



**MINISTRY OF DEFENCE AND MILITARY VETERANS
REPUBLIC OF SOUTH AFRICA**

**ADDRESS BY MINISTER OF DEFENCE AND MILITARY
VETERANS, MS NOSIVIWE MAPISA-NQAKULA AT YOUTH DAY
CELEBRATIONS IN RIVIERSONDEREND, WESTERN CAPE**

Program Director
MEC for Community Safety, Dan Plato

Deputy Mayor of Theewaterskloof,

Councillor Kairo Tiemie

Members of the Riviersonderend Youth Forum

Senior Officials

Members of the community

We are indeed grateful to be part of this occasion, here in one of the most remote corners of our country, where away from the glare of publicity we can concentrate on the real issues facing our youth.

Today, we commemorate national youth day. Not only do we remember the heroism a past generation, but also celebrate what their struggles have done to the benefit of the present day generation. We remember and celebrate also in the knowledge, that despite the challenges that still remain, the successes of the past 19 years have given us real hope for the future.

It is an honour to be with you on a day that we celebrate the heroism of

the class of 76. It is not everyday that, on a day like this, the focus of the nation can fall on a small community like this one. Special thanks should be extended to the Riviersonderend Youth Forum who are our hosts today.

The uprising of students in 1976 which rapidly spread from Soweto to all corners of the country shook the foundations of apartheid. It ushered in an era of militancy which saw an intensification of internal resistance to apartheid and an exodus of youths to join externally based liberation movements as combatants. The death knell for apartheid was sounded.

Every year on June 16 we remember the courage and sacrifice of these youths. We honour them in song, dance, speech and poetry. The best way to honour them is to resolve many problems faced by the youth today which prevent them from realizing their potential to be productive and fulfilled citizens. High unemployment, endemic poverty, crime and substance abuse blight the lives of our youths throughout the country.

The 2011 census results revealed that close to 60 per cent of South Africa's population is under the age of 35. The overall unemployment rate in the country is 25 per cent. What is alarming is that those between the ages of 25 and 34 constitute 71 per cent of the unemployed. About 3,3 million youths are neither employed nor studying. This is an unacceptable state of affairs which enjoins all of us to find lasting solutions. What future does this country have if we do not invest in our youth and create conditions that offer opportunities for the realization of their full potential?

We must continue to invest in education and skills development but

seek better results than are currently been achieved .Our youths must be equipped to find gainful employment or set up their own businesses. Chronic unemployment is the scourge that breeds poverty, crime, substance abuse and the disintegration of families. Poverty, alienation, despair and a sense of worthlessness drive many of our youths to engage in destructive anti-social behaviour. We have to stop the rot.

The situation here in Riviersonderend is all too depressingly familiar. It is a small community with an unemployment rate of 40 per cent with all the attendant social ills. I am told that alcohol and drug abuse are rife. Violent crimes against women and children are tearing the social fabric of this community apart. Teenage pregnancies are high. With limited economic activity in the area prospects for employment are low. Most youths have little education and seem destined to remain trapped in poverty and helplessness. Parents, if they are there, are too poor to make any meaningful interventions to improve the lot of their children. It is no consolation to say to you that many other communities in the country are in a similar situation.

My message to you is that we cannot afford to surrender to despair and helplessness. Together we can make sure that no one is written off as a hopeless case and left behind. Nowhere is it prescribed that the youth of Riviersonderend and elsewhere are condemned to languish on the margins of society with no prospects for upward mobility. Nowhere does it say that a life of substance abuse and crime is the only answer to a seemingly hopeless situation.

Government has a role to play .It has a constitutional obligation to provide education and health to all citizens especially those who cannot pay for these services. All over the world it has been proven that education is the most effective tool to lift people from poverty. A

skilled and educated people are an essential precondition for the economic development of nations. That government takes this responsibility seriously is illustrated by the fact that education consumes nearly a quarter of the national budget.

But our youths also have to take personal responsibility to improve their circumstances. They must have the discipline, initiative and focus to conquer adversity and become productive citizens. They should not allow despair to blind them to opportunities that exist for self-improvement. They must realize that violence, crime and substance abuse only lead to a dead end.

One of the fruits of our democracy is a transformed and inclusive South African National Defence Force (SANDF) which is there to serve you. It is no longer an instrument of your oppression. We are present here in the form of a small exhibition as a friend of this community. I urge you, if you have not already done so, to visit the stands and learn more about the SANDF and the career opportunities it offers. All arms of service –army, navy, air force and health services- are here.

We wish to rejuvenate our defence force by recruiting young people from different backgrounds throughout the country. We particularly need educated and skilled young South Africans to serve in a modern and technologically advanced defence force. While there are exciting career opportunities in the SANDF, I must stress that due to acute budgetary constraints there is a limit to the numbers the force can recruit. Indeed government as a whole can only employ a small percentage of the workforce. It is the private and productive public sectors that should create the bulk of jobs. Government's responsibility is to put in place a policy environment that attracts the investment needed to grow the economy and create jobs. Such a policy framework

exists in the National Development Plan which was officially adopted at the ANC conference in Mangaung last year.

The Department of Defence is at an early stage of conceptualizing a National Youth Service whose focus will be on the development of entrepreneurial skills. After training, young people will work in the SANDF, other government departments mainly in the security cluster and in the private sector. The defence force also recruits youths through the Military Skills Development System (MSDS) and University Reserve Training Programme (URTP) officials at the exhibition stands will explain how these systems work.

The core responsibility of the SANDF is to protect the sovereignty, territorial integrity and people of South Africa. Its role, however, goes beyond that. It has an inherent capability to contribute to the nation's economic development and to the upliftment of communities such as yours. We are currently looking at the enhancement of the force's ability to stimulate local economic growth through various interventions and to assist communities in distress.

We are aware of the devastation on your community caused by substance abuse and gratuitous violence. The SANDF will provide social workers, psychologists and health staff to assist this community deal with these social pathologies. At a broader level government has embarked on a relentless campaign to rid communities such as yours of drug lords and other criminals who are destroying the lives of young people.

Today we invoke the spirit and courage of the youths of 1976 whose selfless heroism paved the way for the freedom we enjoy today. We now live in a democracy which, despite its imperfections, is the envy of

many in the world. The challenge we face is to create the material conditions that will enable us to tackle and ultimately eliminate the grinding poverty that afflicts the lives of too many of our people. The youths of today must drive the economic development and transformation needed to have an inclusive economy that provides a better life for all South Africans. This is the only way we can truly honour all our youths who paid the ultimate price so that we may live as free men and women.

I thank you

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