



# LIMPOPO

PROVINCIAL GOVERNMENT  
REPUBLIC OF SOUTH AFRICA

## **KEYNOTE ADDRESS BY THE PREMIER OF LIMPOPO PROVINCE DR PHOPHI RAMATHUBA ON THE FREEDOM DAY COMMEMORATION, SASELAMANI SPORTS GROUND, COLLINS CHABANE MUNICIPALITY, VHEMBE DISTRICT**

27 APRIL 2026

Programme Director, MEC for Sport, Arts and Culture Mr Jerry Maseko  
MECs,  
Members of the Provincial Legislature  
The Host Mayor of Collins Chabane Municipality, His Worship Cllr Maluleke  
Executive Mayors and Mayors,  
Hosi MT Maluleke  
Traditional Leaders,  
Leaders of our political parties and Civic Organisations  
Our youth, women, religious leaders, business leaders, veterans of our liberation struggle, students, members of the media and the people of Limpopo;

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

We gather here today at Saselamani Sports Ground in Collins Chabane Municipality not merely to commemorate a date on the calendar, but to honour a journey - a long, painful, courageous and ultimately triumphant journey from oppression to democracy, from exclusion to belonging, from silence to a voice that is now ours.

On 27 April 1994, South Africa gave birth to a constitutional democracy. That day was not only about voting. It was about dignity being restored to millions who had been denied it for generations. It was about opening the gates of citizenship to those who had been locked out by apartheid. It was about saying, with one voice, that this country belongs to all who live in it.

Today, 32 years later, we gather under the theme: Freedom and the Rule of Law: Thirty Years of Democratic Citizenship."

We do so at a time when many of our people ask hard questions. Some ask: what is freedom when unemployment remains high? What is freedom when a young person completes matric but still cannot find work? What is freedom when a flood washes

away homes, bridges, roads, and their livelihood? What is freedom when the daily struggle for water, electricity, roads and safety feels endless?

These questions are legitimate. They are the questions of a people who care, who hope and who still believe that democracy must mean something tangible in their lives.

And it is precisely because we understand these concerns that we say: freedom is not a once-off event; freedom is a living responsibility. It is not a statue to admire. It is a duty to fulfil.

Residents of Limpopo, we must never confuse the freedoms we enjoy today with the false comforts of routine. Yes, our freedoms have become part of daily life. Yes, some may no longer feel the dramatic difference of 1994 as sharply as before.

But let us be clear: there is a profound difference between the apartheid state and the democratic government we have today.

Apartheid divided people by race, denied the majority a voice, built development for a few and oppression for the many and treated Black people as strangers in their own land.

This democratic government, by contrast, does not take its people for granted. It listens. It answers. It is held accountable. It is required to serve all the people, not a select few.

That is the difference between tyranny and democracy, between domination and dignity, between exclusion and inclusion.

In Limpopo, we know that our people elected us to serve them. We know that every vote was a message, every ballot a trust every community a promise. That is why when our people raise concerns every day, we do not become impatient. We do not say they are complaining too much. We say: these are our people, this is our mandate and we must respond.

That is why the Members of the Executive Council and I continue to criss-cross this province, visiting communities, engaging residents, and working to resolve concerns on the ground.

We are inspired by the spirit of Collins Chabane himself, a son of the soil who remained grounded among the people. He listened to the struggles of communities, walked with them and rose through dedication, discipline and service to become a national leader. He was a man who could be found seated under a tree with

villagers, organising in the community and later taking the issues of the people to provincial, national and international platforms in search of solutions.

We walk in his footsteps. We do so because leadership must never be distant. It must be visible, compassionate and responsive.

We do this because government must not only be seen in offices and boardrooms; it must be felt in villages, townships, farms and cities. It must be present where people live.

Despite the harsh realities we face, Limpopo is not standing still. Our province is carving out its rightful place in the national economy. We are increasing our contribution to the gross domestic product and we are among the top two provinces in reducing unemployment. That does not mean the crisis is over - it is not.

But it does mean that the tide is turning. We are changing economic fortunes by investing in sectors that matter: mining and beneficiation, agriculture and agro-processing, tourism, manufacturing and skills development.

We are bringing education closer to our learners and young people. We are reviving Lemana College. The TUT Campus in Giyani is now operational. The Sekhukhune Mining Beneficiation Academy is advancing well. The Central Academic Hospital is progressing well to help us reduce referrals to other provinces.

These are not empty promises. These are investments in a future where our young people are not spectators in the economy, but active participants in it.

We are also mindful of the painful setbacks caused by natural disasters that devastated parts of our province in recent months. Floods destroyed homes, roads and livelihoods. Communities were displaced. But the response of this government has been clear: reconnect communities, rebuild roads, resettle affected families and monitor the wellbeing of those who remain displaced. We have not abandoned them. We have not forgotten them. We have stood with them and we will continue to stand with them.

That is what democratic government looks like. It is not perfect, but it is present. It is not indifferent, but caring. It is not distant, but accountable.

On this Freedom Day, we also remind ourselves that democracy is protected by the rule of law. Freedom without law becomes chaos. Law without justice becomes oppression. Our task is to ensure that our constitutional democracy remains a place where rights are protected, institutions function, and all people are treated with dignity.

Victims of Gender-based violence that devastate parts of this province must be protected and feel confident that their lives are in safe hands. In addition to social interventions we make as government the rule of law must consistently vindicate them when they bring their cases to courts.

We have learnt with sadness of such a horrible incident just yesterday wherein the Police in Malamulele under Vhembe District have arrested a 29-year-old male suspect following the rape of an 89-year-old woman that occurred at Nyavani village, in the early hours of Saturday, 26 April 2026. We were once a district and place that pride itself in respect for lives of others, this is not the kind of example we want to show to the world. We are going to ensure that there is adequate support to have this case prosecuted successfully and uphold the rule of law.

As we move closer to local government elections, let us remember the significance of the first democratic elections of 27 April 1994. For the majority of South Africans who had never voted before, dignity was restored and the country transformed into a non-racial, non-sexist and democratic society. It gave birth to a national identity rooted in respect, shared responsibility and love for our country.

As government, it is our duty to ensure that people can truly feel the impact of freedom in their daily lives. I wish to raise a concerning matter brought forward by Mr Cyril Makamu of Malamulele, who has reported a sewer spill in his yard for several months, creating a serious health risk for him and his neighbours. This is a matter that requires urgent attention from the ward councillor, municipal management, the Speaker, the Mayor, and the municipality as a whole. Residents should never feel hopeless when local and provincial government are present.

Mr Makamu, and others facing similar challenges, must know that they are not alone. This is why we insist that those elected to office must be people known and trusted in our streets, churches and villages - leaders who are disciplined, humble, honest, accessible, hardworking, and committed to serving the people.

Let us therefore continue building a Limpopo and a South Africa that belongs to all who live in it.

Let us defend freedom by using it to build jobs, schools, roads, clinics, safety and hope.

Let us honour our liberation heroes not only with songs and speeches, but with service, discipline and development.

And let us never forget: freedom was won through sacrifice, but it must be sustained through action.

May Freedom Day inspire us to do more, to serve better and to keep faith with the people of Limpopo and South Africa.

I thank you.