

YOUTH DAY SPEECH

Master of ceremonies,
Flag officers,
The Acting Secretary for Defence and Chief of the South African National Defence Force,
Generals and Senior Officers of the Department of Defence,
Distinguished Guests,
Young men and women of the DOD present and on parade,
Members of the media,
Ladies and Gentlemen:

It is a great honour and a privilege for me to address you today on behalf of the Minister of Defence Honourable Minister L. Sisulu, as we gather to join in the month-long commemoration of the 1976 June 16 student uprising. This year our nation celebrates the 33rd anniversary of this event, coming as it does in the wake of the recently held Fourth General Elections since the advent of our Democracy in 1994, in which the youth asserted itself as an important voting constituency of our national electorate.

This day reminds us of the courage, determination and sacrifice demonstrated by young men and women of our country in dismantling the shackles of apartheid.

With courage and enthusiasm to eradicate the demon of oppression in our society, the youth of our country intensified the struggle for emancipation and contributed to the creation of an equal, just and peaceful society. Their bravery in confronting the tyranny of apartheid and its many social-ills contributed immensely to the democracy we enjoy today.

Ladies and gentlemen, it is clear from their single-mindedness and unity that nothing could have prevented them from their will to live in a free society, a society in which they would not be judged by the colour of their skin but by the content of the character, so to speak.

Thirty-three years later, their spirit and relentless commitments to social justice is exemplary, and will continue to guide and inspire young people for generations to come.

They indeed demonstrated the significance of youth participation in matters of national interest. Master of Ceremonies, the youth has an important role to play in nation-building and the welfare of all our people. Our government has recently established the Women, Youth, Children and People with Disability Department, which amongst its priorities, aims to give special attention to the needs of all young people in South Africa. The government did this in recognition of the fact that young people do have a valid input to make in shaping the future of our country.

Today we mark SA Youth Day under the theme: "*Unity of purpose*". It is therefore fitting that we meet here today to celebrate this historic day in our national calendar. The Department of Defence (DOD) continues to participate in promoting initiatives that seek to empower the youth of our country.

The two year voluntary Military Skills Development system (MSDS) is one of the DOD's contributions to national youth development. Through the MSDS the Department is actively contributing to the realization of the core objectives of the

Accelerated and Shared Growth Initiative for South Africa (AGSISA) and the Joint Initiative for Priority Skills Acquisition (JIPSA). The MSDS programme enables us to fight poverty and to assist in reducing the high level of unemployment amongst our youth.

We are told that those who have served the two years under the MSDS programme can confirm that it has enabled them to enter the workplace with greater confidence and maturity. The young people who come from their MSDS service are on the whole, distinct patriotic young South Africans who are more mature, better skilled and imbued with a sense of duty.

All of you in the MSDS programme are indeed a special contingent of today's youth. You have undertaken a challenging task to serve the people of South Africa and to defend the country's sovereignty. The DOD is grateful for your contribution to the realisation of this constitutional mandate.

MSDS recruits are the future of the south African National Defence force (SANDF). The SANDF's prospects are in your hands and it relies greatly on your continued commitment to serve the people of this country. It is our wish that all those who may find employment outside our organisation continue to serve in the Reserve Force. This will ensure the sustainable rejuvenation and enhanced operational readiness of the SANDF.

As you would be aware, the infusion of young, fit and health members into the SANDF through the MSDS is a direct enabling factor towards the operational readiness and success our defence service-delivery, in pear operations.

In this regard, I would like on behalf of the Minister, to extend my sincere gratitude and appreciation to deployable MSDS recruits for their contribution to peace support operations. As ambassadors of our country, they have done a sterling job in ensuring that we contribute positively to Africa's quest for peace and sustainable development.

You should be proud that you are making a huge contribution to the development of our continent. While conditions have changed since the dawn of democracy in our country and several decades have elapsed since the events of 1976, it is clear that you are willing to carry on the legacy of the class of 1976.

As you do so, you need constantly to perform your duties in a diligent, professional and loyal manner. This will ensure that you grow to be reliable and accountable leaders of the SANDF and our country as a whole.

Colleagues, as we will all agree, reports or incidents that seek to eclipse your fine job in the DOD, such as cases of ill-discipline, alcohol abuse, abuse of state facilities and insubordination by MSDS members have no room in our department.

The MSDS programme is partly aimed at nurturing responsible leaders and members of society at large. As future leaders of the SANDF and our country, it behoves you to practice "*Tough Love*" by being stricter with yourselves, as the writer, Robin Sharma argues "*To shape the quality of your lives through the quality of your choices and decisions, ranging from the career you choose, to the books you read, the time you wake up in the morning, and the thoughts you think during the hours of your days.*" One important imperative of discipline today as young people is to take due care of our health as individuals by avoiding doing anything

that will expose us to the HIV virus.

To those who are already infected, we will continue perfecting the provision of comprehensive treatment and care through research of best practices for them and their dependants.

In conclusion, programme director, it is often said that a healthy body bears a healthy mind. On behalf of the Minister, may I commend all those who were involved in organising today's games, thereby contributing not only to the good health profile of the population under our department, but also to our national quest to become a sporting nation of note, continentally and globally.

Today we have our sporting events in the DOD as our country is hosting the CONFEDERATIONS CUP, we wish FIFA, the LOC and SAFA well in this endeavour and commend South Africans for their passion for soccer and sport in general.

I trust that you will all enjoy yourselves and hope that those who will be watching from the sidelines will also have a wonderful day.

To all young adults of our country in the Department of Defence, go ahead and enjoy this day – after all it is in your honour.

I thank you!!