



SPEAKING NOTES BY THE EXECUTIVE CHAIRPERSON OF THE NYDA, DR.SUNSHINE MYENDE OF THE OCCASION OF UN LGBTQI CORE GROUP HIGH LEVEL EVENT

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Programme Director

Dignitaries

All Protocol Observed

I am Dr. Sunshine Myende, the Executive Chairperson of the National Youth Development Agency (NYDA) which is a statutory body of the South African government. It was established to address the needs and aspirations of young people. Our work focuses on three key pillars: supporting youth entrepreneurship and access to finance, providing skills development and training opportunities, and driving policy advocacy to ensure that young people's voices shape the future of our nation.

For the first time in the history of this Agency, we proudly have an openly LGBTIQ+ board member a moment that demonstrates our resolve to ensure inclusivity in leadership and decision-making. As we approach October, South Africa's Pride Month, the NYDA will be present at Pride programmes across the country and will go further by providing financial support to LGBTIQ+ businesses, because economic empowerment is central to dignity. Importantly, our vision of inclusivity extends to rural and peri-urban areas, where many queer youth face the greatest challenges. We want to ensure that every young person, regardless of location or identity, feels seen, heard, and supported.

I know I speak for a majority of the youth in South Africa when I state that the UN LGBTQI Core Group cannot be overstated. South Africa is often celebrated as the first African country to constitutionally prohibit discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation, and one of the earliest to legalise same-sex marriage. Yet, our lived reality tells a more complex story: young



LGBTQI people still face marginalisation, violence, and exclusion in schools, communities, and workplaces.

From this context, the UN LGBTQI Core Group is important because it creates a global political and diplomatic platform where our struggles, voices, and hopes are not isolated but connected to a broader movement for dignity and equality. It signifies that LGBTQI rights are not “special rights,” but human rights that must be protected and advanced at the highest international level.

South Africa stands proud as a nation that has enshrined the rights and dignity of all its people in the Constitution, including the LGBTIQ+ community. We were the 5th country in the world to outlaw discrimination based on sexual orientation in our founding law, and the first in Africa to legalise same-sex marriage. These weren't simply symbolic strides but they reflected a deliberate commitment to building a society rooted in equality, dignity, and freedom for all.

However, while South Africa has made significant progress, we recognise that this progress remains uneven across our African continent. Too many of our siblings in Africa still face violence, criminalisation, and deep exclusion simply because of who they are or whom they love. These realities contradict the values of the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights and stifle the potential of countless young people who deserve to live and thrive openly.

Young people face layered discrimination whether in schools, workplaces, or families. For LGBTIQ+ youth, the dream of safety and belonging is often disrupted by bullying, harassment, or even homelessness.

Despite South Africa's progressive position of the LGBTQI, they still face alarming levels of abuse and exclusion. For instance, schools remain unsafe spaces: more than half of LGBTQI youth (56%) report discrimination at school. In some provinces, this rises as high as 79%.

In eThekweni, during the COVID-19 period, 14.6% of LGBTQI youth faced physical violence in relationships. Non-conforming youth reported even higher rates— with 1 in 4 having experienced abuse. And about 65% of LGBTQI people in South Africa report experiencing violence at some point in their lives, with nearly half reporting to have experienced sexual violence.



It is saddening to know that these numbers show that school is a major locus of discrimination and violence for LGBTQI youth—verbal abuse, threats, sometimes even sexual abuse are disturbingly common.

But youth are also leading the way in reshaping narratives, creating safe spaces, and building bridges of solidarity. Their courage gives us hope and demands our support at every level of society.

As South Africa, we stand ready to work with all African nations, civil society, and the United Nations to advance an inclusive future. We call on our peers across the African continent to repeal discriminatory laws, to confront prejudice, and to ensure that no young person is left behind. The fight for equality is not the struggle of a few it is the responsibility of us all. Together, we can ensure that Africa's future is one of dignity, justice, and love for every person.

At the same time, the United Nations must go beyond convening and conversation. It must strengthen mechanisms to hold member states accountable when they fail to protect the rights of LGBTIQ+ persons. The UN cannot remain silent in the face of criminalisation and violence. True multilateralism requires that we measure progress not only in declarations but in the lived experiences of queer youth worldwide. Accountability is the cornerstone of credibility. Let us remember, true freedom is not achieved when rights exist only on paper, but when every LGBTQI youth can live without fear, without silence, and without shame.

Thank you