

SPEECH BY PREMIER DR PHOPHI RAMATHUBA DURING THE OCCASION OF THE 12TH EDITION OF AFRICA DAY COMMEMORATION, UNIVERSITY OF LIMPOPO, TURFLOOP, POLOKWANE MUNICIPALITY, CAPRICORN DISTRICT

25 May 2026

Programme Director,
Members of the Executive Council,
Speaker of the Provincial Legislature, Dr Makoma Makhurupetše,
Deputy Speaker of the Legislature, Ms Tebogo Mamorobela,
Executive Mayor of Capricorn District Municipality, Cllr Mamedupi Teffo,
Executive Mayor of Polokwane Municipality, Cllr John Mpe,
Councillors,
The Vice-Chancellor and Principal of the University of Limpopo, Dr Jeffrey Mabelebele,
Traditional Leaders,
Faith-Based Leaders,
Members of the Media,
Distinguished Guests,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

Thobela, Avuxeni, Ndi matsheloni, Good morning, Goeie Môre,

Today, we gather to celebrate the soul of a continent that has endured hardship, resisted oppression, conquered adversity and continues to inspire the world through its resilience and determination. Africa Day remains a powerful reminder that despite centuries of colonialism, exploitation and division, the spirit of Africa has never been broken.

From the majestic mountains of Kilimanjaro to the rich soils of Limpopo, from the bustling cities of Accra and Nairobi to the villages of Mankweng, Ga-Molepo and Nchinchane, Africa continues to pulse with energy, creativity, intelligence and hope. We are descendants of great kingdoms, fearless revolutionaries, visionary leaders and hardworking communities who refused to surrender their dignity and identity.

Today, as we commemorate the 12th edition of Africa Day here at the University of Limpopo, Turfloop, we do so under a timely and meaningful provincial theme: “Sport and Culture as Catalysts for Climate Action.” This theme speaks directly to the African Union’s 2026 focus on “Water Security, Climate Resilience and Sustainable Development.” It reminds us that climate change is no longer a distant scientific discussion confined to international conferences and policy documents. It is a daily reality affecting communities across our continent.

Programme Director,

The devastating floods that recently affected parts of Limpopo Province, Zimbabwe and Mozambique have exposed the painful reality that climate change is already disrupting lives, destroying infrastructure and threatening livelihoods across Southern Africa.

Families have lost loved ones, homes have been swept away, roads and bridges have collapsed and many communities remain vulnerable and displaced.

These disasters carry an important lesson for all of us. Climate change does not recognise borders, race, nationality or political affiliation. It affects us collectively and therefore our response must also be collective, coordinated and urgent. Africa can no longer afford to respond to climate disasters through temporary relief measures alone. We must now focus on long-term solutions that build resilience and protect future generations.

This is precisely why sport and culture must become powerful instruments of mobilisation, education and transformation. They are not simply forms of entertainment or recreation. They are among the most influential tools available to unite communities and inspire social change.

When young people gather on soccer fields, netball courts, rugby grounds and athletic tracks, they create spaces of influence, discipline and unity. When communities gather through traditional music, poetry, storytelling and dance, they strengthen social cohesion and preserve indigenous knowledge systems that have guided African societies for generations.

Our traditional songs, dances and languages carry deep environmental wisdom. They teach respect for nature, responsible use of water and harmonious coexistence with the environment. Through culture, we preserve our identity and reconnect with our heritage. Through sport, we cultivate teamwork, discipline, perseverance and resilience.

Imagine local sporting tournaments becoming platforms for river clean-up campaigns and environmental awareness. Imagine cultural festivals becoming centres for climate education and water conservation advocacy. Imagine our athletes, artists, musicians and traditional leaders becoming ambassadors for environmental protection and climate resilience.

That is the Africa we must build.

Programme Director,

Limpopo remains one of the richest provinces in terms of cultural diversity and heritage. Ours is a province where Sepedi, Tshivenda, Xitsonga and many other languages coexist in harmony. This diversity is not a weakness that divides us; it is a strength that enriches us and teaches us the true meaning of unity in diversity.

The future of our continent depends on our ability to unite around a common vision of peace, development and prosperity. We must never forget that as Africans we are connected by shared values, shared struggles and shared aspirations.

As the great Pan-Africanist Kwame Nkrumah once said: "Africa is one continent, one people and one destiny."

These timeless words remain relevant because our survival and progress depend on continental unity, economic cooperation and collective self-reliance. The challenges confronting Africa today require African solutions driven by African people who understand the realities of this continent.

Programme Director,

The time has come for Africa to stop underestimating itself and doubting its own capabilities. For far too long, our continent has been conditioned to believe that progress and solutions must come from elsewhere. We have exported our raw materials, our talent and even our confidence while importing dependency and underdevelopment.

Yet Africa possesses some of the brightest minds and greatest potential in the world. We have engineers capable of designing climate-resilient infrastructure. We have scientists developing innovative agricultural and water solutions. We have entrepreneurs transforming industries through technology and innovation. We have academics, researchers and professionals who are ready to lead this continent into a new era of growth and self-sufficiency.

The real challenge is not whether Africa has capacity. The real challenge is whether Africa believes in itself enough to fully utilise that capacity.

We must invest in African innovation, strengthen African institutions and support African research. We must create conditions that allow our young people to thrive on their own continent instead of forcing them to seek opportunities elsewhere. We must build economies that create jobs, reduce inequality and restore dignity to our people.

This is why government in Limpopo continues to prioritise infrastructure development, water security and climate resilience as critical pillars of sustainable development. Through the Limpopo Development Plan, we are investing in long-term projects that strengthen our communities against climate shocks and future disasters.

We are upgrading roads and bridges using climate-smart engineering standards so that our infrastructure can withstand extreme weather conditions. We are strengthening water infrastructure systems, including the Nandoni Water Treatment Works, to improve water security for communities across the province. We are also refurbishing water networks through Lepelle Northern Water to reduce water losses and ensure sustainable supply.

These are not merely infrastructure projects. They are investments in human dignity, economic development and the future survival of our communities.

Programme Director,

Africa Day must also remind us that the struggle for liberation did not end with political freedom alone. The lowering of colonial flags marked the beginning of a new struggle for economic freedom, social justice and sustainable development.

Today, our generation confronts new battles that require courage, vision and unity. We continue to fight against poverty, unemployment, inequality, corruption and underdevelopment. We are also increasingly confronted by climate injustice, where developing nations suffer the harshest consequences of environmental damage they did not create.

Our responsibility as leaders, communities and citizens is to ensure that future generations inherit a continent that is peaceful, prosperous, environmentally secure and economically independent.

To the young people gathered here today, I want to deliver a clear and direct message. Africa's future will not be shaped in foreign capitals or distant boardrooms. Africa's future will be shaped by you through your education, your discipline, your innovation and your commitment to this continent.

You must reject the dangerous belief that greatness only exists outside Africa. You must reject hopelessness and dependency. This continent needs your ideas, your energy, your skills and your determination. It needs young Africans who are confident enough to lead, innovate and transform society.

You carry the responsibility of rewriting Africa's story from one of poverty and conflict to one of opportunity, excellence and prosperity. Through education, entrepreneurship, sport, culture and innovation, you have the power to position Africa as a global leader in development and human progress.

Programme Director,

Let us leave this gathering with renewed determination and a deeper commitment to building the Africa we desire. Let us use sport to unite communities and inspire social cohesion. Let us use culture to preserve our heritage and strengthen our identity. Let us use education to unlock opportunities for future generations. Let us use innovation to confront climate change and accelerate sustainable development.

Above all, let us use African unity as the foundation upon which we build a peaceful, prosperous and climate-resilient continent.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

The sleeping giant of Africa is awakening. The future is calling upon us to rise beyond dependency, beyond division and beyond despair. This generation must be remembered as the generation that restored Africa's confidence, protected its resources and built a continent defined by excellence, resilience and shared prosperity.

Africa is rising. Africa is resilient. Africa is capable. And Africa's time is now.

Inkomu, Ndza khensa Ndo livhuwa,
Thank you.