



**SPEAKING NOTES FOR EXECUTIVE CHAIRPERSON
DR SUNSHINE MYENDE**

**COMMUNITY ANTI-GANGSTERISM AND SCHOOL
SAFETY JAMBOREE – ATLEHANG SECONDARY
SCHOOL, BLOEMFONTEIN**

17 APRIL 2026

**SPEAKING NOTES BY THE EXECUTIVE CHAIRPERSON OF THE NYDA ON THE
OCCASION OF THE COMMUNITY ANT-GANGSTERISM AND SCHOOL SAFETY
JAMBOREE – *Message of support | ± 6-10 minutes***

17 April 2026

Programme Director,
School leadership,
Teachers,
Our partners,
And most importantly, the young people of Atlehang Secondary School,

Good morning. AYEYE

I want to begin by saying this - I am not here to speak at you, I am here to speak with you. Because what brings us together today is not something distant or theoretical. It is something real. It is something many of you see in your streets, hear in your communities, and in some cases, experience in your own lives.

We are here because of the reality of gangsterism, violence, and the growing feeling of insecurity in spaces that are meant to protect you - spaces like this school.

And the first thing we must do is be honest about that. Because if we are not honest, we cannot change anything. But as we confront this reality, we must also remember who we are as a country, and what young people before you have already done.

In 1976, young people not much older than you made a decision that changed the course of this country. They stood up against a system that told them they did not matter. They stood up not because it was easy, not because it was safe, but because they understood something powerful - that their future was worth fighting for.

They wanted a seat at the table. But more than that, they wanted to define the table itself, to shape the rules, the direction, and the future of this country.

Now here is the difficult question we must all sit with today. If we say we want a seat at the table, if we say we want to be part of decisions that affect young people, if we say we want to shape the future, then what kind of lives are we living right now? Because the truth is, and I will say it as plainly as I can - you cannot build the future while you are destroying your present.

You cannot define table manners when you are not even in the room. And you cannot Bluetooth your way into that table. You cannot be disconnected from purpose, from discipline, from direction, and still expect to lead. It takes a certain kind of



individual to make it to the table. It takes discipline when no one is watching. It takes strength to say no when everyone around you is saying yes. It takes clarity to decide that your future is more important than the pressure of the moment.

And I know that is not easy. Because for many young people, gangsterism does not come looking like danger in the beginning. It comes looking like belonging. It comes looking like protection. It comes looking like identity in a world that sometimes makes you feel unseen. But we must tell the truth here - gangsterism does not give you power. It borrows your future, and it never gives it back.

There are no success stories in crime. No one builds a meaningful life through violence. No one creates a future through destruction. There are only consequences. Sometimes it is a correctional facility cell. Sometimes it is a grave. And sometimes it is a life where you are free, but everything that could have been is gone. And that is the harsh reality we cannot run away from.

There is a saying in South Africa that many of us know: a nation that fails its youth has no future. But today I want to bring it closer to you. A young person who gives up on their own future, a young person who allows themselves to be pulled into things that destroy them, also limits what this country can become. Because you are not just individuals sitting here today. You are the future of this country. And that future cannot be built in fear. It cannot be built in crime. It cannot be built in spaces where young people feel safer in gangs than they do in classrooms.

This school must be a place of safety. A place where you are able to focus, to grow, to dream, and to build something meaningful. But that responsibility does not sit with one person. It sits with all of us. It sits with the school. It sits with the community. It sits with government and partners. And it sits with you.

Because every single decision you make matters. Every decision is either taking you closer to the life you deserve, or further away from it.

At the NYDA, we work every day to create opportunities for young people - through skills development, through programmes, through pathways into the economy. But the truth is, those doors we open mean nothing if you are not in a position to walk through them. They mean nothing if your life is interrupted before it even begins.

That is why today is a moment to reflect honestly with yourself. A moment to ask: who am I becoming? Where is this path taking me? And is it taking me closer to the table, or further away from it? Because the young people of 1976 did not fight for you to inherit fear. They fought for you to inherit possibility.

50 years later, honouring that legacy is not about words. It is about choices. The quiet choices you make when no one is watching. The difficult choices to walk away. The courageous choices to build something meaningful, even when it is not easy.



I want to leave you with this. Your life is bigger than your current circumstances.

Your future is bigger than your environment. But only if you choose it. Let today not be just another talk that you forget when you leave here. Let it be a turning point.

Let this school become what it is meant to be - a place of safety, dignity, and opportunity. And let each of you decide that you will become the kind of person who does not just want a seat at the table, but who is ready to earn that seat, to define it, and to use it to build a better future - not just for yourself, but for others too.

I thank you.