

SPEECH BY PREMIER DR PHOPHI RAMATHUBA DURING THE LAUNCH OF YOUTH MONTH, BELA-BELA COMMUNITY HALL, BELA-BELA LOCAL MUNICIPALITY, WATERBERG DISTRICT

02 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 Waterberg District Municipality, Cllr Jack Maeko,
Mayor of Bela-Bela Local Municipality, Cllr Gloria Modiegi,
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,

It is both an honour and a privilege for me to be part of history as we officially launch Youth Month here in Bela-Bela Local Municipality, Waterberg District. This launch marks the beginning of a month-long programme dedicated to reflecting on and honouring the sacrifices of the young people who participated in the historic 1976 Students' Uprising. It is indeed a moment for remembrance, reflection and renewal. It is a moment to draw lessons from our past as we shape the future of our province and our country.

Programme Director, today, we gather in the shadow of giants. We gather to honour a generation of young people whose courage, sacrifice and unwavering determination watered the tree of freedom with their blood and nourished the dream of a democratic South Africa. The liberties we enjoy today were born from their defiance, strengthened by their resilience and secured through their ultimate sacrifice.

This year carries profound significance as it marks fifty years since the historic events of 16 June 1976, when thousands of students took to the streets of Soweto and many other parts of South Africa to challenge an unjust education system and confront the brutality of apartheid. What began as a student protest evolved into one of the defining moments in our liberation struggle. It awakened the conscience of the world, intensified international solidarity against apartheid and accelerated South Africa's journey towards freedom and democracy.

It is therefore fitting that Youth Month remains an important part of our national calendar. It reminds us that young people have always been at the forefront of social

change and nation-building. It reminds us that every generation has a responsibility to advance the cause of freedom, justice and equality.

This year, Youth Month is commemorated under the theme "RESET@50: The Future Calls." This powerful theme invites us not only to celebrate the achievements of the past fifty years but also to reimagine the future. It challenges us to reset our ambitions and strengthen our commitment to empowering young people as drivers of economic growth, innovation, social cohesion and national renewal.

Programme Director,

To fully appreciate the courage of the youth of 1976, we must understand the conditions under which they lived. The apartheid government introduced the Bantu Education Act of 1953 to deliberately deny black children quality education and meaningful opportunities. The system sought to prepare black people for lives of permanent subservience and exclusion.

Yet the youth of 1976 refused to accept this injustice. They stood up against oppression and demanded the right to learn, to dream and to determine their own destiny. In doing so, they demonstrated extraordinary courage and patriotism.

Many paid the ultimate price.

Today we remember the bravery of Tsietshi Mashinini, Hector Pieterse, Hastings Ndlovu, Khotso Seatlholo and countless others whose names may never appear in history books but whose sacrifices changed the course of our nation. Their courage reminds us that no challenge is insurmountable when young people unite behind a noble cause. The challenge facing today's youth may not be apartheid, but it remains significant and urgent.

Many young people continue to face unemployment, poverty, inequality, crime, substance abuse, gender-based violence and limited access to economic opportunities. Too many graduates struggle to enter the labour market. Too many talented young people remain excluded from meaningful participation in the economy. Too many young women continue to live under the threat of violence and abuse.

As government, we acknowledge these realities. We recognise that despite the tremendous progress made since the advent of democracy in 1994, the journey towards full youth empowerment remains unfinished.

However, we must also acknowledge the significant strides that have been made over the past thirty-one years of democracy. Millions of young South Africans now have access to education, healthcare, social support and opportunities that were denied to previous generations. School nutrition programmes have ensured that learners can focus on their studies. New schools and classrooms have been built. Through the National Student Financial Aid Scheme, many young people from poor households have gained access to higher education and training opportunities.

Yet access alone is not enough.

This is why government continues to invest in education, skills development and youth empowerment. We are strengthening our Technical and Vocational Education and Training institutions, improving the quality of teaching and learning, promoting science and mathematics education, and expanding opportunities that prepare young people for the changing demands of the modern economy.

Programme Director,

Youth development cannot be the responsibility of government alone. It requires a partnership involving business, labour, civil society, communities and families. The private sector must play a greater role in creating employment opportunities, supporting entrepreneurship and investing in youth development initiatives. Community organisations, faith-based institutions and traditional leaders must continue to guide and mentor young people so that they become responsible and productive citizens.

Throughout this month, government departments, municipalities, the National Youth Development Agency and various stakeholders will implement a comprehensive programme of activities across all districts of our province. These programmes will create platforms for meaningful dialogue and youth participation, promote health and wellness, expand access to education, skills development and employment opportunities, strengthen entrepreneurship and business development, and foster social cohesion and nation-building.

Through these interventions, we seek to empower young people not merely as beneficiaries of development but as active partners in shaping the future of our province and our country.

Programme Director,

The spirit of 1976 was not only about resistance. It was also about values. It was about discipline, integrity, selflessness, patriotism and service to others. These are values that must continue to guide us today. As we honour the youth of 1976, we must reject corruption, criminality, substance abuse and all forms of violence. We must reject gender-based violence and femicide. We must build communities that are safe, caring and supportive of young people.

The greatest tribute we can pay to the martyrs of June 16 is to build the South Africa they envisioned — a country characterised by justice, equality, dignity and opportunity for all. We therefore call upon the youth of Limpopo to become active citizens and agents of positive change. Participate in community development initiatives. Volunteer your skills. Build businesses. Create jobs. Champion innovation. Defend the Constitution. Protect our democracy and contribute meaningfully to the development of our province.

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.

To the young people of Limpopo, we say: the future is not something that will happen to you; it is something that you must help create. The generation of 1976 confronted apartheid. Your generation must confront unemployment, poverty, inequality, crime, corruption and gender-based violence. They marched for freedom. You must march for opportunity, innovation, economic inclusion and social justice. They carried the hopes of their generation. You carry the hopes of generations yet unborn.

As we commemorate fifty years since the historic uprising, let us pledge that the sacrifices of the youth of 1976 will not be remembered only in speeches and ceremonies, but in the opportunities we create, the communities we build and the future we shape together. Freedom was never free, and its preservation demands active citizenship, responsible leadership and patriotic service from all of us.

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 Month 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.

Long live the spirit of June 16.

Long live the youth of South Africa.

I thank you.