



SPEAKING NOTES FOR EXECUTIVE CHAIRPERSON DR SUNSHINE MYENDE

YOUTH MONTH – MEDIA LAUNCH

14 MAY 2026



SPEAKING NOTES BY THE EXECUTIVE CHAIRPERSON OF THE NYDA ON THE OCCASION OF THE YOUTH MONTH MEDIA LAUNCH – *Remarks | ±10 minutes*

16 March 2026

*Programme Director,
Honourable Minister and Deputy Minister,
Leaders from government, business, civil society and youth formations,
Representatives of the media,
Distinguished guests,
Most importantly, young people of South Africa,*

“There comes a time in the life of any nation when there remain only two choices: submit or fight.” These words by Bab'Oliver Tambo speak directly to the courage of the young people of 1976, who chose resistance over silence, dignity over fear, and freedom over submission. Today, we gather not only to remember them, but to honour the unfinished responsibility they handed to future generations.

As we launch the national programme for the 50th Anniversary Commemoration of the 1976 Youth Uprisings, we do so under the theme: “RESET@50 - The Future Calls”, with a powerful reminder that “freedom lives in every generation.” This slogan is a national challenge. It is a reminder that every generation must define freedom in the context of its own struggle, its own realities and its own responsibilities.

For the youth of 1976, the struggle was against apartheid oppression and an education system designed to limit black potential and black futures. For many young people today, the struggle is against unemployment, poverty, inequality, exclusion and economic marginalisation. And yet, despite the differences between then and now, one thing remains unchanged: the determination of young people to shape the future of this country.

It is therefore deeply significant that we launch this commemoration here, at the Hector Pieterse Memorial - because this venue is sacred ground in the democratic history of South Africa. This is where young people altered the direction of a nation. To gather here fifty years later is to collapse the distance between memory and action. It is to recognise that commemoration cannot become a ceremonial exercise detached from the lived realities of young people today. If we truly honour the generation of 1976, then we must confront honestly the challenges facing young people in democratic South Africa.



Yesterday, South Africa woke up to deeply concerning unemployment statistics. Statistics South Africa confirmed that unemployment has risen to 32.7%, with young people continuing to carry the greatest burden of unemployment in our country. Behind those statistics are real lives. It is the graduate sitting at home with qualifications but no opportunity. It is the young person in a rural village disconnected from economic participation. It is the young entrepreneur with innovation and determination, but without access to finance or markets. And increasingly, unemployment is no longer only an economic issue, but a dignity issue, a social cohesion issue, a mental health issue. And it is one of the defining responsibilities of our democracy. This is why the work of youth development must move beyond symbolism and become urgent, coordinated and measurable.

As the National Youth Development Agency - as lobbyists, coordinators and initiators of these conversations with the right stakeholders - we continue to intensify interventions aimed at expanding pathways to opportunity for young people. One of the measures we have undertaken is active engagement with the Department of Public Service and Administration, together with relevant government departments, around our database of unemployed graduates. We are calling for stronger commitments towards the absorption of qualified young people into vacancies, internships and employment opportunities across the public sector.

Equally, we are clear that youth unemployment cannot be resolved by government alone. The private sector owes it to the youth of this country, to come to the table. This cannot remain only a public sector responsibility while millions of young people remain excluded from the economy. Business has a role to play. Labour has a role to play. Civil society has a role to play. And all of us, collectively, have a responsibility to ensure that young people are not spectators in the economy of this country, but active participants in shaping it.

The Agency has become intentional in encouraging young people themselves, to become builders of opportunity. Through our grant programmes and enterprise development interventions, the NYDA continues to support young entrepreneurs who are building businesses, creating jobs and contributing meaningfully to local economies. We want young people to understand that entrepreneurship must not be reserved for the privileged few. It must become accessible to township youth, rural youth, young women, young people with disabilities, young queers and first-generation entrepreneurs across South Africa.

Since 1 August 2025, the NYDA has processed 1,311 grant opportunities to a value exceeding R28.2 million in support of youth-owned enterprises and youth development initiatives across South Africa.



The provincial spread of these interventions reflects both the scale of need and the growing entrepreneurial activity among young people across the country. Limpopo accounted for approximately 30% of all grants processed, followed by KwaZulu-Natal at 26%, Mpumalanga at 16.7%, Gauteng at 10.4%, and the Eastern Cape at 8.2%. The Free State accounted for 5.6%, while the North West, Western Cape and Northern Cape collectively represented just over 3% of grants processed.

These grants processed have impacted a young woman opening a business, a young graduate employing others, a young innovator building solutions within their own community. These grants are investments in inclusion. Investments in economic participation. Investments in social stability. And ultimately, investments in freedom itself.

As we commemorate 50 years of June 16, we must also locate South African youth within a broader continental and global context. The African Union Youth Charter reminds us that young people are not passive beneficiaries of development, but active partners in governance, peacebuilding, innovation and economic transformation across the continent. South African youth continue to contribute meaningfully to global conversations on democracy, inequality, climate justice, technological transformation and social justice. But young people cannot inherit responsibility without inheriting opportunity.

That is why the NYDA is also currently undertaking nationwide consultations on the Integrated Youth Development Strategy for 2026 to 2029. These consultations are aimed at ensuring that youth voices directly shape the country's development agenda and that youth development becomes more coordinated, inclusive and responsive to lived realities across all provinces. The revised IYDS seeks to strengthen collaboration between government, the private sector and civil society, while reducing fragmentation in youth development interventions. Because policy must listen before it leads. And leadership must remain connected to the lived experiences of the people it serves.

As part of this Golden Jubilee programme, we are also placing strong emphasis on reflection, intergenerational dialogue, youth empowerment, entrepreneurship, skills development and nation-building. This commemoration is not only about remembering the past, but about mobilising investment into the future of young people.

The youth of 1976 did not fight so that future generations could inherit hopelessness. They fought for possibility. They fought for dignity. They fought for a South Africa where young people could imagine futures beyond oppression and limitation. And so the responsibility before us today is not only to remember their bravery.



It is to continue their unfinished work. To build a country where freedom can be felt not only in law, but in daily life. A country where talent is not determined by geography, surname or social class. A country where young people do not have to choose between survival and dreams. A country where every generation expands the meaning of freedom for the next.

As we launch Youth Month 2026 and the year-long programme of the Golden Jubilee, let us recommit ourselves to investing seriously in young people - not only through speeches, but through action, resources, opportunity and partnership. Because the future is not something waiting for young people someday. The future is already calling them. And our responsibility, as leaders and as a nation, is to ensure they are equipped to answer that call.

One wise apartheid activist said “A nation that does not value its youth does not deserve its future.” May we prove ourselves worthy of the young people of South Africa.

I thank you.