

ADDRESS BY THE PREMIER OF LIMPOPO, DR PHOPHI RAMATHUBA, DURING THE  
DIALOGUE WITH TRADITIONAL LEADERS

Park Hotel, Mokopane – 23 September 2026

Chairperson of the Limpopo Provincial House of Traditional and Khoi-San Leaders, Hosi Ngove

Members of the Provincial and Local Houses,

Your Majesties, Kings and Queens,

Senior Traditional Leaders,

Headmen and Headwomen,

Members of the Executive Council,

Executive Mayors and Mayors,

MEC for Cooperative Governance, Human Settlements and Traditional Affairs,

Senior government officials,

Distinguished guests,

Ladies and gentlemen,

Good morning, Avuxeni, Ndi Matsheloni, Silotshile!

This dialogue provides us with an opportunity to reflect honestly on the progress we have made since our last engagement, to account for the resolutions we adopted, and to identify those matters that require renewed attention and collective action.

Our institution of traditional leadership remains an important pillar of governance in Limpopo.

As government, we remain committed to working respectfully and constructively with traditional leaders. We understand that support for the institution of traditional leadership is not a favour. It is part of our constitutional and legislative responsibility and it is essential to the effective governance and development of our province.

Let me begin by reporting on anthropological work and the recognition of traditional leaders. Although the Provincial Committee on Traditional Leadership Disputes, commonly known as the Kgatla Committee, concluded its work, the Provincial Government continues to receive applications for the recognition of new traditional communities and leaders.

Each application is investigated and processed in accordance with the law. We are also continuing to fill vacancies caused by natural attrition and to review acting arrangements. During the 2025/26 financial year, 266 recognitions were processed, most of them at the level of headmen and headwomen. In the current financial year, 139 recognitions have already been processed from the first quarter to date.

The fast-tracking of recognitions, especially replacements, remains a priority. We recognise that prolonged vacancies and acting arrangements can create uncertainty and become a source of disputes within communities.

We are also working with the national Department of Traditional Affairs to document the customary laws of succession and genealogies of royal families. Fifteen royal families were documented during the previous financial year and ten have been identified for documentation during 2026/27.

We understand the concerns raised by some senior traditional leaders regarding this process. However, documentation is not intended to undermine the authority of royal families. It is intended to preserve customary knowledge, protect historical records and assist in resolving succession disputes before they escalate. Ultimately, all royal families must be documented and those whose laws and genealogies have been finalised will sign off the records for future reference.

On the disestablishment of community authorities, progress is being made. Sixteen community authorities remain outstanding. These are structures inherited from the apartheid era and must be transformed in accordance with our democratic constitutional order.

Following approval granted by the Minister in February 2026, an action plan has been developed to complete the process by March 2027. Data analysis has been completed for all 16 authorities, and consultations commenced on 27 August. The Tiyani, Vuyani and Makotopong Community Authorities have already been consulted. These consultations will be followed by inspections in loco and the finalisation of reports for consideration and approval by the Executive Council.

This process must be handled with sensitivity, fairness and respect for communities. It is not about erasing history, but about ensuring that our governance structures reflect democracy, accountability and the legitimate authority of recognised traditional institutions.

The Limpopo Provincial House of Traditional and Khoi-San Leaders continues to operate as an important platform for advice and engagement. Established in July 2022, the House has 36 seats and its current term will conclude in April 2027. The Provincial Government continues to provide accommodation, vehicles and secretariat support to the leadership of the House.

We presided over the official opening of the House for 2026 at Mapela Traditional Council on 29 May. We are also preparing for the opening of the Mopani Local House on 02 October 2026 at Shiviti Traditional Community. These occasions are important because they reaffirm the relationship between democratic government and traditional leadership.

On financial support, the Provincial Government continues to provide assistance within available resources. This includes salary subsidies for 109 traditional council staff, support for the inauguration of senior traditional leaders and funeral support for acting and senior traditional leaders.

Following the Constitutional Court judgment affecting section 25 of the Limpopo Traditional Leadership and Institutions Act, the Province intervened to support traditional councils with operational grants. An allocation of R20.3 million was made for 203 traditional councils. Approximately R18 million was paid on 31 July 2026, with outstanding payments affected by banking challenges, court orders and royal family disputes. These matters must be resolved so that all eligible councils can receive their support.

Sitting allowances are also being processed. Claims have been received and verified and payments to traditional councils are expected by the end of September 2026.

We are aware that some traditional councils still operate without adequate staff. A submission will be made to Treasury during the mid-year adjustment process to fund priority vacancies. At the same time, we are participating in the national process to develop generic organisational structures for traditional councils.

Progress has also been made in the constitution and reconstitution of traditional councils. Of the 168 recognised traditional communities with senior traditional leaders, 141 councils could be constituted in line with the applicable legislation.

The remaining councils face various challenges, including court cases, succession disputes and incomplete submissions. Our target is to finalise the outstanding processes by 31 March 2027.

The 2026 initiation season also requires reflection. Of the 957 applications received, 771 were approved and published in the Government Gazette. A total of 48 877 initiates attended legal initiation schools, while 960 attended illegal schools. Sadly, three deaths were recorded. This is unacceptable.

We must intensify our cooperation to ensure that initiation schools operate legally, safely and with full respect for the law, culture and the dignity of initiates. No custom can justify negligence, abuse or the loss of life.

Regarding traditional leadership disputes, 33 senior traditional leadership disputes remain under consideration, while other matters involve headmen, headwomen and kingship or queenship claims. Thirteen cases are currently before the Investigative Committee, most of which are nearing completion. The cooperation of traditional leaders and the timely designation of House members have contributed positively to this process.

Despite the challenges, Limpopo continues to make meaningful progress. But we must do more. The Draft Provincial Spatial Planning and Land Use Management Bill provides an opportunity to strengthen the role of traditional leaders in land-use management. We must work together to ensure that this important legislative process is concluded.

Let us continue to govern through dialogue, resolve disputes through lawful processes, support our traditional councils and protect the dignity of our communities.

The strength of Limpopo lies in the partnership between democratic institutions and traditional leadership. With unity, honesty and mutual respect, we can build a province where customary authority and constitutional democracy work together in the service of our people.

I thank you.