



LIMPOPO

PROVINCIAL GOVERNMENT
REPUBLIC OF SOUTH AFRICA

**SPEECH BY LIMPOPO PREMIER DR. PHOPHI RAMATHUBA DURING
THE PROVINCIAL HUMAN RIGHTS DAY COMMEMORATION AT
BAKENBURG STADIUM, MOGALAKWENA LOCAL MUNICIPALITY,
WATERBERG DISTRICT**

21 MARCH 2026

Programme Director,

Members of the Executive Council,

Executive Mayor of Waterberg District Municipality, His Workshop Cllr Jack
Maeko

Mayor of Mogalakwena Local Municipality Mayor, His Worship Cllr Ngoako
Taeatsoala,

Other Executive Mayors and Mayors from Waterberg District Municipality
and other districts in our province

Councillors,

Limpopo Human Rights Commission Representative,

Commission for Gender Equality Representative,

Members of the Progressive Women's Movement,

Representatives of Chapter 9 Institutions,

Faith-Based Organisations,

Distinguished Guests,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Ndi mats Sheloni, Avuxeni, Thobela, Good morning, Goeie môre.

We gather here today at Bakenburg Stadium, in Mogalakwena Local Municipality, to join the nation in commemorating Human Rights Day. We do so with a clear understanding that Human Rights Day is not a date on the calendar - it is a mirror held up to our society, forcing us to ask: are the rights written in our Constitution lived in the daily lives of our people?

We are commemorating Human Rights Day at a time of deep significance. This year coincides with the commemoration of the 1956 Women's March to the Union Buildings and it marks 30 years since the adoption of our democratic Constitution. These are not separate anniversaries. They are connected chapters of one story: the struggle for dignity, equality and freedom.

Programme Director,

Human Rights Day is rooted in the painful history of Sharpeville in 1960, when peaceful protesters were killed for demanding a basic human right - the right to move freely without pass laws. The Sharpeville Massacre remains a permanent reminder that rights can be denied by law, enforced by bullets and justified by an unjust state.

It is important that we remember this, especially here in Mogalakwena - an area with its own history of resistance and courage. This community has produced heroes and heroines who refused to accept oppression as normal.

We honour the likes of Thabo Makunyane, Nelson Diale and many other men and women who carried the burden of struggle so that we could carry the promise of democracy. Their message to us is clear: human rights were not donated; they were demanded and defended.

This year's theme, "The Bill of Rights at 30: Making Human Rights Real," must speak to our lived reality in Limpopo. Making rights real means translating constitutional promises into functioning clinics, safe streets, quality schools, clean water, reliable electricity and dignified work.

The Constitution is not just a legal document. It is a social contract. It says every person has inherent dignity and equal worth. It protects freedom of expression, freedom of association, the right to education, the right to healthcare, the right to housing and the right to be free from violence. It is a shield for all who live in South Africa - black and white, women and men, rural and urban, young and old, able-bodied and living with disability.

Programme Director,

As we mark 30 years of the Constitution, we must ask: what has it meant for Limpopo?

It has meant that a child born in Ga-Mashashane, in Mapela, in Mahwelereng, in Sekhukhune, in Giyani, in Thohoyandou and here in Mogalakwena is no longer legally born into a system designed to keep them inferior. It has meant that our people can vote, organise, speak, pray, study, and build businesses without apartheid laws determining their destiny.

It has meant expansion of access to education - more schools, more opportunities for young people, more students supported through NSFAS and bursary programmes. It has meant access to primary healthcare, including clinics and hospitals that serve our communities every day.

It has also meant that a rural province like ours can build capacity to do what was once unthinkable - develop professionals, train specialists, improve infrastructure and grow institutions that must serve our people with excellence, not excuses.

But Programme Director, making rights real also means honesty about what still hurts.

We still face unemployment, particularly among the youth. We still face poverty in many households. We still face inequality between those with opportunities and those left behind. We still face substance abuse, crime, and the painful reality of gender-based violence.

So when we commemorate Human Rights Day, we are not celebrating perfection. We are recommitting ourselves to progress. We are renewing the promise that the struggle did not end in 1994 and it did not end in 1996 when the Constitution was adopted. The struggle changed form: from liberation to transformation.

To the young people gathered here today: Human rights are not only something you read about in Life Orientation. Human rights must live in your choices and your actions.

Your rights include the right to education but your responsibility is to attend school, study and reject anything that steals your future. Your rights include the right to safety but your responsibility is to respect women and girls, to reject violence and to speak out when your friends normalise abuse. Your rights include the right to dignity but your responsibility is to never humiliate others, never bully others online and never spread hate in the name of identity or tribe.

Young people of Limpopo: do not be misled into thinking that democracy is useless because it is unfinished. Democracy is a tool, it must be used. Participate in community structures. Volunteer. Start cooperatives. Learn skills. Hold government accountable, yes but also hold yourselves accountable to the dream of this country.

Programme Director,

The commemoration of the 1956 Women's March must also speak powerfully to our reality. Those women marched against pass laws, but they were also marching for recognition: recognition that women are not second-class citizens; that women carry families, communities and economies. Their message remains relevant because even today, too many women live under threat in their own homes.

We must say it without apology: violence against women and children is a human rights violation. It is not culture. It is not discipline. It is crime. It is shameful and it must end. We must build communities where women can walk freely, study freely, work freely and live freely.

Programme Director,

Why do we commemorate days like this?

We commemorate because memory is a defence against repetition. We commemorate because the comfort of forgetting is dangerous. We commemorate because young people must inherit not only the benefits of freedom but also the responsibility to protect it. We commemorate because rights can be weakened slowly - through corruption, through intolerance, through misinformation, through apathy - unless citizens are alert and active.

As Limpopo, our task over the next decades is clear: to deepen access to opportunity; to build an ethical and capable state; to resource rural areas so that geography does not decide destiny; and to ensure that the Constitution is not only celebrated in speeches but experienced in households.

Let us use this day to strengthen social cohesion, to reject tribalism, to choose Ubuntu, and to build a province where every person can say: "My rights are real. My dignity is protected. My future is possible."

I thank you.