



AFRICAN NATIONAL CONGRESS

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Speaker's Notes

JUNE 16 - SOUTH AFRICA'S YOUTH DAY

INTRODUCTION

This year marks the 12th Anniversary of the heroic student and youth upsurges of South Africa on June the 16th of 1976. In form and magnitude the upheavals added glorious chapters to the annals of our struggles already replete with examples of great courage and determination by the oppressed throughout the length and breadth of South Africa.

As we observe South Africa's Youth Day (declared by the NEC of the ANC in 1986) in 1988, we record with great satisfaction that the spirit of June 16th lives on among thousands upon thousands of young South African militants. It is manifested in phenomenal youth and students involvement in the mass democratic struggles at home, and a spirit of no-surrender amongst those abroad.

For over a decade now the world has witnessed brave and determined struggles by our Black youth and students despite incessant harrassment and reprisals by the regime. Extensive school boycotts, massive demonstrations, militant rejection of the community council system - are some of the marks scored by the youth in the struggle for freedom and democracy. Out of this fierce crucible of battles the youth have emerged even better organised and more steeled. They are surely earning the heirdom to the rich tradition of fighting established by generations of youth such as the ANC Youth League, the latter days SASO, NAYO and the various township SRCs which confronted the regime in the '70s.

SIGNIFICANCE:

The 1976 uprisings set the system of Bantu Education on a route of destruction. Even then the racists responded with the brute force of state power resulting in hundreds killed and yet thousands forced into exile - the immense majority of who joined the ANC to fight for a democratic and non-racial South Africa.

Many veterans of the June 16th generation have today matured into experienced leaders in the mass democratic movement and the underground structures of the ANC and its allies inside the country, whereas others have become gallant combatants in the ranks of the MK, inspiring both young and old.

ENEMY REACTION:

Evidently, the post-June 16 period, as a consequence became one of unprecedented youth participation at every level of the struggle - a feat which remains a challenge to generations to come. In a manner perhaps unforeseen, the youth of our country have managed to survive very admirably the regime's attempts to intimidate and muzzle them through indiscriminate arrests and bannings - we recall the fateful detentions and arrests of student leaders and the banning in 1977 of nineteen progressive organisations (mostly youth based). These Hitlerite measures remain the mainstay of the regime's strategy against youth mobilisation and organisation as reflected by the recent clampdown on seventeen organisations (several of them youth and student-based) including the South African Youth Congress (SAYCO).

BITTER BATTLES:

Encouraged by underground cadres and fired by a keenness to forge ahead, the youth managed, as they do today, to make a quick review of each enemy strike. During such pauses, they came to see the way forward, as that of the Freedom Charter. Their reflection included a review of past student organisations and led to the launch of COSAS and AZASO, both of which helped to deepen commitment and consolidate youth and community bonds. During 1980, the Year of the Charter, they campaigned to popularise the Freedom Charter, stressing as they did, that education could not be separated from the broader anti-apartheid struggle, therefore, correctly projecting student aims as charter aims. This went a long way in drawing progressives, including teachers and educationists into the campaign for a People's Education finally enshrined in the Education Charter.

The campaign for the realisation of the objectives of the Education Charter, formed the basis for the country-wide schools and colleges boycotts of 1985-86, which in their dialectical ramifications, related to the confrontation of the enemy on all fronts. Against the backdrop of the State of Emergency, we can say that these battles have engulfed the entire system involving as it were attendant issues emanating from the viciousness of the terms of the emergency. It was the State of Emergency of the year 1985-86, with its toll of activists including the youth and students, that led to the banning of COSAS, forcing an adaptation to clandestine methods - demonstrating the tactical flexibility of the student movement. This state of affairs was to influence the Soweto Parents Education Crisis Committee to convene a National Education Crisis Conference, which in subsequent meetings sought greater cooperation between parents and students in pursuit of "Education for People's Power" - the slogan of the 2nd NECC of 1986, in Durban - and joint action against the regime. The task of implementing people's education remains a rallying cry.

RESPONSIBILITY OF THE YOUTH

No doubt, the Youth have participated gallantly to date. But the struggles of the youth would not count for much, if they were not linked to those of the masses of the people, especially the workers. At any rate, the youth ride at the helm, thanks to the experienced guidance of the stalwarts. But this fact cannot and must not preclude the principal necessity to maintain youth organisations as such and their mobilisation around issues that affect them as youth. This is even the more reason why the banning of SAYCO and other youth and student organisations must pre-occupy us all.

DUTY OF THE LIBERATION ALLIANCE:

The Liberation Alliance of South Africa, headed by the ANC, has a great duty to the Youth Movement. Furthermore, as a movement we have the responsibility to facilitate the release of personnel which has the competence to guide the youth in struggle, both inside and outside our country. This responsibility must fall on all sections and compartments of our movement.

The SAYCO, which is a proud formation of the youth, has gallantly withstood enemy repression and further increased its strength by drawing in new forces since its inauguration, thus becoming perhaps the greatest single reinforcing factor to the mass democratic movement in recent times. The repressive measures adopted by the regime against it must be fought all-round. We have a big task to mobilise our people in their millions to fight against the restriction on SAYCO and the many other democratic organisations recently censured.

We must make the 12th Anniversary of June 16th a fighting day! The call by the leadership of the ANC in the Jan 8th NEC statement: "...we must continue to build the broadest possible united front against apartheid, for a democratic South Africa. All organisations to which the people belong, whether cultural, sporting, professional, religious or of other types, should understand that they too have an obligation to engage in struggle in pursuit of the common cause. Let the fact of the united opposition of millions of our people to the apartheid system find expression both in united action and action within a united front."

The 12th Anniversary of 16 June, reminds us of the imperative of ideological and political orientation of the youth. As never before, we are called upon as the movement, to impart in a very conscious way, revolutionary knowledge through dynamic contact and on the spot guidance. For this to happen, bold decisions are essential to providing the ANC Youth Section with a leeway to fulfil its arrogated role in the bitter struggles ahead. This then is the message of 16th June 1988.

Let us advance in united ranks!
Forward to the defeat of the racist October elections!

Amandla! Maatla!
Power to the People!

Lusaka, May 31, 1988.