



LIMPOPO
PROVINCIAL GOVERNMENT
REPUBLIC OF SOUTH AFRICA

**ADDRESS BY THE PREMIER OF LIMPOPO, DR PHOPHI RAMATHUBA,
AT THE BLACK LAWYERS ASSOCIATION LIMPOPO GALA DINNER****

BOLIVIA LODGE, POLOKWANE

09 OCTOBER 2026

Programme Director,
President and Leadership of the Black Lawyers Association,
Honourable Judges, Magistrates and Legal Practitioners present,
Distinguished guests, comrades in the pursuit of justice,

Good evening.

It is an absolute honour to stand before this esteemed gathering of legal minds at the Black Lawyers Association Limpopo Gala Dinner. We gather under a powerful and urgent theme: “Transforming Justice: Building an inclusive and accessible legal system for all.”

When we speak of transforming justice, we are not speaking merely of courtroom procedures or legal technicalities. We are talking about the

fundamental promise of our Constitution: equality before the law, human dignity and the redress of historical injustice.

As the Limpopo Provincial Government, our commitment to a fair and inclusive justice system is unwavering. It is a system that must bring tangible redress to our most vulnerable - women, children, the youth and persons with disabilities. But to achieve this, we must look honestly at the state of our legal profession, the conduct of our courts and the relationship between the legal fraternity and the state.

The Professional Journey: Dignity, Exploitation, and the Next Generation

We celebrate the undeniable growth of black lawyers carving out space in a profession that was historically closed to them. Yet, a bigger battle remains to be won. How do modern black lawyers advance the aspirations of restoring the dignity of black people, which was so systematically eroded by apartheid and colonialism?

We cannot separate the transformation of the legal system from the transformation of the profession's internal practices. Frankly, we must ask a hard question: Are we seeing the rise of black lawyers translate into the upliftment of black children?

Look at how candidate attorneys and trainee attorneys are treated and compensated when they take their first steps toward becoming full attorneys. Is it fair that young graduates endure profound financial hardship and exploitation just because "we went through it too"? Shall we perpetuate a

cycle of hazing and suffering under the guise of paying dues? We must find a balance. A profession built on justice cannot tolerate injustice within its own training grounds. We must mentor, uplift and adequately compensate the next generation.

Government and Litigation: Is This the Path We Choose?

As government, we have often been on the receiving end of your sharp, newly acquired legal acumen. Departments like Health, Public Works, and Local Government frequently find themselves in the crosshairs of intense litigation.

Some law firms and businesses stand tall today not by competing against equally tough corporate opponents, but because they have made government litigation their primary business model. This has become a clear pattern.

We must ask ourselves: Is this the path that legal gurus want to see grow? When the state - which exists to serve the poor - is bled through endless litigation, it is service delivery that suffers. This is a point to ponder and I know raising it without subjecting it to a debate is something that some of you would not be too pleased with, but we hope there will be more avenues where we shall engage and expand this thought further.

We have been asked whether our administration has a deliberate and concrete plan to empower young legal practitioners and women in particular?

Yes. Transformation cannot be left to chance. Our administration is deliberately creating opportunities for women and young practitioners through preferential procurement and targeted legal assignments, ensuring they are not spectators in the economic mainstream of the legal sector.

We agree that the State Attorney's office is heavily pressured. To broaden access and empower practitioners, we are actively looking at establishing well-structured provincial and departmental legal panels. This will decentralise legal work, support emerging black and women-owned law firms and bring accessible legal services closer to our communities.

Can the state be deliberate in ensuring that private businesses benefiting from government contracts empower young professionals and women?

Absolutely. It should be - and must be - mandatory. Any private enterprise entrusted with lucrative work by organs of state in Limpopo must demonstrate a concrete commitment to skills transfer, sub-contracting and working with young professionals and women-owned firms within our jurisdiction.

Another matter that has been raised is whether the province will engage lawyers to train traditional leaders on resolving traditional leadership disputes in alignment with government policies and legislation?

Traditional leadership disputes remain a significant challenge, in fact there are over 600 legal cases that are related to traditional leadership disputes. It is our desire that we see a different approach to resolving traditional

leadership because we think that the solution lies deep with its traditional composition rather than a courtroom where a party that has stronger financial muscles tend to win as opposed to traditional heir.

Of course, we welcome the idea of partnering with legal experts - particularly through bodies like the BLA - to develop training manuals and lecture series. We have so far subjected all districts to training of traditional leaders on various matters, including land use and management as we have noted the indiscriminate allocation of sites for various purposes, sometimes ignoring land use prescripts. The training has gone well, but it stands to be seen how far these traditional leaders would go in putting such knowledge into practice.

We must capacitate our traditional councils to resolve disputes peacefully, transparently and in strict compliance with the traditional practices.

Lastly, it is said that when tender requirements demand a pre-existing track record with government, we inadvertently lock out brilliant, capable young and emerging practitioners. The measures are not meant to exclude growth amongst black youth. Equally, loosening them should not expose government to danger of half-baked legal representatives for expediency.

Where we feel there is need to change, we shall review and dismantle these exclusionary barriers to ensure that capability and competence - not historical access to state contracts - determine who serves the government.

Conclusion

Programme Director, the scales of justice must balance. Let us build a legal system that protects the vulnerable, uplifts the young, respects traditional governance and partners with the state to uplift our people rather than tear them down. Let justice help us curb the scourge of gender-based violence and killings that have engulfed our country.

The Office of the Premier's door is open. Let us work together to transform justice in Limpopo.

I thank you.