. I have a senior traditional leader serving as my advisor, Hosi Mahumani, an elder who understands the institution deeply. His advice is not theoretical; it is grounded in experience and tradition.

We recently held engagements and a retreat to strengthen coordination and address concerns. Eighty-three Senior Traditional Leaders have been trained as economic change agents to drive rural development, job creation, sustainable resource use and active citizenry. The remaining leaders will be included in the 2026/27 plan.

Traditional leadership is not ceremonial in Limpopo; it is developmental. We will continue to build this partnership with respect and consistency.

12. Health: we will defend public healthcare because the majority depends on it

Honourable Mapoulo advocates strongly for healthcare, a point I think he should take a leaf from Honourable Malebana who has taken time to tell the story of Limpopo's health department with such clarity. Let me respond without hostility but with clarity: in Limpopo, less than 9% of our people have medical aid. The majority relies on public healthcare.

That is why we have strengthened insourcing: All previously outsourced hospital kitchens have been insourced. Cleaning services have been insourced. We have introduced a standardised menu to improve nutrition and consistency.

The results are visible: fewer complaints, better quality control and restored dignity and accountability.

And Honourable Speaker, today, while some were drafting press statements, I visited our health professionals as they perform a historic operation to separate conjoined twins here in Limpopo, Mankweng Hospital. We believe that they will recover and be in the best of health whilst we provide support to the mother of the children. That is the calibre of our public health system when it is supported and led properly.

We will also support the family with a house to ensure a stable environment after discharge - because this government acts with both competence and compassion.

13. Crime and illegal mining: we are tightening the net

On illegal mining and associated criminality: SAPS is resuscitating a dedicated task team, resourced with vehicles and personnel. We are engaging the Ministry of Defence to explore SANDF deployment in hotspots where illegal mining is rapidly increasing.

We will not normalise lawlessness. There can be no dignity where criminals control communities.

14. Municipal performance and audits: outcomes must translate into services

To Honourable Wilson: yes, audit outcomes must translate into water, refuse removal, roads, electricity and functioning institutions. That's what we are, that's what this democracy has brought forward, something that was foreign before 1994. That is the reason you may comfortably refer to structures for accountability that this ANC

government has created, the Human Rights Commission, the Public Protector and all others that we saw necessary to hold us accountable at all times.

Let me hasten to say that municipalities are working hard to strengthen governance systems, with many of them building internal capacity to do their financial statements. Nineteen municipalities prepared their Annual Financial Statements in-house and eight used consultants. However, there are municipalities who prepared AFS in-house, and they appointed consultants to review the work that was done in-house.

That is why we are strengthening support and oversight of municipalities and where there is failure, we will not hesitate to use the legal instruments available to government. But we will do it to restore service provision - not to posture.

Closing: politics end; service remains

I would be failing in my duty if I did not douse this so-called “lerole” that Honourable Mapoulo claims “le tja thuntsha”. At that moment it became clear that our message had unsettled him, because who, in this House, would sink so low as to question the DNA credentials of individuals linked to a female Member of the Executive Council?

What are we witnessing here if not the return of chauvinism dressed up as oversight? If that is to be the standard, will Honourable Mapoulo come to this podium and disclose, without exception, how many children he has fathered—those he supports and those he chooses not to acknowledge? This Legislature cannot descend into that kind of debate. The MEC owes no one an explanation: she has breached no code of conduct and acted within the laws governing the Executive.

We had to take time, amidst howling, to detail and report back to the people of Limpopo the progress we have made in reaching the goals they set for us, with the time that you Honourable Speaker had allocated us then. Some members are complaining that we too

two hours when we detailed what we have – honourable Wilson, we took the 2 hours accounting to the people of Limpopo, they are our greatest treasure.

Unfortunately, some of the members who donated their time had missed the essence of our messaging of building Limpopo. Let's hope this time around they are listening.

As I conclude Honourable Speaker, the people of Limpopo are not asking who won a debate. They are asking who is fixing the clinic, who is keeping water running, who is opening a road, who is bringing safety, who is creating work.

This government is in charge. We do not govern by hashtags. We govern by implementation.

So, to those who brought constructive proposals: we hear you, and we will work with you. To those who brought drama: the people are tired. They want delivery.

We will continue to build a Limpopo that works for all - one project at a time, one community at a time and one measurable outcome at a time.

I thank you.