



## **NYDA EXECUTIVE CHAIRPERSON AT 80<sup>TH</sup> SESSION OF THE UNITED NATIONS GENERAL ASSEMBLY**

As the National Youth Development Agency (NYDA), we were honoured to form part of the South African delegation to the 80th Session of the United Nations General Assembly (UNGA) High-Level Week. During this historic gathering, we participated in the high-level plenary meeting commemorating the 30th anniversary of the World Programme of Action for Youth, reaffirming the global commitment to leaving no one behind. We also joined the UN LGBTQI Core Group High-Level Meeting, where we delivered the South African statement and amplified the voices of young people in the fight for equality, dignity, and inclusion.

This moment carries profound significance for our country, as South Africa assumes the Presidency of the G20—the first African nation to do so—under the theme, “Solidarity, Equality and Sustainability.” This places us in a strategic position to champion inclusive growth, social justice, and human-centred development. Fittingly, our participation at UNGA 80 coincides with South Africa’s Heritage Month, a time when we celebrate our diversity, reflect on the struggles that won us freedom, and more especially as the NYDA recommit ourselves to building a future where every young person, regardless of identity, can thrive.

South Africa is firmly committed to the principle that equality and non-discrimination are fundamental pillars of our democracy. Our transition was built on the recognition that no person should suffer discrimination because of who they are or whom they love. Our Constitution was the first in the world to prohibit discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation, and South Africa became the first African country to legalise same-sex marriage. These were not merely symbolic victories—they were deliberate steps towards building a society rooted in equality, dignity, and freedom for all.

This commitment also finds resonance in the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action, which recognises non-discrimination as a cornerstone of gender equality. The struggle for the equal recognition of women’s rights is intrinsically linked to the recognition of the rights of LGBTI persons. As we mark Beijing+30, we reaffirm that these principles must apply to all, including LGBTI individuals whose rights and dignity are still too often denied.



For the first time in the Agency's history, we proudly have an openly LGBTIQ+ board member. This milestone demonstrates our resolve to ensure inclusivity in leadership and decision-making.

Looking ahead, as we approach October—South Africa's Pride Month—the NYDA will be visible in Pride programmes across the country. We will also extend financial support to LGBTIQ+ businesses, recognising that economic empowerment is central to dignity. Our vision of inclusivity is not limited to urban centres; it extends to rural and peri-urban areas, where many queer youth face the harshest challenges. We are determined that every young person, regardless of identity or location, feels seen, heard, and supported.

The importance of the UN LGBTQI Core Group cannot be overstated. While South Africa is rightly celebrated as the first African country to constitutionally prohibit discrimination based on sexual orientation, the lived realities of young LGBTQI people reveal a more complex story. Many still face marginalisation, violence, and exclusion in schools, communities, and workplaces.

This is why the UN LGBTQI Core Group matters. It provides a global political and diplomatic platform where our struggles and hopes are connected to a broader movement for dignity and equality. It affirms that LGBTQI rights are not "special rights" but human rights that must be advanced and protected at the highest international level.

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

In South Africa, young people continue to face layered discrimination—whether in schools, workplaces, or families. For LGBTQI youth, the dream of safety and belonging is often disrupted by bullying, harassment, or even homelessness. Despite our progressive constitutional framework, alarming levels of exclusion persist. Research shows that more than



half of LGBTQI youth (about 56%) report discrimination at school, rising to as high as 79% in some provinces. During the COVID-19 pandemic in eThekweni, about 14.6% of LGBTQI youth faced physical violence in relationships, while one in four non-conforming youth reported abuse. Overall, about 65% of LGBTQI South Africans report experiencing violence at some point in their lives, with nearly half reporting sexual violence.

These numbers reveal a sobering reality: schools, which should be safe spaces of growth and learning, are often sites of discrimination and violence for LGBTQI youth. Yet, despite these challenges, youth continue to lead the way in reshaping narratives, building solidarity, and creating safe spaces. Their courage gives us hope and strengthens our resolve to act.

As South Africa, we stand ready to work with our peers across Africa, alongside civil society and the United Nations, to advance an inclusive future. We call on African nations to repeal discriminatory laws, confront prejudice, and 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, we call on the United Nations to go beyond convening discussions and strengthen mechanisms that hold member states accountable when they fail to protect LGBTIQ+ rights. Silence in the face of criminalisation and violence is not an option. True multilateralism requires that progress be measured not only in declarations but also in the lived experiences of queer youth and all marginalised communities worldwide. Accountability is the cornerstone of credibility. True freedom is not achieved when rights exist only on paper, but when every LGBTQI youth can live without fear, silence, or shame.

The protection and promotion of LGBTI rights is not a marginal issue. It is central to achieving gender equality, social justice, and sustainable development. Discrimination based on sexual orientation or gender identity not only violates human rights but also undermines our shared goals of peace, equality, and inclusive development.

As representatives of South African youth at the United Nations, we call for renewed global solidarity to dismantle all forms of discrimination, confront intersecting inequalities, and ensure that no one is left behind. We reaffirm that the universality, indivisibility, and interdependence of human rights must remain our guiding light.



Piece by:

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