

Introduction

Sign language¹. Dumelang. Molweni. Good Evening. Sanibonani. Avuxeni. Goeienaand. Ndaa!

Tonight is not the night to talk about the 8th consecutive clean audit reports or the over 2000 youth enterprises that we have supported in the last financial year alone, nor is it about the thousands of jobs we have created and/or sustained. Many of the beneficiaries are young women.

It is not even to boast about the incredible achievement of the NYDA Disability Strategy that was adopted last year.

Tonight is about all of you; young, beautiful, ambitious, intelligent and powerful South African women. You have come from different parts of our land, different cultures, languages and backgrounds.

But what unites you, are your aspirations, willpower and the strength that lies in each and everyone one of your characters!

Congratulations on making it this far! And a special congratulations to the **Women of Firsts** - all of you graduating this evening.

(Please join me in giving them and yourselves a round of applause!)

NYDA: NYP 2023 and IYDS 2022 -2025

A bit of housekeeping requires me to remind you that the National Youth Development Agency, (NYDA), is a South African youth-based agency established mainly to address challenges faced by South African youth. The Agency was established by an Act of Parliament in 2008 with the objectives of improving access to quality education, facilitating and implementing skills development programmes, and establishing key partnerships - among other important tasks.

As part of these tasks, the Integrated Youth Development Strategy (IYDS) 2022 - 2025 was adopted by the Cabinet in 2022 and it is a tool to ensure that the objectives of the National Youth Plan 2030 are met.

Your role in this Plan and Strategy is pivotal. Both these documents are available on the NYDA website for you to download, study and contribute to. It is through actions such as these and others, that South African youth and women can be - no longer in words or speeches but in action and deed - completely integrated into the economy and society in general.

¹ The greetings is almost like an army salute but without taking you hand all the awy down from your forehead to your waist - not more than 10 centimetres from your forehead
Please see: Picture at the end of this speech OR <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=56sFxKa9JYI>

I must also remind you that four out of the seven appointed NYDA Board Members are young women, while the two most senior positions - Executive Chairperson and Deputy are assumed by women. As of March 2022, the total employee split for the NYDA was 334 females to 215 males².

Most of the people in this country, continent and world are women, so these numbers should be 'normal' if we were to consider proportions. But they most certainly aren't.

NYDA Office of the Executive Chairperson: 2021 to Present

I was appointed in 2021 by the President of the Republic of South Africa, making me the first female Executive Chairperson of the NYDA. One of the things he said when he appointed us, is that "the new board of the National Youth Development Agency carries a great responsibility in the country's drive to empower young people through skills development, employment, work experience and other opportunities³."

That is precisely why I made it one of my missions, during my term in office, to break glass ceilings and unlock doors for other young women and girls. In this regard, Programme Pillar One in my office is "Women of Firsts" which is divided into the four areas of Women in Sports, Empower the girl child, Promotion of Gender Parity and (why we are here tonight) the Executive Chairperson's Mentorship Programme,

This programme is in its second year and is one of the various projects that my office has initiated specifically, targeting girls and young women.

The Programme Facilitator, Ms Kgabo Lucia Mabunda, has done a great job in outlining the purpose of the Mentorship Programme; to the new Cohort - remember why you applied! And to our graduates tonight - do not forget the lessons learnt, all the skills you have acquired and the networks you have established.

We know that an ecosystem needs to be (re)developed to (re)create the conditions that make it possible for young women to thrive in the economy, sports, media, government and civil society as a whole. As the NYDA we are alive to the realities and challenges facing young women and the mammoth task to compete on a level playing field. Through projects we initiate, strategic partnerships we establish and the policy direction we advocate for, the ecosystem is progressively changing.

² National Youth Development Agency. 2022. Annual Report 2021/2022, p122

³<https://www.thepresidency.gov.za/press-statements/president-ramaphosa-appoints-new-board-national-youth-development-agency>

StatsSA released their Quarterly Labour Force Survey earlier today and the official unemployment rate is 32.6% of the working-age population⁴. While this number has decreased by 11 000 since the last quarter, that translates to about 7.9 million people who are without jobs and a steady income. The jobs that your businesses can potentially create, won't only be life-changing to many families but can also reduce unemployment and help reduce poverty - even if it is one family at a time.

Before I conclude, let me tell you about the daughter of former slaves, who went on to become America's first self-made female millionaire! That is, without inheriting or acquiring it through some settlements. Her name was Madame C.J. Walker, although she was born Sarah Breedlove in 1867 in Louisiana, USA (a southern slave state at the time).

She created hair products through a manufacturing company she founded in 1910 and employed over 3000⁵ women, a majority of them black. She donated to worthy causes and was an activist in her own right.

When she passed away in 1919, her company is said to have been making \$500 000 per annum.⁶ Taking that into perspective in 2023, with inflation taken into consideration, that is equivalent to about \$8.9 million⁷ (over R170 million per year)! Sadly, the company closed down in 1981, 62 years after she transitioned and lasted longer than her own life.

On that note, I would like to thank everyone who has been part of this Programme - from the conceptualisation phases right up to its implementation. You have breathed life into a vision that only a few years ago was a pipedream. (Perhaps name these people/institutions/organisations?)

Conclusion

To the new Cohort:

Women to Come; take heed of the fierce equal rights activist, provocative poet and philosopher Audre Lorde when she proclaimed: "It is never easy to demand the most from ourselves, from our lives, from our work. To encourage excellence is to go beyond the mediocrity of our society. But giving in to the fear of feeling and working to capacity is a luxury only the unintentional can afford, and the unintentional are those who do not wish to guide their own destinies⁸." Take your future into both your hands and guide your destinies!

⁴ Department Statistics South Africa. 2023. Quarterly Labour Force Survey, p1

⁵ <https://www.rd.com/list/female-firsts/>

⁶ <https://www.guinnessworldrecords.com/world-records/first-self-made-millionairess>

⁷ <https://www.dollartimes.com/inflation/inflation.php?amount=500000&year=1919>

⁸ Lorde, Audre. The Master's Tools Will Never Dismantle the Master's House, p7-8

On the graduates this evening: Out of all those that applied for the previous 2022 Cohort, eight were shortlisted and six are graduating this evening. These six not only completed the Programme but performed with distinction.

Armed with all the knowledge you have gained and driven by the skills you have been taught - go out there with heightened self-confidence knowing you were the **Women of Firsts!**

Emulate the self-confidence, bravery, resilience and brainpower of Madam C. J. Walker! Despite being born to former slaves, her struggles which include losing both her parents before the age of 10, systemic racism and patriarchy - she defied all odds set in her path and did the unthinkable!

Go out there and make something that will last for longer than you! And in the process, make yourselves, your families and this land of ours proud!

Again, congratulations.

I thank you.

"Hello"



***Footnote 1: Hello - in sign language**

References

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