

SPEAKING NOTES: 2026 HERITAGE DAY CELEBRATION

Programme Director MEC Mabuza,

The Hosting Executive Mayor Nkosikazi Nomsa Mtsweni,

Representatives of the House of Traditional Leaders led by Kgoshi EP Chaane

Members of the Executive Council,

All Public Representatives in our midst

Representatives of the broader civil society

Bahlali base Dr JS Moroka and others from across the Province

1. Ladies and Gentlemen
2. Opening and significance of Heritage Day. On behalf of the Premier of Mpumalanga Mr Mandla Ndlovu, Siyanibingelela nonke. SANIBONANI! LOTJHANI ! AS the province of Mpumalanga we join millions of other South Africans in celebrating Heritage Day and to reflect on the richness and diversity of our country's living heritage.
3. Heritage Day is not merely about looking into the past; it is about understanding who we are, what binds us together and what kind of society we want to build for future generations.
4. This year's theme
5. The 2026 Heritage Month and Heritage Day celebrations are held under the theme: "Celebrating Our Living Heritage: Strengthening the Ties That Bind Us."
6. The theme reminds us that heritage is alive. It is expressed through our languages, music, dance, customs, stories, food, indigenous knowledge, craftsmanship and the values we pass from one generation to another.
7. Our diversity should never be a source of division rather, It should be one of our greatest strengths.
8. Living heritage provides opportunities for South Africans from different backgrounds to understand one another, appreciate our differences and discover what we share.
9. At the centre of our heritage is the African philosophy of Ubuntu – I am because we are.
10. Ubuntu calls upon us to respect one another, care for one another and recognise our common humanity. It is precisely these values that can strengthen social cohesion in our communities.

11. Heritage must liberate, not limit. Heritage must be a means through which people discover their dignity, identity and place in society.
12. We must preserve heritage in ways that empower people rather than use culture to exclude, discriminate or divide.
13. There is no place for GBVF in our heritage. As we celebrate our heritage, we must be clear that gender-based violence and femicide cannot be justified in the name of culture or tradition.
14. Our heritage must be used to promote dignity, respect, compassion and the protection of women and children.
15. For many communities, heritage provides an opportunity to reclaim histories, languages, traditions and knowledge that were marginalised or suppressed.
16. By teaching younger generations about their history, we strengthen their sense of identity and confidence in their own abilities.
17. Our indigenous knowledge systems contain valuable knowledge about agriculture, medicine, environmental conservation, craftsmanship, food, storytelling and community life.
18. We must ensure that this knowledge is documented, protected, transferred to younger generations and, where appropriate, contributes to sustainable livelihoods.
19. Human emancipation is also about restoring dignity. When communities see their languages, traditions, heroes, artists and histories respected, they see themselves as important contributors to the story of South Africa.
20. Our heritage institutions must therefore remain accessible and relevant to ordinary people. Heritage is not only about culture; it is also an economic resource. Our heritage sites, cultural festivals, traditional practices, arts and crafts can attract visitors and create economic opportunities.
21. This connects directly with the broader objective of growing tourism and encouraging South Africans to explore their own country. Mpumalanga is blessed with a rich combination of cultural, historical and natural heritage.

22. From our royal and traditional institutions to our museums, heritage sites, arts, crafts, music, dance and cultural festivals, we have many stories that can be transformed into meaningful tourism experiences.
23. Heritage tourism must not only bring visitors into communities; it must create opportunities for the communities themselves. Local artists, crafters, performers, tour guides, accommodation providers, food producers and young entrepreneurs must be able to participate in and benefit from the heritage economy.
24. Music and song are among the most powerful ways through which communities preserve memory. Through songs, our people have preserved stories of love, hardship, migration, struggle, celebration, spirituality and hope.
25. A traditional song sung by grandparents can become a source of identity for grandchildren. We must therefore create platforms where young people can learn from traditional musicians while also giving them opportunities to reinterpret heritage through contemporary music.
26. Music has the unique ability to bring people together despite differences in language, age, background or geography.
27. South Africa's history demonstrates how indigenous music and cultural expression contributed to community mobilisation and social solidarity. Many of our traditional communities placed strong emphasis on respect for women, elders, children and the broader community.
28. We must reclaim those positive values and reject harmful practices and attitudes that undermine human dignity. Previous national Heritage Day messaging has similarly emphasised that cultural heritage cannot be used to justify violence against women.
29. Men and boys must be part of the solution. The fight against GBVF cannot be left to women alone. Men and boys must actively participate in creating communities where women and girls are safe and respected.

30. We must teach our young people that strength is not demonstrated through violence, control or intimidation, but through responsibility, respect and protection of others.
31. Young people are custodians of tomorrow's heritage. If we want our heritage to survive, we must make young people active participants rather than passive observers.
32. We must encourage young people to learn indigenous languages, music, dance, oral history, crafts and traditional knowledge while using modern technology to preserve and share them.
33. Heritage must evolve with society. Living heritage is not frozen in time. It evolves as communities evolve. Our responsibility is to preserve the values, knowledge and cultural expressions that define us while allowing new generations to contribute their own creativity and interpretation. This people-centred and dynamic understanding of living heritage is central to the 2026 theme.
34. As we celebrate today, let us remember that our heritage is a bridge between our past, our present and our future. Let us use heritage to unite rather than divide, empower rather than exclude, create opportunities rather than poverty, and promote respect rather than violence.
35. Let us celebrate the languages we speak, the songs we sing, the stories we tell, the traditions we practise and the communities that keep our heritage alive.