



Monday 23 August 2021

Dear Fellow South African,

Today, I want to speak to the young people of South Africa. Young people are turning out in impressive numbers to get the COVID-19 vaccine. This fills me with great pride. Over half a million South Africans enrolled on the day that registration for over 18s opened.

The young people of our country are giving us all hope that an end to this time of hardship is within our sights.

As I watched young people being interviewed while queueing at vaccination centres I was impressed by their enthusiasm and excitement. Most of all I was impressed by their knowledge about the vaccine, how it can protect, and why it is necessary.

I heard young men and women speaking of the need to protect those at risk in their communities. I read a post online by a young person urging those who follow her on social media to take heed of the early days of the HIV/Aids pandemic, when young people died unnecessarily because they believed false stories that were then circulating that antiretroviral medication was deadly, or because they disregarded advice to practice safe sex.

The maturity that young people have brought to the important task of vaccinating as many South Africans as possible calls to mind the words of Frantz Fanon, that it is to each generation to discover its mission and fulfil it.

In 1994, millions of South Africans stood in queues to fulfil the mission of liberation. Many young people stood in those long queues to cast their vote for the first time.

Today it is the turn of the new generation of young people.

Today's young people are being called upon to step up and be at the forefront in this defining moment in the life of our nation.

Last week, we passed the milestone of 10 million vaccine doses administered. Nearly 5 million people are fully vaccinated, which means they have received one dose of the J&J vaccine or two doses of the Pfizer vaccine. But we still have a long way to go.

This is where young people come in. We are calling on them to go out and get vaccinated so that we reach our goal.

I was not surprised to see young people taking to this task with such determination. Since the pandemic broke out 17 months ago, young South Africans have been an integral part of the national effort to battle the coronavirus.

We have seen the youth step up to keep themselves and others safe. We have seen youth formations and community organisations, young leaders, influencers and content creators using their platforms to share public health messages with their peers.

Young people have been brave and forthright when they have seen the friends or popular personalities violating the regulations at parties, grooves and gatherings. They have called them out. We have seen how young people have been helping with the national vaccination drive, even when they were not yet eligible themselves.

We are proud of the young volunteers in our communities, like those from #GrandkidsforGogos who assisted the elderly with vaccination registration at social grant pay-points. One young volunteer was asked what motivated her and she said: "I am where I am because of the elderly."

I hear such powerful words from young people often. Despite the hardship caused by the

pandemic, they are still optimistic, and they still want to be of service to our country. By getting vaccinated they aren't just protecting themselves, but also those around them.

There is still a lot of shady content being circulated out there about the vaccine. These conspiracy theories are far-fetched, and I am calling on young people once again to not circulate them. These messages are harmful, and are making people hesitant to get vaccinated. This is not only harmful to young people, but many others, including people at risk who really need the vaccine.

Young people are digital natives. They are more tech savvy than any generation that came before them. It is important that they help to spread the correct information around vaccines provided by the Department of Health and World Health Organisation.

We would like to see young people becoming walking adverts for the vaccination process. We appeal to young people to post pictures of themselves getting vaccinated.

These vaccines are safe. They work. They don't affect anybody's performance in any way. Most importantly, they save lives. Young people have always been the drivers of progress, innovation and change.

You are determined to build a better, brighter future. We must emerge from this health crisis so we can recover and rebuild.

I want to give a shout out to those who have got their jab. I also want to thank all the youth organisations, leaders and influencers for their efforts to encourage young people to get vaccinated, and call on them to continue with this work. Your time is now. Go and get your jab. This is your mission and your chance to fulfil it.

With best regards,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Ajit Ramakrishna". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.