



SPEAKING NOTES FOR EXECUTIVE CHAIRPERSON
DR SUNSHINE MYENDE

EASTERN CAPE YOUTH PARLIAMENT
**"CELEBRATING 30 YEARS OF OUR CONSTITUTION:
A CONSCIENTISED YOUTH ADVANCING AN
INCLUSIVE ECONOMY AND ENDING GENDER-
BASED VIOLENCE ON THE 50TH ANNIVERSARY OF
THE 1976 UPRISING."**

25 JUNE 2026



SPEAKING NOTES BY THE EXECUTIVE

CHAIRPERSON OF THE NYDA ON THE OCCASION OF THE EASTERN CAPE

YOUTH PARLIAMENT – Keynote Address | ±15 minutes

25 JUNE 2026

Programme Director;

Honourable Speaker;

Honourable Members of the Eastern Cape Provincial Legislature;

Representatives of Government;

Leaders of Civil Society;

Distinguished Guests;

Fellow South Africans;

And, above all, the young leaders gathered in this House today;

Good morning.

History has a remarkable way of asking every generation a different question. For the generation of 1976, the question was whether they were prepared to confront an unjust system that sought to deny them education, dignity and the freedom to determine their own future. Their answer was one of extraordinary courage. Armed not with political power or economic influence, but with conviction, they altered the course of our country's history and reminded the world that young people are never merely spectators in the making of a nation - they are often its greatest architects.

Twenty years later, South Africa answered another defining question through the adoption of our democratic Constitution. It committed our nation to building a society founded upon human dignity, equality, freedom and social justice. It recognised that democracy would not simply be measured by the absence of oppression, but by the presence of opportunity. It challenged us to build a society in which every citizen, regardless of race, gender, geography or economic circumstance, would have the opportunity to realise their full potential.

Today, thirty years after the adoption of that Constitution and fifty years after the uprising of 1976, history asks our generation a different question altogether.



Have we been as intentional about creating opportunity as previous generations were about securing freedom?

That question sits at the heart of today's theme. It is also one of the defining questions confronting South Africa's democracy. Because while our Constitution remains one of the most progressive in the world, constitutions are not self-executing documents. They articulate rights, define principles and establish institutions, but they rely on leaders, communities and citizens to translate those ideals into lived realities. Democracy therefore cannot be measured only by the rights we enjoy on paper. It must also be measured by whether those rights enable young people to live lives of dignity, participate meaningfully in the economy, feel safe in their communities and believe that this country has invested in their future.

It is for this reason that I believe today's conversation is not simply about commemorating our past. It is about determining the character of our future. The organisers have challenged us to reflect on what it means to build a conscientised youth capable of advancing an inclusive economy while ending gender-based violence. Those are not separate responsibilities. They are deeply connected because both require us to build a generation that understands that democracy is not sustained through rights alone, but through responsibility, participation and active citizenship.

A conscientised youth is therefore not simply a generation that knows the Constitution. It is a generation that lives its values. It understands that freedom carries responsibility, that equality requires action and that dignity is something we owe not only to ourselves but to one another. Such a generation rejects corruption because it understands that corruption steals opportunities from young people. It rejects violence because it understands that violence destroys communities and undermines constitutional democracy. It embraces innovation because it recognises that progress belongs to those who are prepared to create rather than merely consume. Above all, it understands that nation-building is not the responsibility of government alone, but a shared responsibility carried by every citizen.

This understanding becomes particularly important when we consider the realities confronting young South Africans today.

Our country continues to grapple with one of the highest youth unemployment rates in the world. Behind every percentage point is a young graduate waiting for their first opportunity, a young entrepreneur struggling to access finance, a young artisan searching for practical experience, or a young innovator whose ideas remain unrealised because opportunity remains beyond reach. These realities remind us



that while political freedom has been secured, economic inclusion remains one of the unfinished tasks of our democracy.

For many years we have described unemployment as our greatest challenge. While that is undoubtedly true, I would argue that the deeper challenge confronting South Africa is the widening gap between talent and opportunity.

Across every province, every township, every village and every city, we encounter young people whose creativity, resilience and ambition are undeniable. What too many of them lack is not ability, but access. Access to quality education, access to affordable connectivity, access to markets, access to finance, access to mentorship and access to practical work experience. When talent is abundant but opportunity remains scarce, inequality reproduces itself across generations and constitutional rights become increasingly difficult to realise in practice.

Closing that opportunity gap is therefore not simply an economic objective. It is a constitutional imperative.

If we believe that every young South African possesses equal dignity, then we must also believe that every young South African deserves a fair opportunity to realise their potential. If we believe in equality, then we must confront the barriers that continue to exclude millions of capable young people from meaningful participation in the economy. And if we truly believe in freedom, then we must ensure that freedom is experienced not merely as the absence of oppression, but as the presence of opportunity.

This brings us to the first responsibility contained within today's theme: advancing an inclusive economy.

An inclusive economy cannot simply be measured by the number of jobs created. It must also be measured by who participates, who owns, who innovates and who benefits from growth. It is an economy in which young people are not confined to the margins as job seekers alone, but are recognised as entrepreneurs, innovators, employers, researchers, manufacturers, creatives and leaders capable of shaping South Africa's economic future.

That is why I have increasingly argued that the next frontier of our democracy is economic citizenship.

Political citizenship gave South Africans the right to vote and participate in democratic governance. Economic citizenship must ensure that every young South African has a genuine opportunity to participate meaningfully in the economy. It is



about creating pathways into ownership, entrepreneurship, innovation and productive economic participation. It recognises that sustainable development cannot be achieved if young people remain excluded from wealth creation and decision-making.

This conversation becomes even more urgent as the global economy undergoes profound transformation. Artificial intelligence is changing the nature of work. Climate change is accelerating investment in green industries. Advances in technology are redefining how businesses operate, while the African Continental Free Trade Area is creating unprecedented opportunities for trade, innovation and regional collaboration across our continent.

These developments should not intimidate us. They should inspire us. The countries that will lead the future will not necessarily be those with the greatest mineral wealth or the largest populations. They will be those that invest most effectively in the capabilities of their people. The next contest among nations will increasingly be determined by innovation, technology, research, entrepreneurship and human capital.

South Africa's greatest strategic asset is therefore not beneath our soil. It is sitting in our classrooms, our universities, our TVET colleges, our communities and in this very chamber today.

Our responsibility is to ensure that this generation is equipped not merely to participate in the economy of tomorrow, but to shape it.

That requires what I believe must become a national Skills Revolution. We must align education, training and innovation with the realities of a rapidly changing world. We must prepare young people for careers that do not yet exist, technologies that continue to evolve and industries that will define the next generation of economic growth. We must cultivate problem-solvers rather than rote learners, innovators rather than imitators, and entrepreneurs capable of transforming ideas into enterprises that create employment for others.

Equally important is our recognition that meaningful participation in the twenty-first century economy depends increasingly on digital inclusion. Affordable data and reliable connectivity are no longer luxuries; they have become essential infrastructure for education, entrepreneurship, innovation and economic participation. A young person who cannot access the digital economy is often excluded from opportunity before they have even had the chance to compete. Digital inclusion is therefore not simply a technological priority; it is a constitutional imperative because it determines who can participate in the economy of the future and who is left behind.



It is precisely because of these realities that institutions must constantly evolve.

The National Youth Development Agency has increasingly positioned itself as a convener of partnerships that connect young people to opportunity rather than expecting opportunity to find them. Through initiatives such as Phanda Thursday, we have deliberately reimagined how public institutions engage with citizens by taking government services, career guidance, entrepreneurship support, employment pathways and strategic partners directly into communities. It is a simple but important shift in philosophy. Public institutions should not merely exist; they should be accessible. Opportunity should not depend on geography, financial means or proximity to government offices. It should be brought closer to the people it is intended to serve.

In many respects, Phanda Thursday demonstrates what constitutional implementation looks like in practice. It reflects an understanding that responsive governance requires institutions to remove barriers rather than expecting citizens to overcome them alone. It is one practical example of how we begin translating constitutional ideals into meaningful opportunities for young people.

Honourable Members,

If advancing an inclusive economy is one pillar of today's theme, then ending gender-based violence is the other. We cannot separate these two conversations because they are bound together by the same constitutional values of dignity, equality and freedom.

An economy cannot be described as inclusive if women and girls continue to experience violence that limits their participation in education, employment, leadership and public life. Equally, we cannot claim to be building a prosperous society while violence continues to rob families of security, communities of trust and young people of the opportunity to realise their full potential. Gender-based violence is therefore not only a criminal justice issue. It is a constitutional issue because it undermines the very rights our democracy was established to protect. It is also an economic issue because every act of violence deprives our country of talent, productivity, innovation and leadership.

As we reflect on the responsibilities of a conscientised youth, we must therefore recognise that ending gender-based violence cannot be left to law enforcement agencies or the justice system alone. It requires a societal shift in attitudes, behaviours and relationships. It requires young men who understand that strength is measured by character rather than control, and young women who are empowered



to pursue their aspirations free from fear, discrimination or limitation. It requires families, schools, faith-based organisations, community leaders and public institutions to nurture a culture in which respect, accountability and equality are not merely spoken about but consistently practised.

Ultimately, the society we build will reflect the values we choose to normalise. If we normalise respect, equality and accountability, we strengthen democracy. If we tolerate violence, discrimination and exclusion, we weaken it. A conscientised generation therefore understands that protecting the dignity of others is not an act of charity; it is a constitutional responsibility and an essential condition for sustainable development.

Honourable Members,

The Constitution also calls upon us to think beyond our immediate circumstances and prepare South Africa for the opportunities emerging across our continent and the world.

The African Continental Free Trade Area presents one of the greatest economic opportunities in our lifetime. It has the potential to reshape trade, investment and innovation across Africa by creating new markets for entrepreneurs, expanding regional value chains and strengthening economic cooperation. The question before us is whether South African youth will simply observe this transformation or whether they will become its architects.

The answer depends largely on the choices we make today.

If we invest in education that encourages innovation, if we expand digital inclusion, if we strengthen entrepreneurship, if we prepare young people for artificial intelligence, renewable energy, advanced manufacturing, the blue economy and the creative industries, then South Africa will not simply participate in the economy of the future - we will help shape it.

The African Union Youth Charter reminds us that young people are not passive beneficiaries of development. They are agents of transformation, peace-building, innovation and democratic renewal. That understanding should fundamentally influence how we design public policy. Youth development should not be regarded as a social expenditure to be accommodated after other priorities have been funded. It is one of the most important economic investments any nation can make because countries that invest consistently in the capabilities of their young people are ultimately investing in their own competitiveness, resilience and long-term prosperity.



This brings me to the role of institutions.

The Constitution provides the promise, but institutions build the pathways. Institutions are the mechanisms through which constitutional rights become practical opportunities. They connect policy to implementation and aspiration to measurable progress. That is why institutions must constantly evolve to remain responsive to the changing realities of the people they serve.

The National Youth Development Agency exists because Parliament recognised that youth development requires dedicated leadership, coordination and advocacy. Yet the Agency has never claimed that youth development is its responsibility alone. On the contrary, the greatest lesson we have learnt is that meaningful progress depends on partnerships.

Through the National Youth Service, we continue to position community service as a pathway to skills development, employability and active citizenship. Through partnerships supporting the Presidential Youth Employment Initiative, young people are accessing meaningful work experience that strengthens their transition into the labour market. Through initiatives such as Phanda Thursday, we are demonstrating that responsive governance requires institutions to bring services, opportunities and strategic partners closer to communities rather than expecting citizens to navigate fragmented systems on their own.

These interventions matter because they reflect a broader philosophy: constitutional rights become meaningful only when they are accessible.

However, the responsibility cannot rest with one institution.

Youth development should be the lens through which every government department measures its impact. It should influence how municipalities plan local economic development, how educational institutions prepare young people for work, how financial institutions assess access to capital and how the private sector approaches procurement, investment and employment. If every institution represented in this Parliament were required to account annually for its contribution to youth development, I have no doubt that South Africa's development trajectory would be fundamentally transformed.

Honourable Members,

History has never been shaped by generations that waited for change to happen. The young people of 1976 did not wait for justice to find them. They confronted injustice because they understood that silence would only preserve inequality. The



generation that negotiated our constitutional democracy did not inherit freedom. They worked tirelessly to secure it.

Our generation is called to demonstrate that same courage.

Not by repeating history, but by responding to the challenges of our own time with equal determination.

Our responsibility is to ensure that constitutional rights translate into economic opportunities, that technological change creates inclusion rather than exclusion, that democracy strengthens participation rather than division and that every young South African, regardless of circumstance, can believe that this country has invested in their future.

When future generations look back on this moment, they should not remember us only as the generation that celebrated fifty years since the Soweto Uprising or thirty years of constitutional democracy. They should remember us as the generation that chose implementation over symbolism; the generation that understood that democracy is sustained not only by remembering our history but by expanding opportunity; the generation that transformed constitutional principles into practical realities.

Fifty years ago, young people demanded that the doors of learning be opened. Thirty years ago, our Constitution promised dignity, equality and freedom. The question before us today is whether those open doors now lead somewhere. They must lead to quality education that prepares young people for the future economy.

They must lead to thriving enterprises owned by young South Africans. They must lead to safer communities where women and children live free from violence.

They must lead to laboratories, innovation hubs, farms, factories, creative industries and digital platforms where young people shape the future rather than wait for it. They must lead to an inclusive economy in which talent is rewarded, opportunity is accessible and dignity is experienced in everyday life.

The Constitution has already given us the promise. Our collective responsibility is to build the pathways.

If we commit ourselves to that responsibility with the same courage demonstrated by the generation of 1976, then we will not only honour their legacy - we will extend it.



We will strengthen our constitutional democracy, unlock the extraordinary potential of our young people and ensure that the promise of freedom continues to live, not as an ideal remembered only in history books, but as an opportunity experienced by every generation.

I thank you.