



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

**CULTURAL AND CREATIVE INDUSTRIES CAREER
EXPO**

STATE THEATRE, PRETORIA

15 JUNE 2026



SPEAKING NOTES BY THE EXECUTIVE CHAIRPERSON OF THE NYDA ON THE OCCASION OF THE CULTURAL AND CREATIVE INDUSTRIES CAREER EXPO –

Message of support | ±10 minutes

15 June 2026

Programme Director,
The Chief Executive Officer of the South African State Theatre,
Representatives of Government and our strategic partners,
Leaders from the cultural and creative industries,
Distinguished guests,
Most importantly, the young people who have chosen to create rather than
surrender,
Good morning.

Somewhere in South Africa tonight, a young woman is editing a film on a borrowed laptop, hoping that one day her work will find an audience beyond the four walls in which it was created. Somewhere else, a young man is sketching designs that he dreams will one day appear on the runways of Paris, Milan or Johannesburg, using nothing more than pencil and paper because the software he needs remains beyond his reach. A musician is recording in a bedroom studio, a photographer is chasing perfect light with a second-hand camera, a playwright is rewriting the same script for the tenth time, and an animator is teaching themselves new skills through free online tutorials because formal training is simply unaffordable.

None of them knows what tomorrow will bring. Yet every one of them is quietly shaping the future of this country.

For generations, South Africa measured its prosperity by what lay beneath its soil. The economy of the future, however, will increasingly be measured by what exists within the imagination of its people. The next great export may not be a mineral hidden underground, but a screenplay written in Aliwal North, a fashion label born in Secunda, a digital game developed in Giyani or a song recorded in a township bedroom.

Tomorrow, our nation will commemorate the legacy of 16 June 1976. We will honour young people who refused to accept the future that had been prescribed for them and who understood that education was about far more than classrooms. It was about dignity, agency and the right to determine one's own destiny. Their courage



transformed the trajectory of our democracy
and expanded the possibilities for generations that would follow.

Today, the struggle has evolved but it has not disappeared. The young people before us are not marching against an unjust education system; they are confronting barriers that prevent them from transforming creativity into sustainable livelihoods. They are navigating unequal access to funding, technology, markets, mentorship and professional networks. They are fighting to ensure that talent is recognised not only with applause, but with opportunity.

The National Youth Development Agency does not view the creative economy as a niche sector reserved for artists and performers. We see it as a strategic pillar of youth development, economic participation and inclusive growth. We see entrepreneurs where others see entertainers. We see employers where others see performers. We see intellectual property, innovation and enterprise where others see hobbies. Above all, we see young people whose creativity has the power to transform not only their own lives but the future of our country.

This understanding is particularly important at a time when South Africa continues to grapple with persistently high levels of youth unemployment and economic exclusion. The answer cannot rest solely on waiting for traditional employment opportunities to emerge. It must also be found in creating the conditions that enable young people to become producers, innovators and business owners who generate opportunity for themselves and for others.

Globally, the evidence is compelling. Cultural and creative industries contribute more than billions to the world economy every year and sustain nearly 30 million jobs, employing more young people between the ages of 15 and 29 than any other sector. Across continents, governments are recognising that creativity is no longer simply a cultural asset but a strategic economic one. Nations that invest in their storytellers, designers, filmmakers, musicians, architects, software developers and digital creators are investing in exports, tourism, technological innovation and long-term competitiveness.

South Africa possesses every ingredient required to lead in this space. We have extraordinary cultural diversity, globally recognised artistic excellence and one of the youngest populations on the continent. Yet potential alone does not produce prosperity. Talent without access remains unrealised potential, and ambition without support too often becomes frustration.

And this is where the work of the NYDA becomes indispensable. This commitment is not theoretical; it is already finding expression through practical interventions across the country. Through the National Youth Service, thousands of young people are participating in creative and cultural initiatives that simultaneously develop skills, strengthen social cohesion and create pathways into the economy. More than 4,000



young participants are currently engaged in creative sector activities, while the Agency's Young Creatives Programme, implemented in partnership with the Department of Sport, Arts and Culture, continues to nurture emerging artists and preserve South Africa's rich cultural heritage. These initiatives reflect an important principle: creativity should never be treated as an extracurricular activity, but as a viable route to entrepreneurship, employment and nation-building.

Beyond these dedicated programmes, the NYDA continues to strengthen the creative ecosystem through entrepreneurship development, grant funding, business management support, mentorship and market linkages that enable young creatives to move from passion projects to sustainable enterprises. Whether a young person is launching a fashion label, establishing a production company, building a digital content studio or commercialising a design concept, our role is to ensure that talent is matched with the tools, networks and opportunities necessary for long-term success.

Our mandate is not merely to respond to unemployment after it has taken root. Our mandate is to create pathways into economic participation before talent is lost. It is to ensure that a brilliant concept developed in Giyani has the same chance of becoming a thriving enterprise as one conceived in Sandton. It is to ensure that a young filmmaker from Lusikisiki, a designer from Mamelodi or a musician from Springbok can access the support, financing, mentorship and entrepreneurial development necessary to compete not only locally but globally.

Youth development cannot be reduced to programmes delivered or grants disbursed. It must ultimately be measured by whether young people are able to build sustainable livelihoods, own productive assets, create employment and participate meaningfully in the economy. It is measured by whether innovation becomes enterprise and whether enterprise becomes dignity.

For this reason, the creative economy must be understood as far more than entertainment. Every successful production creates work for technicians, editors, marketers, transport providers, designers, caterers and countless others. Every fashion label builds manufacturing opportunities. Every digital creator contributes to an expanding ecosystem of technology and communication. Every creative enterprise demonstrates that ideas can become industries and that culture can become commerce.

Yet we must also be honest about the obstacles that continue to confront young creatives. Too many still struggle to access affordable equipment, production spaces, business development support and markets that reward originality. Too many possess exceptional artistic ability but lack the entrepreneurial knowledge required to commercialise their work, protect their intellectual property or negotiate equitable



partnerships. If we are serious about unlocking youth potential, then our commitment must extend beyond celebrating creativity to building the ecosystems that sustain it.

This requires collaboration. Government has a responsibility to create enabling environments and responsive policy frameworks. The private sector has a responsibility to invest in emerging talent and expand market opportunities. Educational institutions must cultivate innovation alongside technical skills. Established industry leaders must mentor those who follow behind them. Communities must value creativity not as a pastime but as a legitimate and essential contributor to local economic development.

The African Youth Charter reminds us that young people must be empowered to participate fully in the economic, social and cultural development of the continent. The National Youth Policy similarly recognises that meaningful youth development demands coordinated action across sectors to remove structural barriers and expand opportunity. These frameworks are not abstract commitments; they are calls to action that challenge us to build a society where no young person's future is determined by the circumstances of their birth.

As the National Youth Development Agency, we remain committed to being part of that work. We will continue investing in entrepreneurship development, facilitating access to opportunity, supporting innovation and advocating for ecosystems that allow young people to transform their ideas into sustainable enterprises. Our objective is not simply to help young people find work; it is to help them build wealth, create jobs and become active participants in shaping South Africa's economic future.

Programme Director, we have also learned that when you invest in a young creative, you are rarely investing in one career alone. You are investing in a future employer, a future mentor, a future exporter and often the catalyst for an entire local economy. One opportunity granted to one young person can ripple through families, communities and industries in ways that statistics alone can never fully capture. That is why we continue to believe that youth development is not expenditure; it is one of the smartest investments a nation can make in its own future.

As we approach Youth Day, I believe there is perhaps no more fitting tribute to the generation of 1976 than ensuring that today's generation inherits not only the freedom to learn but also the freedom to create, to own, to innovate and to prosper. The struggle for dignity did not end with political liberation. It continues in our determination to ensure that every young South African has the opportunity to realise their full potential.

When history reflects on this generation, may it not say that we recognised talent only after it succeeded. May it say that we built institutions that believed in young



people before the world did, that we invested in possibility before it became profitable, and that we understood our greatest national asset was never hidden beneath the ground but always existed within the imagination, resilience and ambition of our youth.

Somewhere in South Africa tonight, another young person will open a laptop, pick up a paintbrush, write a lyric or sketch a design without knowing whether anyone will ever see it. Our collective responsibility is to ensure that they are not creating in isolation but creating in a country that believes in them, invests in them and walks the journey with them.

That is how we honour the legacy of June 16. That is how we give practical meaning to youth development. And that is how we unlock not only the creative economy, but the limitless potential of South Africa's young people.

I thank you.