



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

REPUBLIC OF SOUTH AFRICA

DRAFT VIDEO MESSAGE

BY

MS MMAPASEKA STEVE LETSIKE, MP

AT THE

SOUTH AFRICAN YOUTH COUNCIL

“NATIONAL EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE MEETING”

ON

22 MAY 2026 | VIRTUAL | 18:00



women, youth &
persons with disabilities
Department:
Women, Youth and Persons with Disabilities
REPUBLIC OF SOUTH AFRICA



[CHECK AGAINST DELIVERY]

Programme Director;

The President, Deputy President, General Secretary and leadership of the South African Youth Council, including all National Executive Committee Members;

Young leaders of our movement and our country;

Comrades and friends in youth development,

Allow me to greet you in the spirit of youth solidarity, struggle and nation-building as you convene this important National Executive Committee meeting of the South African Youth Council (SAYC) at a critical moment in the life of our democracy, and as you prepare your structures, revise your implementation plans and organise yourselves toward the historic 50th commemoration of the youth uprising of 1976.

I must begin with a sincere apology that I am unable to join you in person for this important National Executive Committee meeting due to conflicting commitments that require my presence elsewhere in service of our national responsibilities.

I would have deeply valued the opportunity to sit among you, listen to your deliberations and engage directly with the energy, ideas and political commitment that continue to define the organised youth movement in our country.

But even though I cannot be with you physically, I could not allow this important gathering to pass without lending my voice, my solidarity and

my unwavering support to this meeting, because the work you are doing is far too important for silence.

And so, while distance keeps me away in person, please know that I join you in spirit, in solidarity, and in the shared conviction that the struggle for youth dignity, opportunity and empowerment must continue with urgency and with purpose.

During this critical moment in our country's democracy when young people are confronting unemployment, exclusion and uncertainty, spaces such as this NEC are not ordinary meetings, they are sites of organisation, reflection and strategy for the future of South Africa.

This gathering must be understood as a strategic moment in the life of South African youth politics, because 50 years after June 16, we must ask ourselves a difficult question: what would the youth of 1976 say to a South Africa where millions of young people are still locked out of opportunity, still waiting for jobs, still battling poverty, still excluded from economic participation, and still carrying the emotional burden of a future that often feels uncertain?

They would remind us that youth struggle was never about symbolism. It was about dignity. It was about power. It was about building a country where young people could live fully, work meaningfully, participate equally, and dream without restriction.

And that is why your work as SAYC matters.

As government, through the Department of Women, Youth and Persons with Disabilities, we continue to provide strategic leadership through the National Youth Policy 2030, ensuring that youth development is mainstreamed across government planning, budgeting, implementation and accountability. But let us be honest with one another: government alone cannot carry this responsibility. The time for institutions working in silos has ended.

If we are serious about confronting youth unemployment, social exclusion, inequality and hopelessness, it will require a whole-of-government and whole-of-society effort. In this regard, the National Youth Development Agency remains one of the most important vehicles available to young people.

The NYDA's current programmes in its Annual Performance Plan are not abstract targets on paper. They are real pathways for youth development the Council must actively organise around and help unlock for communities.

This year, NYDA is set to support over 2,000 youth-owned enterprises with financial interventions, provide non-financial business development support to more than 23,000 young entrepreneurs, create and sustain thousands of jobs through youth enterprises, capacitate tens of thousands of young people with skills for the labour market, place thousands of young people into jobs, and significantly expand National Youth Service opportunities so that up to 100,000 young people can secure paid service opportunities.

These are not just numbers. These are doors of possibility.

SAYC must not stand outside these programmes as spectators, you must work with the NYDA and other stakeholders to mobilise young people into these opportunities.

You must become a bridge between policy and the lived realities of young people in townships, villages, campuses, hostels and informal settlements.

You must help young people access financing, business support, skills programmes, job placement initiatives and National Youth Service opportunities, because a programme sitting in an APP means nothing if the young person in Giyani, in Lusikisiki, in Khayelitsha, in Alexandra or in Upington cannot access it.

This is where your MoU with the Department and your relationship with NYDA must become practical instruments of implementation.

Not ceremonial documents. Not political symbolism but living tools for coordinated youth action. As you establish your subcommittees in this NEC, I want to impress upon you something very important.

Choose your leaders carefully. Choose the best among you. Choose leaders with political discipline, with strategic clarity, with unquestionable work ethic, with integrity, and with commitment to delivery, because it is at committee level that strategic objectives either come alive in action, or die quietly on paper.

Many organisations do not fail because they lack vision. They fail because they appoint leadership that cannot execute. History will not judge you by the beauty of your resolutions. It will judge you by whether your structures delivered for young people.

And young people, I must also caution you. We are living in a time where there are organised forces across the world and increasingly within our own societies that seek to reverse the gains of democracy.

The anti-gender, anti-human rights and anti-democracy movements disguise themselves in the language of morality, tradition, faith or family values, but their project is the same: to roll back equality, attack constitutional freedoms, undermine women's rights, target LGBTI persons, silence progressive youth voices, erase disability justice, and weaken democratic institutions.

These are not isolated attacks against one group, they are attacks against democracy itself because democracy cannot survive if equality is selective, dignity is negotiable and if some people are told they are less human than others.

Young people must understand these dynamics deeply, in order to frame a response that is equally effective.

A young queer person denied dignity, a young woman trapped in gender-based violence, a young person with a disability excluded from opportunity, a rural young person locked out of digital access, a young graduate without work are not separate struggles.

This is why intersectionality matters, because oppression does not arrive one issue at a time, and liberation will not be achieved one issue at a time.

It will require a united democratic youth movement that understands that the struggle for jobs is also a struggle for equality, the struggle for dignity is also a struggle for democracy, and the struggle for opportunity is also a struggle for justice.

And so I call upon this NEC of the South African Youth Council, to mobilise all young South Africans in their diversity to be a part of this movement. Mobilise them into organisation. Mobilise them into economic participation. Mobilise them into democratic struggle. Mobilise them into nation-building.

We must mobilise all young people in the Republic, into the fight to restore dignity to the millions of young South Africans who have been locked out of opportunity.

Let the spirit of 1976 not become memory alone. Let it become movement, sound organising and policy translated into action.

Let it become young people building enterprises, entering jobs, shaping democracy, defending equality, and reclaiming their future, because the youth of South Africa are not a crisis to be managed.

Our young people are a force to be organised, a generation to be empowered and they are the builders of the South Africa that is yet to come.

Together, let us organise, mobilise, restore dignity and together, let us put South Africa's young people to work.

I thank you!