

SPEECH BY PREMIER DR PHOPHI RAMATHUBA DURING THE YOUTH DAY  
COMMEMORATION AT VASASELE PRIMARY SCHOOL, N'WAMITWA VILLAGE, GREATER  
TZANEEN LOCAL MUNICIPALITY, MOPANI DISTRICT,

16 JUNE 2026

Programme Director,  
Speaker of the Provincial Legislature, Dr Makoma Makhurupetje,  
Deputy Speaker of Legislature, Ms Tebogo Mamorobela,  
Members of the Executive Council,  
Members of the Provincial Legislature,  
Executive Mayor of Mopani District Municipality, Cllr Pyle Shayi,  
Mayor of Greater Tzaneen Local Municipality, Cllr Odas Ngobeni,  
Councilors present,  
Traditional Leaders,  
Religious leaders,  
Representatives of the National Youth Development Agency,  
Youth leaders and the young people of Limpopo,  
Members of the Media,  
Ladies and Gentlemen,

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

Young people of Limpopo,  
Sons and Daughters of the soil,  
Heirs of a history written in courage,  
we gather today not merely to remember, but to awaken.

We stand on ground once shaken by the footsteps of brave young people who refused to kneel before injustice. In June 1976, they became the thunder before the rain. They were the fire in the winter of apartheid. They were the crack in the wall that made freedom possible. They did not only protest against Afrikaans as a medium of instruction; they rose against a system that sought to shrink black minds, silence black voices, and bury black identity. They said, with one voice and one heartbeat, that the black child would not remain at the margins of history. They insisted on dignity. They insisted on self-worth. They insisted on a future.

Those young people had no luxury of the freedoms we enjoy today. They had no access to the facilities, the opportunities, the mobility and the platforms that are available to you. Yet they carried vision like a torch in the dark. They built self-help projects, community projects and networks of international solidarity. They turned pain into purpose and oppression into organisation. They affirmed blackness not as a burden, but as a badge of honour. They stood tall in a storm, and because they did, we now walk under the sky of democracy.

Thirty-Two years into democracy, it is no longer as easy as it once was to shout "Black Power" and have the nation immediately resonate. Not because the call has lost its

truth, but because the battle has changed form. The demands are different and the global politics have changed drastically.

Today our struggle is not only against the visible chains of apartheid; it is against the silent prison of unemployment, poverty, hopelessness and exclusion. The enemy now is not only the law of segregation, but the despair that tells a young person to sit down when they were born to rise.

That is why our government in Limpopo has placed young people at the centre of development. We know that the future cannot be built by watching from the fence. It is built by putting tools in the hands of the young, by opening gates that were once closed and by creating pathways where there were once walls.

We are investing in skills development because a skill is a key. It opens doors. It unlocks livelihoods. It turns talent into income and aspiration into action. Through our programmes, young people are being trained to become artisans, technicians, entrepreneurs and innovators. We are not only preparing you to look for jobs; we are preparing you to create them.

We are strengthening youth-owned enterprises because economic freedom must be more than a slogan. It must have roots in the soil of Limpopo. Through the Limpopo Youth Fund, we have supported youth-led businesses that are growing local economies and proving that young people are not a problem to be managed, but a force to be unleashed.

Programme Director, we are advancing the Sekhukhune Mining Beneficiation and Academy because we want the wealth beneath our feet to uplift the minds above it. We are reviving institutions such as Lemana College and ensuring that the TUT Campus in Giyani is operational, because education must move closer to the people. We are opening doors so that no child of Limpopo should have to travel far just to find a future.

We want young people to participate in agriculture, tourism, manufacturing, digital innovation, construction and cooperatives. We want you to be builders, creators and owners. Limpopo must not only be a province that exports raw talent; it must be a province that grows talent, keeps talent and rewards talent.

In our province, we remain steadfast in our commitment to creating opportunities that empower young people, women, and persons with disabilities through entrepreneurship, innovation, and sustainable livelihood initiatives. Through programmes such as the Sustainable Livelihood Fund, we are investing in projects that create sustainable employment, stimulate local economic growth, and unlock the full potential of our communities.

Programme Director,

As the Limpopo Provincial Government, we are honouring the legacy of the youth of 1976 through practical programmes that create jobs, develop skills and unlock economic opportunities for young people.

Through the Department of Sport, Arts and Culture, we are investing more than R50 million in sport, arts, heritage and library infrastructure. These investments include a R15 million Sport High Performance Centre expected to create approximately 1,200 jobs, R18 million towards the operationalisation of the Provincial Theatre expected to create about 2,000 opportunities for artists and creatives, and R1 million to support young entrepreneurs in the creative industries, creating more than 300 jobs. Together, these interventions position sport, arts and culture as important drivers of youth employment and economic growth.

Through the Department of Agriculture and Rural Development, government continues to support youth-owned farming enterprises through irrigation schemes, poultry projects, packhouses and other agricultural infrastructure. These interventions have already created 53 permanent jobs and 275 seasonal jobs, translating into 328 direct employment opportunities while advancing food security and rural economic development.

Through the Department of Social Development, young people are accessing internships, learnerships and Expanded Public Works Programme opportunities that provide workplace experience, income and skills development. At the same time, the Department continues to invest in programmes that protect vulnerable youth and address social challenges that often stand in the way of economic participation.

Through the Department of Transport and Community Safety, 400 young people will be recruited into the Young Civilians on Patrol Programme during this financial year, while a further 200 young people will be recruited into Traffic Officer Learnerships, creating a total of 600 opportunities that will provide skills, work experience and pathways into long-term careers in public service and law enforcement.

Through the Department of Education, we continue to invest in quality education, school sport, science, technology, coding and robotics. These programmes are equipping young people with the skills required to compete in the modern economy, while ensuring that learners from rural communities have access to opportunities that were once beyond their reach.

The Department of Public Works, Roads and Infrastructure continues to place job creation and youth empowerment at the centre of its work. Over the past eighteen months, the Department appointed 590 permanent employees, including 350 young people, while Roads Agency Limpopo appointed an additional 42 personnel. Through the Expanded Public Works Programme (EPWP), government has also created 64,313 work opportunities across Limpopo during the 2025/26 financial year, providing much-needed income, skills and work experience to thousands of our people.

By the end of July 2026, the Department will recruit an additional 238 employees and fill a further 143 vacant posts approved by the Executive Council. Through partnerships with MERSETA and CETA, 210 young people will also benefit from apprenticeship and learnership programmes in critical trades. These interventions, together with our graduate candidacy and contractor development programmes, demonstrate our determination to equip young people with skills, create jobs and build a new generation of professionals, artisans and entrepreneurs.

In our quest to prepare Limpopo for a rapidly changing global economy, we have also facilitated opportunities for young people to acquire world-class skills. To this end, 12 young people from our province are currently studying in China in critical fields such as engineering and new energy technologies. These young ambassadors will return with valuable knowledge and expertise that will contribute to the growth and modernisation of our province.

Programme Director,

I am pleased to announce that the 2026/27fy Call for Proposals is now open, inviting eligible applicants to submit innovative and impactful project proposals that will advance economic inclusion, enterprise development, and job creation across our province. Detailed information, including the application guidelines is available on the Limpopo Provincial Government website and the Government eTender Portal. Hard copies of the application guidelines may also be obtained from the Office of the Premier at 40 Hans van Rensburg Street, Local Economic Development (LED) Units at municipal offices, and Traditional Council Offices throughout the province.

Enterprises and cooperatives with viable project ideas are encouraged to seize this opportunity to contribute towards building a more inclusive, prosperous, and self-reliant Limpopo.

Yes, unemployment remains a painful wound. But I want to say to the youth of Limpopo: do not let unemployment become your identity. You are more than statistics. You are more than waiting rooms. You are rivers that have not yet found their valley. You are seeds that have not yet broken the soil. You are the sunrise behind a long night.

Programme Director,

As we commemorate fifty years since the historic uprising, we must also prepare for the future. The Local Government Elections scheduled for 04 November 2026 present an important opportunity for young people to shape the future of their communities. The youth of 1976 fought so that future generations could enjoy the freedom to participate in democratic processes and determine their own destiny.

We therefore urge young people across Limpopo to honour that legacy by registering to vote and participating actively in our democracy. Through your participation, you will be defending the Constitution, safeguarding our democratic gains and strengthening the institutions that previous generations sacrificed so much to establish.

May the courage of the June 16 generation continue to light our path. May their sacrifices inspire us to work harder, dream bigger and serve our people with greater commitment. And may Youth Day 2026 mark not only a celebration of our past, but the beginning of a renewed journey towards a prosperous, inclusive and hopeful future for every young person in Limpopo.

To the young people of Limpopo, I say: inherit the courage of 1976, but also the discipline of the future. Be restless for justice, but anchored in integrity. Be bold in your dreams, but responsible in your conduct. Build companies. Build farms. Build technologies. Build communities. Build each other.

The freedom our forebears fought for is not a museum piece. It is a living flame. It burns in your hands now. Guard it. Grow it. Use it to light the path for others.

Long live the spirit of June 16.  
Long live the youth of Limpopo.  
Long live the youth of South Africa.  
I thank you.