



LIMPOPO
PROVINCIAL GOVERNMENT
REPUBLIC OF SOUTH AFRICA

**WOMEN'S DAY COMMEMORATION KEYNOTE ADDRESS BY THE
PREMIER OF LIMPOPO PROVINCE, DR PHOPHI RAMATHUBA**

On the Occasion of the 70th Anniversary of the 1956 Women's March – Ga-Monyeki, Lephalale Municipality, Waterberg District

09 August 2026

Programme Director,

Executive Mayor of Waterberg District Municipality, Cllr Jack Maeko,

Mayor of Lephalale Local Municipality, Cllr Thabitha Modise,

Speaker of the Limpopo Legislature, Dr Makoma Makhurupetje,

Members of the Executive Council

Deputy Minister of International Relations and Cooperation, Ms Thandi Moraka,

Deputy Speaker of the Limpopo Legislature, Ms Tebogo Mamorobela,

Members of the Limpopo Legislature

Other Mayors

Kgoshi Shongoane and all Traditional Leaders

Veterans of the Liberation Struggle

Religious Leaders

Commission on Gender Equality

Progressive Women's Movement

Leaders of Chapter Nine Institutions,
Leaders of Women's Organisations,
Distinguished Guests,
Fellow South Africans,
The resilient women of Limpopo,

Good morning, Thobela, Ndi Matsheloni, Avuxeni, Silotshile, Goeie More!

Today, as we gather to commemorate 70 years since the historic march of the women of 1956, I am reminded of the deep and powerful message carried in Stimela's "*Phinda Mzala (Whispers in the Deep)*". The song speaks of whispers from the deep. It speaks of a voice that refuses to stay buried. It speaks of pain, resistance and the courage to break silence.

Stimela's "*Phinda Mzala -Whispers in the Deep*" can be heard as a call to remember the voices, sacrifices and unfinished struggles of those who came before us. In the context of the 70th anniversary of the 1956 Women's March, the song resonates particularly strongly with the courage of South African women who stood against apartheid and declared that their voices could not be silenced.

"Whispers in the deep" gives the idea that the past continues to speak to the present: the memories of those women, their resistance, pain and determination remain beneath the surface of our national story. "Phinda mzala" is an invitation to reconnect with that spirit of resistance and solidarity.

For the 70-year commemoration, the song becomes more than nostalgia—it is a reminder that freedom was built through collective courage, and that each generation has a responsibility to carry that legacy forward.

Those whispers are not only from the deep. They are the voices of our mothers, grandmothers and sisters who marched to the Union Buildings on 09 August 1956. They are the voices of women who said, “enough is enough.” They are the voices of women who taught us that silence in the face of injustice is itself a form of surrender.

And so today, we hear those whispers clearly.

They say to us:

Do not accept inequality.

Do not accept abuse.

Do not accept exclusion.

Do not accept poverty as the destiny of women.

Do not accept violence as normal.

Do not accept a future where women are present in numbers, but absent in power.

That is why this year’s theme, “Empowered Women Empower Nations” is so important. It reminds us that when women rise, the nation rises. When women are safe, productive and in leadership, the country becomes stronger.

We honour the women of 1956 Lilian Ngoyi, Helen Joseph, Rahima Moosa, Sophia Williams-De Bruyn and the thousands who marched with them. They did not only fight against pass laws. They fought for dignity, equality and freedom. Their struggle was not only political. It was also a struggle for the right of women to live fully, speak boldly and shape their own future.

In Limpopo, we hear their footsteps in our own communities - in villages, townships, farms, schools and clinics. We hear them in the women who wake before sunrise to care for families, in the women who farm the land, in the women who build businesses, in the women who heal the sick, and in the women who lead in silence and strength.

It is indeed pleasing that from 1956 to 2026, we have made significant progress as a country and as a province. When we look carefully at the journey from 1994 to today, we can see the extent to which government has deliberately placed women at the forefront of governance, administration and development.

Today, we no longer have to count the “first female doctor” as a rare exception. We now count women doctors in numbers, because they are present in our public and private health systems in growing numbers, serving our people with distinction. Women have also entered the fields of science, engineering and technology in ways that were once unimaginable, because government opened opportunities and deliberately invested in programmes that support the advancement of women in these fields.

For example, the University of Limpopo's Medical School has graduated more than 225 doctors since its establishment ten years ago, and almost half of those graduates are women. Similarly, there has been a marked increase in women's representation in engineering, with more than 35% of graduates in this field across the country since 1994 being women, many of whom now serve in both public and private institutions.

Some may say we are ungrateful when we no longer celebrate the "first woman" in every field, but the truth is that this is itself a sign of progress. It means women are no longer rare exceptions. They are becoming part of daily life, daily leadership and daily excellence, thanks to the interventions of democratic government.

In Limpopo, this progress is visible in our own leadership structures. The Executive Council is now majority female, and representation of women in Senior Management Service has increased from less than 20% in 1994 to over 45% today. Our responsibility now is to push that representation beyond 50%, so that it reflects the demographic reality and talent of our province.

That is why the mentorship programme I will spearhead is so necessary. It is not only about training women for leadership; it is about building confidence, removing fear, and preparing a new generation of women leaders who can carry the province forward.

Our partnership with higher learning institutions must also be practical. I want the university I partner with to give me an opportunity to serve as a lecturer,

so that I can share real-life leadership experience with these women. They must not only learn theory; they must learn from lived experience.

These women must also grow into future mentors themselves — women who will one day guide others, including future Chiefs of Staff and senior executives. I want them to learn from the experience of the Premier: how challenges are managed, how pressure is handled, and how leadership is sustained with courage and integrity.

We must also create safe spaces for honest conversations. There should be closed sessions where women can be equipped to challenge harmful myths, including the myth of romantic scams and other forms of manipulation that exploit women's trust and hope. These sessions must help remove fear, build awareness and strengthen women's ability to protect themselves, their careers and their futures.

I was mentored by people who gave me hope, and I was willing to grow. That same spirit must be passed on to the women of Limpopo.

The song *Phinda Mzala* also calls us to break silence. And today, we must speak plainly: gender-based violence is a war against women, against families and against our democracy. It is a pandemic!

No woman should fear returning home.

No child should grow up in a house where violence is normal.

No community should protect abusers through silence.

No perpetrator should feel safe because victims are afraid to speak.

As government, we are strengthening prevention, reporting, response and support. We are working with SAPS, Social Development, health professionals, traditional leaders and community structures to ensure that women can report abuse and receive help faster. We are also strengthening victim support systems and response mechanisms across the province.

But we know this is not enough. We must continue to educate communities, empower survivors and hold perpetrators accountable.

The people of Limpopo, this government is not only speaking about empowerment - we are investing in it.

The Limpopo Department of Agriculture and Rural Development continues to place women at the centre of agricultural development. In the 2025/26 financial year, 10,101 women farmers benefited from support programmes. This included 542 women smallholder farmers, about 75% of all smallholder farmers supported, and 9,559 women subsistence farmers, about 90% of all subsistence farmers supported.

Women also made up nearly half of the jobs created through environmental rehabilitation programmes.

In the 2026/27 financial year, 5,418 women farmers have already been approved for support. These women will receive production inputs, mechanisation, infrastructure support, disaster relief and medicines.

We are helping women move from subsistence to smallholder farming and from smallholder to commercial farming. We want women in agriculture not only as producers, but also as agro-processors, packers, logisticians, marketers and exporters.

The Department is envisaging to provide production inputs in the current financial year to the following farmers here at Shongwane Village for Livestock production to: Mocheko Mmakwena Sara.

Tselane Rebecca Mmakwena and for broilers Makgae Mmakolobe Amasia, Mogotle Ninifa Regina and Shiko Calvary Manthubu. For Vegetable production, Moloto Tlou Evelyn, Selemela Moloko Esther, Manewa Maidi Josephine and Boya Makhanani Hellen. One project owned by 6 women called Phapamang has benefited last year.

These may appear to be small interventions, but the impact reaches far beyond the individual farmer.

Through COGHSTA, women are being supported to participate in construction, human settlements and infrastructure development. We are insisting that women-owned and women-led enterprises benefit from projects in housing, building and related value chains.

Women must not only live in the houses we build. They must also build them. Women must not only benefit from development. They must help deliver it.

We are deeply concerned by the rising mortality rate during birth and complications linked to late diagnosis and surgical injuries. In response, the Department of Health has mobilised 100 doctors and nurses for a week-long Women's Month training programme from 24 to 30 August 2026. This training will equip them to identify high-risk pregnancies early, read ultrasound better, respond to critical maternal cases, and reduce preventable deaths.

We are also pursuing advanced technology, including the possible acquisition of a Da Vinci robot, to improve care in urology and gynaecology.

In addition, we have strengthened online direct referral systems, so that patients do not have to move from one clinic to another or wait in long queues when they need urgent help. They can simply apply online and reduce the expenditure of travelling

We are investing in women's participation in tourism, agro-tourism and rural enterprise so that women can benefit from Limpopo's natural and cultural heritage. Women must be part of the visitor economy, the creative economy and the local supply chain.

We are also investing in women's education and leadership. We know that a woman with knowledge is a force of transformation.

That is why the province is introducing a Women Deputy Directors Leadership Development Programme, targeting 50 women Deputy Directors across departments. Each department will nominate five eligible officials.

This programme will build a pipeline of women leaders who are ready for senior management and executive responsibilities.

We want women not only to participate in leadership, but to shape it.

Programme Director, we must be honest. We have made progress, but we are not yet where we need to be. Women remain underrepresented in Senior Management Service positions. Half of provincial departments are still failing to meet performance targets. Too many women still face unemployment, poverty and unsafe conditions. Too many rural women still struggle to access finance, markets, infrastructure and opportunity.

Some of the notable progress we are making in empowerment of women is in the procurement of goods and services. In the first quarter spend of R3,8 billion 40% (over R1 billion) was spent on women owned companies. This is a significant leap that we should continue to cherish.

So yes, we have done much since 1994. But no, we are not satisfied.

We must go further. We must do better. We must move faster.

Through the Sustainable Livelihood Fund and youth enterprise partnerships, we are prioritising women, youth and persons with disabilities in agriculture, tourism, digital industries, infrastructure repairs and the green economy.

This is how we convert policy into opportunity.

To the young women of Limpopo, I say: do not let silence define your future.

If you are from Ga-Masemola, Giyani, Musina, Marble Hall, Jane Furse or Lephalale, your dreams are valid.

Pursue education.

Build businesses.

Lead with courage.

Learn skills.

Enter professions where women were once excluded.

Become doctors, engineers, farmers, scientists, principals, entrepreneurs and public servants.

The future does not belong to those who wait. It belongs to those who rise.

The whispers in the deep are becoming louder.

They are telling us that women must not only be remembered. They must be empowered.

They are telling us that silence must be broken.

They are telling us that health systems must heal, economies must include, schools must prepare and communities must protect.

They are telling us that the struggle of 1956 did not end at the Union Buildings - it continues in every clinic, every classroom, every farm, every construction site and every home.

Let us honour the women of 1956 not only with words, but with action. On 05 August 2026 we launched the Women Month Programme of activities showing over 70 events that require your full participation from all districts and municipalities. Visit our pages to see where each of those support programmes will be held.

Let us build a Limpopo where women are safe.

A Limpopo where women lead.

A Limpopo where women own.

A Limpopo where women produce.

A Limpopo where women are heard.

“We are all tributaries of great river of pain...flowing into one ocean...spill over the wonders of love into one nation of love.”

Wathint' Abafazi, Wathint' Imbokodo!

Basadi ba Limpopo ke Imbokodo!

I thank you.