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NATIONAL YOUTH DEVELOPMENT AGENCY
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SPEAKING NOTES FOR EXECUTIVE CHAIRPERSON
DR SUNSHINE MYENDE

BRICS+ INTERNATIONAL YOUTH TALK ON CIVILIZATION MUTUAL LEARNING




10 NOVEMBER 2026

SPEAKING NOTES BY THE EXECUTIVE CHAIRPERSON OF THE NYDA ON THE OCCASION OF THE BRICS INTERNATIONAL YOUTH TALK ON CIVILIZATION MUTUAL LEARNING – *Keynote Address | ±5 minutes*

10 November 2026

Distinguished guests,

Representatives of the People's Republic of China,

Leaders of youth organisations and institutions,

Fellow delegates,

Young people,

Good morning.

It is an honour to join you in The People's Republic of China, representing the Republic of South Africa at a dialogue central to our shared future: how do nations and civilisations learn from one another in a world still marked by division and inequality?

I bring greetings from South Africa, a country whose history demonstrates both the cost of denying human dignity and the possibility of building a society founded on equality, respect and shared humanity.

Our experience has taught us that difference need not become division, and that progress requires recognition of the dignity and contribution of others. South Africa therefore approaches civilisation mutual learning not as a ceremonial exchange, but as a principle of international cooperation.

No civilisation has a monopoly on knowledge, wisdom or human progress. Every society carries intellectual traditions, cultural practices, innovations and systems of knowledge shaped by its history. These should be engaged on the basis of equality and mutual respect - not ranked against a single measure of development or imposed as universal models.

True mutual learning requires confidence in what we bring and humility about what we can learn. It does not demand uniformity. It calls us to find common purpose while respecting different histories, identities and development pathways.

For South Africa, this approach is grounded
in our constitutional democracy and expressed through Ubuntu: the understanding that our humanity is affirmed through our relationships with others. Ubuntu calls us to solidarity, mutual responsibility and recognition that our wellbeing is interconnected. It is a contribution we offer to a world that must learn to cooperate across difference.

Our relationship with China gives practical expression to this spirit. Since establishing diplomatic relations in 1998, our countries have developed cooperation across political, economic, educational, scientific and cultural fields. The elevation of our relations in 2024 to an All-Round Strategic Cooperative Partnership in the New Era reflects the depth and ambition of that relationship.

There is much to learn from China's experience in industrial development, technological advancement, infrastructure and skills development. South Africa, in turn, brings its constitutional journey, cultural and linguistic diversity, indigenous knowledge systems and experience of democratic nation-building. Our task is not to copy one another's path, but to exchange knowledge and shape solutions responsive to our respective realities.

At the National Youth Development Agency, we value international engagement that connects young people to knowledge, networks and opportunities for development at home. Our recent programme in China exposed South African content creators and NYDA officials to advanced manufacturing, artificial intelligence, biotechnology, innovation and cultural heritage. Its value must extend beyond the visit, into sustained learning, stronger cooperation and practical opportunities.

This is especially relevant in 2026, the China–Africa Year of People-to-People Exchanges. Strong relations cannot rest on government agreements alone; they must also be sustained through understanding, trust and cooperation between our people.

The challenges before us - climate change, inequality, food security, technological disruption and the future of work - do not respect borders. They require us to bring different experiences and capabilities together. Civilisation mutual learning must move beyond cultural appreciation towards joint research, skills partnerships and innovation that improves lives.

Distinguished guests,

The measure of our engagement will not be the number of meetings held or agreements signed during our stay here. It will be whether we deepen understanding, expand what our societies can achieve together and create better prospects for present and future generations.

South Africa comes to this dialogue ready to
learn, ready to contribute and ready to strengthen its partnership with China and fellow BRICS countries.

We do not need to become the same to advance together. We need the wisdom to learn from our differences, the courage to challenge the limits of our own experience, and the resolve to turn mutual understanding into shared progress.

I thank you.