



## SPEAKING NOTES FOR EXECUTIVE CHAIRPERSON DR SUNSHINE MYENDE

### CHINA-SOUTH AFRICA YOUTH DIALOGUE, BEIJING



16 SEPTEMBER 2026

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**SPEAKING NOTES BY THE EXECUTIVE CHAIRPERSON OF THE NYDA ON THE  
OCCASION OF THE INTERNATIONAL YOUTH TALK ON GLOBAL CIVILIZATION  
INITIATIVE – *Opening Remarks* | ±5 minutes**



16 September 2026

*Distinguished President of the All-China Youth Federation, Mr Xu Xiao,  
Distinguished representatives of the Government of the People's Republic of China,  
Leaders and representatives of the All-China Youth Federation and the China  
International Youth Exchange Centre,  
Fellow young leaders and delegates from South Africa and China,*

Good morning.

It is an honour to join you in Beijing for this important China–South Africa Youth Dialogue, particularly in a year in which China and Africa are placing such emphasis on strengthening the bonds between our peoples.

I would like to express my appreciation to the All-China Youth Federation and the China International Youth Exchange Centre for convening this dialogue and for continuing to create spaces in which young people from our two countries can engage not only with one another, but with the larger questions shaping our shared future.

The relationship between South Africa and China has developed considerably over the past three decades. Our two countries have built an all-round strategic cooperative partnership grounded in political trust, economic cooperation and growing people-to-people exchanges. In 2024, our Heads of State reaffirmed that modernisation is a shared objective in building a high-quality South Africa–China community with a shared future, while identifying cooperation in areas such as digital technologies, new energy, artificial intelligence, education and science and technology.

For us, therefore, the theme focusing on “Youth Leadership and National Modernization”, is particularly meaningful.

Modernisation is not only about infrastructure, technology or economic growth. It is also about people: about the kind of societies we seek to build, the opportunities available to our citizens, the knowledge we preserve and create, and the values that guide how we engage with one another.

This is where dialogue among civilizations becomes important.

South Africa comes from a society shaped by many cultures, languages, traditions and experiences. We understand that our differences do not have to prevent cooperation. On the contrary, meaningful engagement across differences can



broaden our understanding and enable us  
to learn from experiences beyond our own.

The Global Civilization Initiative places emphasis on dialogue, mutual learning and respect among civilizations. These principles provide a useful basis for youth engagement, provided that such engagement remains genuinely reciprocal: that we come not only to share our experiences, but also to listen, learn and understand.

This is particularly important for the Global South. China and Africa are both pursuing paths of development and modernisation that are shaped by our own histories, circumstances and aspirations. There is no single experience that can simply be transferred from one society to another. But there is enormous value in learning from how others have confronted challenges, developed capabilities and created opportunities for their people.

For young people, this exchange is especially significant. We are not simply inheriting the future. We are already participating in shaping it - through our ideas, our businesses, our research, our technology, our communities and our public institutions.

The responsibility of young leadership is therefore not only to understand the world as it is, but to contribute to the world as it should become.

This year is particularly appropriate for deepening that engagement. The 2026 China–Africa Year of People-to-People Exchanges places youth, education, culture, science and technology and mutual learning at the centre of the relationship between China and Africa. Its programme includes initiatives such as the China–Africa Youth Festival, the Future Leaders’ Dialogue, youth innovation and entrepreneurship programmes and exchanges focused on talent development.

For South Africa, these exchanges are an opportunity to strengthen not only friendship, but capability.

We should use them to expand young people's access to knowledge, technology, skills and networks; to encourage innovation and entrepreneurship; and to create opportunities for young people to contribute meaningfully to the development challenges facing our countries and our continent.

But I also believe that youth dialogue must go beyond what happens during the period of an exchange programme.

The relationships formed here should continue in our universities, our businesses, our research institutions, our communities and our public institutions. The ideas



discussed here should find expression in projects and partnerships. And the friendships established between young South Africans and Chinese should become part of the long-term foundation of our bilateral relationship.

As we engage today on digital empowerment, green development and mutual learning among civilizations, I encourage all of us to approach these discussions with openness and curiosity.

Let us learn from one another without assuming that our experiences are identical. Let us share our knowledge while remaining open to knowledge from others. And let us recognise that the future of South Africa–China relations will increasingly be shaped by the generation represented in this room.

Our countries have built a strong foundation of friendship and cooperation.

It is now our responsibility, as young leaders, to give that relationship new energy, new ideas and new possibilities.

I look forward to the dialogue.

Thank you.