



SIYABUYA!

Let's #MakeSAbetter

Youth Day must inspire us to overcome the ravages of the pandemic

Statement by Melene Rossouw of the Siyabuya movement

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The commemoration of Youth Day is a fitting time to consider not only what happened on 16 June 1976, but the world that today's youths are inheriting in the midst of the coronavirus pandemic.

The coronavirus is going to have a long-term impact on the young people of today. It has not only caused millions of additional job losses, but by disrupting education it has reduced the opportunities for young people to gain the qualifications that might lead to a job in what has become a smaller market.

In June 1976 young people rose up against apartheid oppression, and their uprising helped end apartheid and propel the country towards democracy. Now a new generation is about to come of age in a world changed completely by Covid-19.

The economic impact of the pandemic has been particularly harsh on our youth. Before the pandemic, their future was already bleak, with South Africa's youth unemployment at a record high. Now it is worse. As the pandemic closed shops, factories and other places of employment, millions more were out of work. Only some of those jobs have opened up again as the economy shows its first signs of revival.

Again, young people have been particularly affected, and the latest figures from StatsSA show that nearly half of those between 15 and 34 are out of work. The official youth unemployment rate is 46.3%, and for those without matric it is 52.4%.

Education – a key grievance in 1976 – has been severely disrupted. Nearly a year's schooling has been lost through closures or alternate-day education. Universities and other tertiary institutions are only partially open, and distance learning is not an option for everyone. Travel and study at all levels are further impacted by electricity outages.

It's not a problem that will be solved quickly or easily, but Siyabuya believes every South African can contribute to economic recovery and job creation.

Siyabuya aims to build a network of those who believe South Africa can emerge better from the pandemic. All over the country, people are acting on that belief and those examples can inspire others.

Siyabuya encourages South Africans to look after themselves and to help others, including by creating employment wherever they can. Wear a mask, sanitise and stay socially distanced. Get vaccinated as soon as you are eligible, and encourage others to do so. Feed people who are hungry and create jobs wherever possible.

"Youth Day is about our past, and about our future," said Melene Rossouw, the external lead of the Siyabuya! movement.

"The future is in our hands, and it is up to every one of us to do everything we can to rebuild our country. The only real cure for unemployment is economic growth. The crisis that faces today's youth must spur all of us to engage in active citizenry, in our families and communities, to help make this happen."



About Melene Rossouw

Melene Rossouw is the external leader of Siyabuya. She is an internationally recognised gender and human rights activist, global award winner, public speaker, moderator, facilitator, strategist and consultant. An attorney with 13 years' experience, Melene is founder of the Women Lead Movement in South Africa.

Her accolades include being selected by the prestigious Obama Foundation as an Obama Leader in Africa (2018) and as a Mandela Washington Fellow by the US Department of State in 2019. In October 2020, she was selected as one of the 100 Most Influential Young Africans and made the Top Ten list of Most Influential Young Africans by Africa Youth Awards. She was also recently named as one of the 100 Most Influential South Africans.

About Siyabuya

Siyabuya believes South Africa can emerge stronger from the Covid-19 pandemic. It aims to build networks across the country of people who share this belief and are working to achieve it. Those who are helping others, creating jobs and feeding the poor, are setting examples others can emulate.

Siyabuya aims to #MakeSAbetter by instilling a common sense of mission, built from the ground up, through ordinary South Africans engaged in active citizenry to improve their fortunes and the lives of those around them.

For more information, visit our website at www.siyabuya.org.za

