

SPEECH BY PREMIER DR PHOPHI RAMATHUBA DURING THE BI-ANNUAL NATIONAL RESERVES CHAPLAINS SYMPOSIUM AT FUSION BOUTIQUE, POLOKWANE MUNICIPALITY, CAPRICORN DISTRICT

21 July 2026

Programme Director,

The Right Reverend Bishop E Lekganyane,

On behalf of the Chief of the South African National Defence Force, General Rudzani Makhwanya and Major General Robet Skosana,

Chaplain General of the South African Defence Force, Brigadier General Thabo Masweu,

Chief of Staff of the Chaplain Service Division, Colonel Ninnie Mphahlele,

Senior Staff Officers Chaplains Service Division,

Chief Chaplains of Services and Divisions,

Chaplains,

Senior Officers

Rev Mautji Pataki

Sheik Hachimi

Religious Leaders,

Distinguished Guests,

Ladies and Gentlemen.

Ndi matsheleli, Thobela, Avuxeni, Good Morning, Goeie Môre.

Today, I bring you warmest greetings from the Provincial Government and people of Limpopo. There are few gatherings as inspiring as a gathering of men and women who have willingly committed themselves to stand between peace and chaos, between security and uncertainty and between the dreams of a nation and the forces that seek to undermine them. Today, we assemble among soldiers whose unwavering commitment ensures that our flag continues to fly proudly, our borders remain protected and our democracy is defended with honour. You are the silent sentinels who watch while the nation sleeps, ever ready to answer the call of duty whenever your country needs you.

Yet behind every courageous soldier stands another guardian whose battlefield is unseen. While soldiers defend the territorial integrity of our Republic, chaplains defend something equally precious, the human spirit. They mend hearts burdened by sacrifice, strengthen souls tested by adversity, restore hope where despair seeks to take root and remind every soldier that courage is not merely found in physical strength, but in faith, integrity and unwavering purpose. Today, we honour these commanders of the unseen, the custodians of moral strength and spiritual resilience within our Reserve Force.

Programme Director, it is indeed a profound honour to be part of this Bi-annual National Reserves Chaplains Symposium under the fitting and inspiring theme, "Commanders of Intangible Power." This theme, 'Commanders of Intangible Power,' reminds us that not all power is measured by rank, weaponry or military hardware. Some of the greatest power lies in the ability to restore hope to the weary, strengthen the broken-hearted, guide ethical decision-making and remind our soldiers why they serve. Chaplains command this invisible yet immeasurable power. They shape character, nurture resilience, strengthen faith and build the moral courage that enables our soldiers to fulfil their mission with honour and dignity. That is why you are rightly called the Commanders of Intangible Power.

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You are the custodians of that character. You remind our soldiers that true courage is rooted in conscience, true leadership in humility and true victory in preserving our humanity even in the face of conflict.

This symposium must continue to be a strategic platform where faith meets duty, where moral leadership strengthens military readiness and where those entrusted with nurturing the spiritual well-being of our soldiers come together to reflect, learn and renew their commitment.

Programme Director, our Reserve Force members occupy a unique and often under-appreciated place within our defence capability. Unlike permanent members of the Defence Force, many of you continue with your civilian professions while remaining ready to respond whenever the nation calls. You do not always know when that call will come, but when it does, you answer without hesitation. Your willingness to serve despite uncertainty speaks volumes about your patriotism, selflessness and commitment to the Republic of South Africa.

The same is true for our Reserve Force Chaplains. Your ministry is not confined to places of worship. You carry hope into military bases, training grounds, operational areas and moments of personal crisis. You become trusted counsellors to soldiers carrying emotional burdens that are often hidden behind disciplined faces and decorated uniforms. Your ministry reaches families waiting anxiously for loved ones deployed far from home. In many instances, your comforting words become the bridge between fear and hope.

Indeed, commander's direct military operations, but chaplains guide the conscience of those entrusted with carrying them out. You remind our soldiers that discipline must always be accompanied by compassion,

courage by humility, strength by wisdom and authority by humanity. In an increasingly complex security environment, your moral guidance has become one of the Defence Force's greatest strategic assets.

As the provincial government, we truly appreciate the remarkable contribution that the South African National Defence Force continues to make in building a safe, peaceful and resilient South Africa. A soldier who is emotionally supported, spiritually grounded and morally confident is far better equipped to perform under pressure than one who carries unseen burdens alone. The invisible strength that you cultivate within our service men and women ultimately becomes visible in their professionalism, discipline and unwavering commitment to constitutional values.

Here in Limpopo, we are privileged to enjoy an excellent working relationship with the South African National Defence Force. Together, we continue to demonstrate that collaboration between government and the Defence Force produces meaningful results for our communities. Through the Welisizwe Rural Bridges Programme, we have witnessed soldiers applying their engineering expertise to reconnect isolated communities by constructing bridges that restore dignity, improve access to essential services and stimulate economic activity. Beyond infrastructure development, the SANDF continues to play an indispensable role in safeguarding our borders and protecting the sovereignty of our country.

These partnerships remind us that the Defence Force is not only an institution of defence but also an institution of development, humanitarian support and nation-building. Behind these successful interventions stand soldiers whose morale and resilience have been strengthened by dedicated chaplains who continue to serve faithfully, often without public recognition.

As we confront new security challenges, social pressures and global uncertainties, your role will become even more significant. Society today yearns for moral regeneration, ethical leadership and compassionate service. These values cannot be legislated into existence; they must be nurtured through example. As chaplains, you are helping to cultivate a military culture rooted in integrity, accountability, respect for human dignity and service above self. In doing so, you contribute not only to the strength of our Defence Force but also to the moral fabric of our nation.

As you deliberate during this symposium, may your discussions produce practical strategies that will continue strengthening the spiritual care, psychological resilience and ethical leadership of our Reserve Force. May you continue inspiring one another, sharing best practices and equipping yourselves to meet the evolving needs of those who have dedicated their lives to serving South Africa.

Allow me to assure you that the Limpopo Provincial Government remains committed to deepening our partnership with the South African National Defence Force. Together, we will continue building safer communities, developing resilient infrastructure, protecting our borders and nurturing a society founded on peace, unity and shared responsibility.

To every Reserve Force Chaplain gathered here today, I say thank you. Thank you for carrying burdens that cannot be measured. Thank you for restoring hope where fear threatens to prevail. Thank you for reminding our soldiers that while uniforms may protect the body, faith strengthens the soul.

May this symposium renew your calling, strengthen your fellowship and inspire you to continue serving as true Commanders of Intangible Power.

I thank you.