



• Monday, 15 June 2020 •

Dear Fellow South African,

The words of Frantz Fanon that 'each generation must discover its mission' come to mind every time I have an opportunity to speak with young South Africans.

No matter where they live and no matter what they do, they each have a burning desire to change the world.

While they certainly want to improve their own lives, they also want to achieve a better society and a better world. They see themselves as agents for fundamental transformation.

Throughout history young people have been a driving force for change. In just the last few decades, young people have waged numerous struggles against injustice, from the 1968 student uprising in Paris, to the anti-war movement in the United States in the 1960s, to the anti-colonial struggle in many African and Asian countries, to the fight against apartheid, to the Arab Spring.

Most recently, young people have been at the forefront of the #BlackLivesMatter movement that has gained global support in the wake of the killing of George Floyd in the United States.

Over the past week, activists around the world have also been demanding the removal of

symbols that glorify the barbarity and violence of the slave trade and colonialism.

At an Oxford University demonstration last week a protestor carried a placard with the words 'Rhodes must Fall', the rallying cry of students in our own country five years ago.

Young people across the world have found common cause. They are tearing down of statues and symbols of racism, demanding the decolonisation of educational curricula, and calling for institutions to address racism and social exclusion.

And so, as we pay tribute to the generation of 1976 on this Youth Day, we also salute the youth of post-apartheid South Africa, the worthy inheritors of this noble legacy.

The mission of 1976 generation was to dismantle bantu education; that of today's youth is to take forward the project of national reconciliation and transformation.

In time to come it will be said that this year, 2020, marked the start of a new epoch in human history.

Not only has coronavirus had a momentous impact on people's lives and livelihoods, it has also shaken up the global social order.

The manner in which the pandemic has taken hold has been a reminder of the interconnectedness of the human race and of the deep inequalities that exist between countries and within countries.

The pandemic presents an opportunity to 'reset' a world that is characterised by crass materialism, selfishness and self-absorption not just on the part of individuals but whole societies.

Young people are telling us that the essential values of integrity, compassion and solidarity must be the hallmarks of the new society that will emerge, and that they are determined to be the champions of this new, better world.

In the discussions I have had with young people during this Youth Month, I have said that we

should never underestimate the power of an idea, because ideas can and have changed the world. Ideas have spurred human progress and they are what will enable us to chart a new path in the post-coronavirus era.

These young people have turned their ideas into action. They have not let a lack of resources hinder them. They have carved a niche for themselves in a number of sectors from high-tech to environmental sustainability.

They are determined to succeed on their own merits, to not depend on handouts, and once they have 'made it' to help their peers.

Through programmes like the Presidential Youth Employment Initiative, the National Youth Service and many more we want to support this country's young people to see their ideas through from incubation to opening the doors of their businesses.

Youth unemployment is the greatest challenge we face and the coronavirus pandemic has exacerbated an already dire situation.

Now more than ever we will look to the innovative and pioneering spirit of our youth to come up with solutions to the unemployment crisis that benefit them, their communities and society.

At the same time, I challenge our country's youth to craft and design programmes that will enable us to meet our developmental goals.

In 1961, revolutionary Cuba sent legions of young student volunteers into the mountains and villages to construct schools, teach literacy and train new educators. It is still held up as one of the most successful literacy campaigns in modern history.

Our young people must develop social upliftment initiatives and they must lead them.

Just as they took up the struggle for equality in higher education, the considerable energies of our youth must also be brought to bear to fight for equitable access to health care, for the transformation of land ownership and, most importantly, for gender justice.

Like all South Africans, I have been deeply disturbed by a surge over the last few days in the murder of young women at the hands of men. These are shocking acts of inhumanity that have no place in our society.

Youth-led civic activism, awareness raising and peer counselling are vital tools in our efforts to eradicate gender-based violence from society. At the same time, we must strengthen our justice system, ensuring that perpetrators are brought to book, bail and parole conditions are tightened and that those sentenced to life spend the rest of their lives behind bars.

While this needs society-wide action, I call on young men in particular to take up the struggle against gender-based violence. Unless we end the war that is being waged against South African women, the dream of a new society will remain elusive.

Those of us who were part of student movements during the apartheid era are often asked what we think of the young people of today. There is a temptation to retreat into nostalgia about 'the glory days' of student politics and youth struggle, never to be replicated.

But just as the youth of yesteryear defined their mission, today's youth have defined theirs.

South African youth of 2020 more than meet the high standard set by their predecessors. They are optimistic, resilient and courageous, often in the face of the harshest of circumstances.

They are a source of inspiration and hope. Through their actions, they are building a world that is more just, equal, sustainable and at peace.

I wish all the young people of South Africa a meaningful and inspiring Youth Day.

With best wishes,

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading "Cyril Ramaphosa". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.