

SPEECH BY THE PREMIER OF LIMPOPO, DR PHOPHI RAMATHUBA,
DURING THE TEENAGE PREGNANCY, SUBSTANCE ABUSE AND ANTI-
BULLYING CAMPAIGN AT RALUSWIELO SECONDARY SCHOOL,
VHEMBE EAST CIRCUIT, THULAMELA LOCAL MUNICIPALITY, VHEMBE
DISTRICT

14 August 2026

Programme Director,

MEC for Education, Ms Mavhungu Lerule-Ramakhanya,
Executive Mayor of Vhembe District Municipality, Cllr Miyelani Chauke,
Mayor of Thulamela Local Municipality, Cllr Sara Rammbuda,
Mayor of Makhado Local Municipality, Cllr Dorcus Mmboyi,
Mayor of Collins Chabane Local Municipality, Cllr Shadrack Maluleke,
Thovhela Gole Mphaphuli and all Traditional Leaders,
SAPS Limpopo Provincial Commissioner, Major General Jan Petrus
Scheepers,
School Governing Bodies, Principals, Educators,
Parents and Community Leaders,
Our beloved learners,
Distinguished Guests,
Members of the Media,
Ladies and Gentlemen

Ndi matsheloni, Avuxeni, Thobela, Good morning, Goeie Môre,

Today, we gather at Raluswielo Secondary School in the heart of the Vhembe East Circuit, a circuit that occupies a distinguished place in the history of education in Limpopo. This is a circuit renowned for producing generations of outstanding learners, dedicated professionals and leaders who continue to shape our province and our country. It is a circuit whose name has become synonymous with academic excellence, discipline and resilience.

When South Africans speak about educational excellence, they speak about Mbilwi Secondary School, one of the highest-performing schools in the country, consistently producing exceptional matric results and some of South Africa's brightest learners.

They speak about Mphaphuli Secondary School, the alma mater of our President, His Excellency Cyril Ramaphosa. They speak about Raluswielo, Phaswana and Nthetsheseleni, schools that have, over many years, remained at the forefront of academic achievement. These schools have built a proud legacy that every learner should protect. We cannot allow that legacy to be overshadowed by social ills that threaten the future of our children.

Programme Director,

During the recent IEC online voter registration weekend in July, when I was working in the Vhembe District, I interacted with many of our people, including parents, educators and community members, I became deeply concerned by reports of teenage pregnancy, substance abuse, bullying and gangsterism involving learners. Those concerns have since been confirmed by reports from this circuit and what they reveal should disturb every one of us.

The report before us paints a painful picture. Across just five schools—Mbilwi, Mphaphuli, Nthetsheseleni, Phaswana and Raluswielo—60 learners have been identified as abusing substances, 81 learners have been reported as victims of bullying, 26 learners are pregnant, and 22 learners have been linked to gangsterism. These are only the reported cases. We do not know how many more children are suffering in silence, too afraid to speak out or too ashamed to ask for help.

These statistics are not just numbers. They are the shattered dreams of our children. They represent classrooms interrupted, families in distress and communities under siege. Every learner who falls victim to drugs, bullying or exploitation is one learner too many.

Let me say: substance abuse is the mother of many of these social ills. It begins with what appears to be an innocent experiment—a puff of dagga, a bottle of alcohol, crystal meth, a space muffin or the inhaling of dangerous substances, but it quickly opens the door to violence, gangsterism, bullying, criminal behaviour, poor academic performance and teenage pregnancy. Once drugs take control of a young person's life, every dream they once had begins to fade.

Reports point to Thohoyandou, Sibasa and neighbouring communities, where drugs have become far too accessible. Drug dealers continue to operate in our communities because too many people know who they are but remain silent. We call upon Law enforcement agencies to intensify operations, raid known drug dens and ensure that those poisoning our children face the full might of the law.

We are equally disturbed by reports of gangsterism in our schools. We have heard the names of groups such as Gidis, Miluwani, Italian Boys, Bakani na Zwezwo, which are recruiting learners into violence, intimidation and criminal

activity. Our learners should know that schools are places of learning, not recruitment centres for gangs. Those who recruit children into criminal groups are stealing our future and government will work closely with law enforcement agencies to ensure they are arrested and prosecuted.

Programme Director,

This is not a battle that government can win alone. It requires a united society. Parents must reclaim their responsibility as the first teachers of their children. Educators must continue to identify early warning signs and intervene without fear. Traditional leaders, faith-based organisations, School Governing Bodies and community organisations must work together to rebuild the moral fibre of our communities.

To our learners, I want you to know that your future is worth fighting for. Do not allow anyone to convince you that drugs are fashionable, that bullying makes you powerful, that gangsterism earns respect or that early pregnancy is a shortcut to adulthood. Real success is built through discipline, education, hard work and good choices.

Remember that your parents, your teachers, your community and your government believe in your potential. We see your talent, we believe in your dreams and we are committed to creating opportunities for you to succeed. Never be afraid to seek help, because asking for help is a sign of courage, not weakness.

Programme Director,

Let this campaign become a movement that reaches every classroom, every household and every village in Limpopo. Let every learner become an ambassador against drugs, against bullying, against gangsterism and against teenage pregnancy.

Together, let us protect the proud legacy of the Vhembe East Circuit.

Together, let us restore hope.

Together, let us defend the future of our children.

Let history remember this day as the day we stood together and declared:

Hands off our children.

Hands off their dreams.

Hands off their future.

Ndi a livhuwa.