

President Cyril Ramaphosa's 2020 Youth Day message

16 June 2020

I would like to greet all the young men and women of South Africa on this day, when we celebrate the brave youth of 1976, young people of our country who defied apartheid and fought for our freedom.

It is an opportunity to focus on matters that confront the young people of today, to reflect on the progress that we have made in empowering young people and to determine the tasks that lie ahead.

The coronavirus pandemic has had major health, economic and social effects on the lives of young people and old people.

It has made worse already slow economic growth in our country. It has made businesses suffer, led to job losses and affected education and study.

Our capacity as a country to withstand the shocks caused by COVID-19 has been largely determined by our social circumstances and it has brought to the fore the deep inequalities that persist in our country until today.

We can no longer for example have a situation where young people in rural areas do not have access to technology to enable them to work and to study.

This pandemic provides us with an opportunity to inject new perspectives into how we can turn our economy around, but also how we can really imagine our very society.

Young people must rise to the challenge of leading our recovery after the Coronavirus. We have young entrepreneurs and business owners who through their innovative ideas have been able to change their communities for the better and create new employment opportunities.

We have outstanding young people, in the sciences and research, in sports, in entertainment and other fields who have represented our country on global platforms and stages.

The voices of young people in movements such as Fees Must Fall and protests against gender-based violence have been catalysts for change.

The remarkable potential in our young people across all sectors and spaces is undeniable and young people from time immemorial have always been driven by changing the world, by changing the way things are done, by changing the way we live, by changing unjust systems, by bringing about justice and bringing about a new world.

The moment that we now confront post COVID-19 calls young people across the length and the breadth of our country to be part of that change and to be change agents.

It also calls on young people to rebuild our economy and make a difference in the lives of our communities.

It also calls on young people to be the young people who are going to underpin everything they do with the best of values, who are going to be rooted in principle in creating a South Africa that we can all be proud of.

I once again affirm our commitment as government to supporting young people in every stage of life.

Through our social partnerships and youth-focused programmes, we are committed to unlocking the full potential of the young people of our country.

And as a government our commitment is irrevocable. We will continue to support our young people from cradle right through to young adulthood. We are providing education and training opportunities so that the youth get the skills that are needed by our economy.

Through the National Student Financial Aid Scheme, we are working to ensure that poverty is no longer a barrier to accessing education.

Your social status should no longer be a barrier to being educated and becoming skilled because we recognise that a country that invests in its youth is clearly on the road to prosperity and that is where we want to be.

Through the Presidential Youth Employment Intervention we have to create new pathways into employment for our youth, ensure that they gain the right skills and are able to start their own businesses and get into good jobs as well.

Through the National Youth Service young people are able to contribute to their communities and this builds an ethos of positive and engaged citizenship where young people become activists for good, activists for changing the lives of our people.

Whether it is through the work of the National Youth Development Agency, through the Expanded Public Works Programme and the Community Works Programme or through the Small Enterprise Finance Agency, we are broadening the frontiers of opportunity for our young people every day.

On this day that we pay tribute to the courage, the resilience and optimism of the youth of 1976, we also salute today's generation who are determined, who are focused, who are resolute, but who also have great hopes about their own future and the future of our country.

Though the challenges we face are immense our young people have proven time and time again that their immense optimism and desire to make a change is very strong.

So I want to wish all our young people a happy Youth Day and call on you the young people of our country once again to join us in the immense task of rebuilding South Africa and to making this country a place of peace, of equality and prosperity for all.

A country that you as the young people of our country will engage in building, because as the people of our country you are the change agents that this country has been waiting for.

You must become the change that you want to be, you must become the vehicles of transformation, the vehicles of innovation, the vehicles of creating this great country of ours, South Africa.

So I thank you on this day and wish you the very best. May you grow in strength and determination as you build our country going forward.

Thank you very much.