

SPEECH BY PREMIER DR PHOPHI RAMATHUBA DURING THE OFFICIAL OPENING OF THE LIMPOPO PROVINCIAL HOUSE OF TRADITIONAL AND KHOI-SAN LEADERS AT MAPELA TRADITIONAL COUNCIL, MOGALAKWENA LOCAL MUNICIPALITY, WATERBERG DISTRICT

29 MAY 2026

Programme Director,
Members of the Executive Council,
Speaker of the Legislature, Dr Makoma Makurupetje,
Deputy Speaker of the Legislature, Ms Tebogo Mamorobela,
Executive Mayor of Waterberg District Municipality, Cllr Jack Maeko,
Mayor of Mogalakwena Local Municipality, Cllr Ngoako Taueatsoala,
Chairperson of the Limpopo House of Traditional and Khoi-San Leaders, Hosi Peni Ngove and Deputy Chairperson Kgoshi Rammupudu,
Members of the Executive of the House,
Director-General of Limpopo Provincial Government, Mr Nape Nchabeleng,
Traditional Leaders present,
Community Members,
Members of the Media,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

Se lotshile Mandrebele, Mandrebele mankwakwane, A hlonga nkgomo a hladla mondro,

Se ra lena bo dlou lendrebele, bandro b abo Moghobane nabo Gheghana,

Se ra lena Bokgosi Langa se re šate e bokgosing ne se mandonine o kge laba ba lebusa nabo.

Šate šate lo a ghare šate o duma thendro the bandro.

Šare šate mošhade.

Today, we gather in the majestic land of Mapela, a place where the mountains stand tall like guardians of history, where rivers carve pathways through generations of memory and where the soil beneath our feet carries both the struggles and triumphs of our forebears.

This is not merely a beautiful landscape nestled within the Waterberg District; it is a sacred space rich in culture, rich in identity and richly blessed with mineral wealth hidden beneath its ground, a powerful reminder that our traditional communities possess immense economic potential that must ultimately translate into dignity, prosperity and improved livelihoods for the people who have protected this land for generations.

As we officially open the Limpopo Provincial House of Traditional and Khoi-San Leaders, we do so fully conscious of the historic responsibility entrusted upon this institution by

the Constitution of the Republic of South Africa, which recognises the institution, status and role of traditional leadership according to customary law.

This constitutional recognition is not symbolic or ceremonial in nature but rather affirms the indispensable role that traditional leadership continues to play in preserving culture, promoting social cohesion, resolving disputes, safeguarding indigenous knowledge systems and advancing development within our communities.

Programme Director,

The House of Traditional and Khoi-San Leaders remains one of the most important pillars in strengthening participatory governance and ensuring that the voices of rural communities continue to find expression within our democratic dispensation. As government, we therefore remain unwavering in our commitment to support, strengthen and capacitate this institution so that it remains functional, relevant and responsive to the needs of our people.

It is for this reason that government has over the years intensified efforts aimed at providing meaningful support to traditional leaders through the provision of tools of trade, infrastructure development, administrative support and institutional strengthening initiatives designed to improve service delivery within traditional communities.

Programme Director,

The progress achieved thus far demonstrates government's seriousness in ensuring that traditional leadership institutions are adequately empowered to discharge their responsibilities effectively. During the past financial years, the Department embarked on an extensive programme to provide vehicles to qualifying Senior Traditional Leaders across Limpopo Province, resulting in the successful delivery of 162 vehicles, while the remaining allocations are currently being finalised.

Additional vehicles have also been procured for the Bapedi Kingship and Balobedu Queenship, further affirming government's recognition of the important role played by these institutions within our society.

In strengthening operational efficiency and communication, all Senior Traditional Leaders have been provided with contract cellphones inclusive of airtime and data, while the Province continues with the procurement of furniture and office equipment for traditional councils to ensure that communities receive services in functional, dignified and properly resourced environments.

The Chairperson and Deputy Chairperson of the House have equally been provided with official residences, office space, vehicles, support staff and communication resources because we fully appreciate that effective leadership can only flourish when institutions are properly supported and adequately capacitated.

These interventions are not acts of generosity, but practical expressions of government's commitment to building a capable and developmental institution of traditional leadership.

Programme Director,

The future of our traditional communities depends on our collective ability to transform rural areas into centres of economic activity, investment and sustainable development. Through Section 24 of the Traditional and Khoi-San Leadership Act, traditional councils are empowered to enter into development partnerships with municipalities, government departments, investors and civil society organisations in order to unlock economic opportunities that benefit local communities directly.

This legislative framework presents an important opportunity for us to reposition traditional communities as active participants within the mainstream economy by leveraging the vast agricultural, tourism, mining and cultural potential that exist within these areas.

Traditional communities should no longer remain on the periphery of development while wealth continues to leave their areas without changing the conditions of ordinary people. The time has come for partnerships that create jobs, improve infrastructure, stimulate local enterprises and restore dignity to rural communities through inclusive economic participation.

Government therefore calls upon municipalities, private investors and development agencies to work collaboratively with traditional leaders in ensuring that development initiatives are transparent, community-driven and aligned with the aspirations of local people.

Programme Director,

Our commitment to strengthening traditional institutions also finds expression through the construction and refurbishment of traditional council offices across the province. Since 2014, more than 25 traditional council offices have been constructed while 18 others have been refurbished, creating dignified working environments for traditional leaders and improving access to services for communities.

Several projects, including the Mapela Traditional Council offices, are at advanced stages of completion, while additional projects have already been approved as part of government's broader commitment to improve infrastructure within traditional communities.

At the same time, government is prioritising the filling of critical vacancies within traditional councils to strengthen governance, financial management and administrative functionality. A total of 199 vacancies have been identified and a phased recruitment strategy is being implemented to ensure that traditional councils possess the minimum operational capacity required to function effectively and responsibly.

Programme Director,

Our government remains equally committed to restoring stability, unity and certainty within the institution of traditional leadership through the recognition of traditional leaders and the resolution of long-standing disputes affecting communities across the province.

During the previous financial year alone, approximately 200 recognitions involving Senior Traditional Leaders, Headmen and Headwomen were processed, while the Investigative Committee appointed in terms of the Traditional and Khoi-San Leadership Act continues to address disputes and claims in a manner that promotes peace, fairness and stability within affected communities.

We remain encouraged by the progress already made in resolving several disputes and remain confident that ongoing processes will continue to bring certainty and lasting unity within affected traditional communities.

Programme Director,

As custodians of culture and guardians of communal values, traditional leaders provide moral guidance, mediate conflicts, protect heritage sites and serve as trusted leaders during times of social uncertainty and difficulty.

Government further recognises the critical role played by traditional leaders in promoting community safety, combating gender-based violence and femicide, supporting disaster management interventions and mobilising communities around developmental programmes aimed at improving livelihoods and strengthening social stability.

We also acknowledge the important contribution of traditional leaders towards agricultural development and food security. Through collaboration with government departments, traditional leaders continue to facilitate land access for youth and women farmers, support agricultural initiatives and encourage communities to participate meaningfully in farming and food production programmes.

This partnership becomes even more significant in light of the substantial investments government continues to make towards agricultural support and production development, aimed at transforming rural economies and creating sustainable livelihoods for our people.

Equally important is the role played by traditional leaders in protecting and preserving the sacred practice of initiation. The Provincial Initiation Coordinating Committee continues to work tirelessly to ensure that the 2026 winter initiation season is conducted safely, responsibly and in full compliance with the law.

As government, we remain resolute in our determination to eradicate illegal initiation schools and criminal activities that place the lives of initiates at risk. We call upon this

house and all stakeholders to work together in ensuring that this important cultural practice is protected with dignity, discipline and accountability, while ensuring zero deaths and zero abuse during initiation seasons.

All our MECs have concluded the processes of presenting their budgets votes which is aimed at operationalising our commitments made during our state of the province address. Members of the house are therefore urged to monitor implementation and raise challenges with the relevant MEC. By working together we can indeed do more to transform our communities

Programme Director, Hosi Ngove, and all esteemed traditional leaders present, allow me to reiterate that as the Seventh Administration of the ANC-led government, we remain committed to fixing our roads, one village at a time. Just yesterday, we were with our Dikgerekgere team on Road D3525 and D4380, the roads that connect two schools, a mine and a clinic to the villages at Mapela. These roads were closed due to floods that affected our province and now we are hard at work to make sure these roads are drivable and give access to our road users to connect with the communities.

Despite budget constraints, we will continue investing in road infrastructure to connect our communities and stimulate development. During the 2025/26 financial year, we committed to 21 road upgrade projects and 22 road rehabilitation projects across the province, and I am pleased to report that all 43 projects are currently underway at various stages of implementation. Furthermore, through the Department of Public Works, Roads and Infrastructure, we have initiated the process of upgrading an additional 17 roads this year.

We are currently busy establishing water war rooms in all our municipalities that are water authority, We have already registered progress both in Polokwane and Vhembe district. Yesterday we were here in Mogalakwena trying to resolve similar challenges. One village at a time until all our villages have clean running tap water

Programme Director,

As we approach the Local Government Elections scheduled for the 4th of November 2026, we once again call upon the House of Traditional and Khoi-San Leaders to continue playing its important role in promoting peaceful, free and fair elections throughout our province.

Government and the Electoral Commission continue to rely on the support of traditional leaders in areas such as conflict resolution, voter education and the provision of infrastructure for electoral activities, because the strength of our democracy depends on the unity, peace and cooperation that traditional leaders continue to foster within communities.

Programme Director,

As we officially open this House today, we do so with confidence in its leadership, confidence in its vision and confidence in its ability to advance the developmental aspirations of our people. We remain convinced that the institution of traditional leadership possesses enormous potential to drive social transformation, economic development and nation building within our province.

As government, we wish to assure the House of Traditional and Khoi-San Leaders that we remain fully committed to supporting this institution through meaningful partnerships, improved resources, strengthened governance systems and sustained collaboration aimed at improving the lives of our people.

We further wish the House well as it embarks on its yearly programme of action and we remain hopeful that the work undertaken during this term will continue to strengthen traditional governance, deepen social cohesion and unlock development opportunities that will change the lives of our rural communities for generations to come.

I thank you.