



REMARKS BY

**HONOURABLE MS SINDISIWE CHIKUNGA, MP**  
**MINISTER IN THE PRESIDENCY FOR WOMEN, YOUTH**  
**AND PERSONS WITH DISABILITIES**

ON THE OCCASION OF THE

**MEDIA LAUNCH OF THE GOLDEN JUBILEE**  
**COMMEMORATION OF THE 1976 YOUTH UPRISING**

THEME:

**RESET@50 – THE FUTURE CALLS**

***“Our National Commitment to the Future, for Freedom***  
***Lives in Every Generation.”***

Date: 14 May 2026 | Venue: Soweto, Gauteng Province

PROGRAMME:

**Launch of the Year-Long Golden Jubilee Commemoration**  
**Programme**

**Department of Women, Youth and Persons with Disabilities**  
**Republic of South Africa**

## **SALUTATIONS**

- **Programme Director and members of the media;**
- Deputy Minister in the Presidency for Women, Youth and Persons with Disabilities, **Honourable Mmapaseka Steve Letsike**, acknowledged in absentia;
- Premier of Gauteng Province, **Honourable Panyaza Lesufi**;
- Executive Chairperson of the **National Youth Development Agency (NYDA)**, **Dr Sunshine Myende**;
- Deputy Executive Chairperson, Board Members and Chief Executive Officer of the **NYDA**;
- Acting Director-General of the **Department of Women, Youth and Persons with Disabilities (DWYPD)** and senior officials present;
- Representatives of **national, provincial and local government**;
- Representatives of the **June 16 1976 Foundation**, **Charlotte Mannya-Maxeke Institute**, and other heritage, memory and civil society organisations;
- Representatives of the **United Nations**, diplomatic corps and international organisations;
- Representatives of the **private sector**, development finance institutions, telecommunications, media and technology sectors;
- Leaders of **youth formations** and political youth structures;
- Traditional leadership and faith-based leaders present;

- Distinguished guests;
- And most importantly, the **young people of South Africa**;

**Good morning.**

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## **1. OPENING: HISTORICAL CONTEXT**

**Programme Director,**

**Ladies and gentlemen,** it is easy on a day like this to observe protocol, proceed directly into the programme, and move quickly into the technical details of what is being launched.

But before we do so, I ask for your indulgence for a few moments.

We cannot launch the **Golden Jubilee Commemoration of the 1976 Youth Uprising** without first reflecting on the significance of the moment that brings us here.

Today, we are not merely launching a programme. We are opening a **national year of memory, reflection and action.**

Before we speak about what we will do, and before we speak about the future, let us return briefly to the past that made this future possible.

Because as we speak of **RESET@50**, part of that reset must be a **reset of consciousness through memory.**

We must **retell these stories, preserve them, and pass them on.**

Because **dare we forget.**

And so, we must remember that the morning of **16 June 1976** did not begin on **16 June.**

It had been building for decades.

In **1953**, the apartheid government introduced the **Bantu Education Act**, laying the foundation for an education system designed to **separate, control and limit Black children.**

By the late **1960s** and early **1970s**, a spirit was rising among **Black students and young people.** The **Black Consciousness Movement** was teaching a generation to **reject inferiority, to recover dignity,** and to understand that apartheid did not only control **land, labour and laws** — it also tried to control **the mind.**

In **1969**, the **South African Students' Organisation, SASO**, was launched at **Turfloop**, the then **University of the North.** Turfloop became one of the important centres of **Black student politics**, connecting the struggles of **township schools, rural campuses and national resistance.**

In **1972**, **Onkgopotse Tiro** delivered the **Turfloop Testimony**, condemning **Bantu Education** and the control of Black

education by apartheid authorities. He was expelled. Later, he taught history at **Morris Isaacson High School** in Soweto, where he encouraged learners to question Bantu Education. Among the generation influenced by this political consciousness was **Tsietsi Mashinini**.

Then, in **1974**, the apartheid state sharpened the crisis. It issued instructions that **Afrikaans and English** must be used on a **50/50 basis** as languages of instruction in Black secondary schools. Subjects such as **mathematics, arithmetic and social studies** were to be taught in Afrikaans.

This was not a neutral language policy. It was the apartheid state saying to Black children: **even your learning will happen on our terms**.

By **May 1976**, the matter had moved from **memoranda and warnings** into **student action**.

And this is why I want us, sitting here on this cold morning in **May 2026**, to imagine **May 1976**.

In just a few days from today's date, on **17 May 1976**, students at **Orlando West Junior Secondary School** would go on strike. Two days later, a committee of students would present a memorandum to their principal. Students from other schools would join the strike. By **24 May**, students from **Pimville Higher Primary** and **Khulangolwazi Higher Primary** would also join.

So in **May 1976**, young people were not merely thinking about resistance.

They were **already resisting**.

On cold mornings like this one, perhaps even colder, children were walking to school carrying more than books. They were carrying **fear, frustration, anger** and a growing **conviction** that something had to be done.

They were meeting secretly **before school and after school**. They were **mobilising** in classrooms, in schoolyards and between schools.

But their parents were afraid — and rightly so. Their teachers were afraid — and rightly so.

But what was to be done, when the **liberation movements were banned**. Leaders had been **jailed, exiled, restricted or killed**. But fear was present because communities knew the violence of the apartheid state.

But even in that climate of fear, and even in the cold of that season, the blood of young people was **boiling with conviction**.

They understood that enforcement of Afrikaans was not merely a language question. It was a question of **dignity, power and livelihood**.

By **13 June 1976**, student leaders had formed an **Action Committee**, later known as the **Soweto Students' Representative Council**. Their plan was not to start a violent uprising. Their plan was to hold a **peaceful protest** against the compulsory use of Afrikaans as a language of instruction.

On the morning of **16 June 1976**, learners from schools including **Naledi High School** and **Morris Isaacson High School** moved in organised columns, collecting other students along the way, with the intention of proceeding to **Orlando Stadium** for a peaceful rally.

At around **09:00**, **Tsietsi Mashinini** appealed to the students to remain calm. The message was clear: they were not there to fight. They were there to make a **political statement**.

But apartheid responded to children with **violence**. And when that violence came, the burden of that day was not carried by the students alone.

The recently aired documentary on **Mama Winnie Madikizela-Mandela** reminds us that the story of **1976** is also the story of **mothers, nurses and women** who ran towards the pain of the nation.

It reminds us that as children were wounded and killed, women like **Mama Winnie** and many others used whatever they had — their **cars, their homes, their hands, their courage** — to help

carry children to safe places like **Chris Hani Baragwanath Hospital**, where hundreds of children's lifeless bodies piled up overnight.

This image, must reminds us that the children of Soweto were not statistics. They were **sons and daughters**. They were **learners**. They were **the country's future**.

And so, as we gather here today, we remember not only the thousands of youth who marched, we remember the **hundreds of mothers who mourned**.

So, this **Golden Jubilee** matters. Because **June 1976** was not only a tragic period in our history. It was a moment of **political clarity**. It showed South Africa and the world that young people are not spectators in history. They are **makers of history** and **leaders of the future**.

Colleagues, because this is a **media launch**, allow me to **honour** the **journalists, photographers, editors and media teams** who helped the world see what apartheid wanted to hide.

We remember **Sam Nzima**, whose **photograph** of Hector Pieterse being carried by Mbuyisa Makhubo, with Antoinette Sithole running beside them, became one of the defining images of apartheid brutality.

We remember **Sophie Tema**, who **reported** on the students' march from the early hours of that morning, and Thomas Khoza, whose role in **moving material from the scene to the newsroom** helped carry the story beyond Soweto.

We also remember **legendary photographer Peter Magubane**, whose courageous documentation of apartheid violence, including the Soweto Uprising and its aftermath, helped preserve the visual memory of South Africa's struggle for freedom. Their work reminds us that media does not only report history but at critical moments also helps a nation and the world confront the difficult truth.

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## **SECTION 2: RESET@50 – THE FUTURE CALLS**

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So, distinguished guests, as young people were organising in **May 1976** towards a day of action, in **May 2026**, we gather to organise towards a **year of national action** under the theme ***'RESET@50 – The Future Calls'***.

**This** is not just a campaign. It is a **call to action**:

**To, Remember Truthfully:** not through selective memory, but the full truth of **pain, courage, betrayal, resilience and sacrifice**.

**To, Engage the Present:** by recognising the impact of the **1976 Youth Uprising** on the trajectory of our country, and what it demands of us today.

**To, Shift the Narrative:** from seeing young people as a problem, to recognising young people as **solutions and co-creators of today and the future.**

**To, Empower this Generation:** by transferring **leadership**, not only stories, and building intergenerational continuity.

**And to, Transform the Future:** by ensuring that our programmes advance **economic inclusion** for all young people, especially **young women** and **young persons with disabilities.**

Therefore, this theme recognises that much has been achieved since democracy, but it also requires us to consolidate those gains, confront what remains unresolved, and deliver **measurable opportunities** with and for young people.

### ***2.1. What Democracy Has Built for Young People***

**So, the question is what democracy has done for young people.**

In **1994**, young people entered a democracy that promised **political freedom, equal citizenship** and a new social contract.

In **1996**, that promise was given constitutional force. Our Constitution, which this year turns 30, affirmed the rights to **dignity, equality and freedom**.

Since then, government has expanded access to **education, student funding, youth development institutions, public participation platforms, skills development and employment pathways**.

Through **generations of student activism and progressive deliberate policy choices** of the democratic state, enrolment in the public university sector grew from 495 000 (**495,356**) **students in 1994** to more than 1 million (**1,077,768**) **students in 2022**. By **2025**, public universities were projected to enrol over **1.15 million students**, while **TVET colleges** were projected to enrol over **587,000 students**.

The struggles of student movements over many years, culminating in the **Fees Must Fall protests of 2015, 2016 and 2017**, pushed the country to confront the unfinished question of **free decolonised higher education**. Through **NSFAS**, millions of young people from poor and working-class households have accessed university and TVET opportunities. Between **2019 and 2023**, DHET reported that NSFAS disbursed **R192 billion**, benefiting almost **3.9 million students** in universities and TVET colleges.

We have also built a legislative and institutional framework for youth development. Through the **National Youth Development Agency Act of 2008**, and its subsequent **2024 amendment**, government has institutionalised youth development and created a dedicated agency to coordinate and support young people across the country.

And in this financial year, government is placing **R1.8 billion** behind the **NYDA** to expand youth development, entrepreneurship, employment pathways, skills development and paid service opportunities. This includes support for **youth-owned enterprises, business development support, job placement**, and work towards a **National Youth Fund Strategy**.

The **Presidential Youth Employment Intervention** has created a national platform for connecting young people to opportunities. By **2025**, the **National Pathway Management Network** had over **4.78 million young people registered**, with more than **1.67 million earning opportunities** secured to date.

In the basic education sector, the **Presidential Youth Employment Initiative** created opportunities for more than **320,000 young people** in approximately **23,000 public schools** in its first phase alone.

These gains matter.

They show that democracy has created **institutions**, opened **doors**, and placed **resources** behind youth development.

But the next phase cannot be measured only by **access**.

It must be measured by **completion**, **transition**, **absorption**, **ownership** and **dignity**.

That is where the reset begins.

## ***2.2 Why the Reset Is Necessary and What Must Change***

Ladies and gentlemen,

So why is the RESET necessary and what must change?

**Stats SA's Quarterly Labour Force Survey issued yesterday stated the youth unemployment increased to 32,7%.**

Stats SA also records that more than **four in ten young people aged 15 to 34 were not in employment, education or training**, with the NEET rate for this age group reaching **45.6%** in the first quarter of 2026.

These figures require us to focus on the pressure points in the youth development pipeline.

It is not enough for young people to **enter education** if they do not **complete**, and if completion does not lead to **work, enterprise or further training**.

It is not enough to **train young people** if those skills are not linked to **growing sectors, real employers and productive opportunities**.

It is not enough to support young people with **ideas, businesses and digital access** if they remain outside **finance, procurement, markets, value chains and the digital economy**.

That is why this reset is also a call to **higher education institutions, SETAs, industry and the private sector** to work together more deliberately.

Universities and TVET colleges must work with industry in the **co-creation of curricula**, workplace exposure and skills planning, so that young people are not trained for an economy that cannot absorb them.

To the private sector and strategic institutions represented here today and elsewhere: your presence must translate into concrete commitments — **jobs and work experience, support for youth-owned enterprises, and investment in future skills**.

That is the practical meaning of **RESET@50**: a youth development pipeline that moves young people from **access to completion**, from **qualifications to pathways**, and from **training to absorption, ownership and dignity**.

It must be a **social reset**: rebuilding the social fabric around young people through **social cohesion, patriotism, national identity and shared responsibility**. This means confronting **GBVF, substance abuse, harmful masculinities, mental health challenges, racism, sexism, ableism and social fragmentation**.

It must be a **political reset**: rebuilding how the state listens, implements and accounts to young people and society at large.

It must be an **economic reset**: moving young people from **participation to ownership**, and from **access to real pathways**. It must prepare young people for an economy already shaped by **artificial intelligence, data, cybersecurity, digital platforms, e-commerce, green technologies, advanced manufacturing and new forms of work**. We cannot allow the digital economy to become a new geography of exclusion.

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### **SECTION 3: THE FUTURE THAT CALLS**

So, colleagues...

As we mark **RESET@50 – The Future Calls**, the Chief Executive Officer of the NYDA will outline the year-long roadmap in greater detail.

At a political level, our position is clear: this **Golden Jubilee** is not a one-day event. It is a **year-long national programme of action**.

It must turn the memory of **1976** into measurable opportunities for the youth of **2026**, especially through economic inclusion, future skills, disability inclusion and economic freedom.

The test of this Jubilee will not be the number of events we host. It will be the number of **doors we open**.

**Colleagues**, we acknowledge every organisation, institution, creative industries, media house and partners already carrying the memory of **June 16** through commemorations, dialogues, exhibitions, documentaries, lectures, community programmes and commitments to opportunities.

We welcome creative works such as ***Studying Under the Barrel of a Gun***, directed by **Tebogo Malope** and produced by **Cornet Thabiso Mamabolo**, which helps recover the story of **Turfloop**, student resistance, military occupation and the wider history of youth activism beyond Soweto.

These efforts remind us that the memory of **1976** does not belong to government alone. It belongs to the people.

Government's role is to **coordinate, support, amplify and ensure that memory becomes action**.

We therefore encourage more South Africans to participate in this Golden Jubilee.

Let schools and universities create spaces for **intergenerational dialogue**. **Let families** tell their stories and **young people** use their phones, podcasts, community radio, TikTok and other digital platforms to record the voices of their parents, grandparents, aunts and uncles. Let **media houses** seek out the voices we have not heard enough.

But as we preserve memory, we must also challenge young people to imagine the future.

The youth of today must help us answer a bold question: **what must South Africa look like as a digitised nation by 2076?**

As we mark **50 years since 1976**, we must ask young people to help shape the next **50 years** — towards a **National Youth Development Plan 2076** that speaks to digital inclusion, future industries, innovation, ethical and patriotic leadership, economic ownership and a society where no young person is left behind.

**Distinguished guests,**

As part of this national commemoration, we look forward to gathering here in **Soweto on 16 June 2026**, where the nation, led by **His Excellency, President Cyril Ramaphosa**, will honour the generation of **1976**.

Let this **Golden Jubilee** be remembered not only for what we said about **1976**, but for what we built for **2026 to 2076**.

Let every **sphere of government**, every **institution**, every **private sector partner**, every academia, every young person and every **community** ask: **what will we contribute to the next 50 years of youth development?**

**Long live the class of 1976.**

**I thank you, and God bless you all.**