



**DEPUTY MINISTER IN THE PRESIDENCY FOR WOMEN, YOUTH
AND PERSONS WITH DISABILITIES**

REPUBLIC OF SOUTH AFRICA

MESSAGE OF SUPPORT BY

MMAPASEKA STEVE LETSIKE, MP

AT THE

NEXTGEN ANNUAL CAREER EXPO

ON

31 JANUARY 2025 | MABESKRAAL | 09:00

[CHECK AGAINST DELIVERY]

Thank you, Programme Director, Thabang Sefotho

Our gracious hosts, the Chair of the School Governing Body and the School Principal of Rakoko Secondary School,

The Deputy Minister of Higher Education, Mr Buti Manamela

The MMC for Community Services, Cllr Mosweu Manganye,

Nkosi Minenkulu Joyi, representing the National House of Traditional and Khoi-San Leaders, and all royal houses present,

The South African BRICS Youth Association, represented by Ms Margaret Molefe,

Teachers, Parents, Community Members;

And most importantly, the Matric Class of 2024

Thank you for the gracious invitation to participate in this annual NextGen Career Expo geared at inspiring South Africa's future professionals on the various career choices they can pursue.

This event is more than just an exhibition of career opportunities, it serves as a gateway for the empowerment of our young people and knowledge sharing toward a successful future.

As the Ministry responsible for youth, we are deeply committed to ensuring that young people have access to the tools, resources, and opportunities they need to build fulfilling careers and contribute meaningfully to our country's development.

The world is changing rapidly, and with it, the demands of the job market.

It is therefore essential that we prepare ourselves not just for employment but for leadership, innovation, and more so entrepreneurship.

As you all go through school, you each have to walk a path that will introduce new and exciting opportunities, expose you to tough challenges that need to be faced with bravery, and as a consequence, how you respond to these life changes, will unleash the immense potential in each and every one of you.

It is encouraging that as you will walk this path, you will not be alone.

The number of parents, teachers, traditional leaders, government deployees, and other stakeholders is a demonstration of a whole-of-society approach to the development of our young people.

As I look at this room filled with bright young minds, I am filled with hope for the future of our country, which continues to battle the triple challenges of poverty, inequality and unemployment.

You are the leaders, innovators, and change-makers of today, and you have a responsibility to contribute to the development of our country as patriotic citizens.

Patriotism is about a deep sense of love, devotion, and loyalty to our country and its people.

You must be connected to our nation's history, culture, values, and ideals, as well as a commit to contributing positively to South Africa's advancement.

Most importantly, you must exhibit the courage to acknowledge and address our nation's flaws, striving to make it better for future generations.

True patriotism is not blind allegiance, but an active commitment to improving the country for the benefit of all its people.

Some of you have reached 18 and others are close, and I must encourage all of you to actively protect the hard earned gains of our democracy as social activists.

As a start, this means you have a responsibility to exercise your civic duty to vote in the next elections and all elections to come.

Voting early in life establishes a lifelong habit of civic engagement. Studies show that people who vote in their youth are more likely to continue voting as they grow older.

Participating in elections will empower you to bring forward new ideas and support leaders and policies that align with your values and aspirations to grow South Africa, together.

It is a direct way to advocate for the society you want.

Whether your next steps lead you to university, a technical college, an apprenticeship, or straight into the workforce, remember that your dreams are valid, and your contributions matter, regardless what field you will choose to study.

We need you to exercise innovation in every sector.

Whether it be in engineering, the arts, the public sector, entrepreneurship and business, medicine, law, science, social activism, and all your chosen career paths.

There is nothing you set your mind to that you cannot achieve.

As our nation continues to face these triple challenges, they present your greatest opportunities.

It is your generation that will turn our struggles into success stories.

The role young people have played over time toward the development of science and the technologies that are shaping how we live life as we know it in unmistakable.

The most disruptive technological and scientific advancements have been pioneered in great part by young people who dared to innovate and stretch the boundaries of research and development for the advancement of society.

Alan Turing, considered one of the fathers of computer science, developed the concept of the Turing machine in his mid-20's paving the way for young innovators like Bill Gates and Paul Allen who founded Microsoft, and Steve Jobs and Steve Wozniak who founded Apple Inc., all in their early 20's.

Tim Berners-Lee, who was in his early 30's, invented the World Wide Web as we know it, which development transformed how people access and share information.

You would not have Instagram, TikTok, Facebook, and all other social media platforms without this ground breaking work.

Even here in South Africa, we have examples of young innovators who have dared to excel in their young age.

A passionate young scientist, Siyabulela Xuza, developed a safer, more efficient rocket fuel while still in high school. This earned him international recognition, including a NASA-affiliated award. He has since focused on renewable energy solutions for Africa.

At just 16, Kiara Nirghin invented a super-absorbent polymer using orange peels, capable of retaining large amounts of water in soil. This innovation helps farmers mitigate the effects of drought, making agriculture more sustainable.

While working at Vodacom, Nkosana Makate invented the **"Please Call Me"** service, a free messaging system allowing people with no airtime to

request a callback. This simple yet impactful invention transformed mobile communication across Africa.

You must embrace your education, not just as a means to an end, but as a powerful tool to rewrite the narrative of our country and the world.

Let me share three guiding principles to carry with you into the future:

1. Believe in Yourself

Each of you has a unique gift to offer the world. Trust in your abilities and never be afraid to fail. Failure is not the opposite of success – it is a stepping stone toward it.

Even to those who may not get the results they were working toward, that is not the end of the road. It is an opportunity to refocus, and try again.

2. Never Stop Learning

Education does not end when you leave school. The world is changing rapidly, and the skills you learn today may not be the ones you need to carry you through tomorrow.

Stay curious, stay adaptable, and embrace lifelong learning.

3. Give Back to Your Community

Your success will always be intertwined with the well-being of those around you. As you rise, lift others with you.

Be a force for good in your family, your community, and your country.

I urge you to dream big, work hard, and never lose sight of the values instilled in you by your teachers, parents, and community.

The road ahead will not always be easy, but I assure you, it will be worth it.

In the words famously attributed to Steve Jobs, the Founder of Apple Inc. at the 2005 Stanford Commencement Address:

“Stay hungry. Stay foolish.”

I thank you!