



**ADDRESS BY DEPUTY PRESIDENT CYRIL RAMAPHOSA  
ON THE OCCASION OF THE 73<sup>rd</sup> ANNIVERSARY  
OF THE ANC YOUTH LEAGUE**

**HILLBROW THEATRE, JOHANNESBURG  
7 OCTOBER 2017**

Leadership of the ANC Youth League,  
Leaders of the entire Progressive Youth Alliance,  
Comrades and Compatriots,

I convey revolutionary greetings to you, the youth of our land, who carry the aspirations and hopes of our nation. I am truly humbled and honoured to address you as you celebrate 73 years since formation of the ANC Youth League.

The ANC today needs the imagination, foresight and political clarity of the Youth League of 1944. It was led by brave, principled and exemplary leaders like Lembede, Tambo and Mandela, who understood that there was no way South Africa could have lasting peace and prosperity if it was founded on the exploitation of one by another.

This was a youth that was justifiably impatient with the inability of the ANC leadership of the time to directly confront the evil of racial discrimination and political oppression. They earned their place in history not through empty rhetoric – they earned the trust of the toiling masses because they were willing to sacrifice everything for the freedom of their people.

They were young lions called to battle by the ideal of a united, non-racial, non-sexist, democratic and prosperous society. Seventy three years later our nation once more yearns for a courageous, patriotic, honest and militant youth organisation that will inspire hope among our people. They want and deserve a Youth League that will prioritise the struggles faced by young people.

So as we look back to the rich history of the ANC Youth League, we must be inspired by the determination of the League to change the course of history.



Despite the many successes we have attained since 1994, our nation says that we could have done even better. They say we could have done better if we had remained united in our resolve to deal decisively with the scourges of poverty, unemployment and inequality. They say we could have achieved more if we spent more time implementing ANC policies and less time fighting for positions.

They say they are disappointed because we have been distracted by factional battles driven by self-interest and patronage. They say we are arrogant and we do not want to listen. Some are even scared to be identified with us. They see us killing each other for power and resources, and getting into politics not to serve but to access lucrative tenders.

In the midst of deep poverty and widespread unemployment, they ask what kind of people steal resources that are meant to improve the lives of the poor.

Like the ANC Youth League of yesterday, we look to you to bring an end to this winter of discontent. We look to you to stand up and fight injustice, greed and corruption. We look to you to renew the ANC and make it a trusted organisation of all the people of South Africa. We look to your generation to achieve economic freedom in its lifetime.

Comrades, in just over two months the ANC will be holding its 54<sup>th</sup> National Conference. We are certain that it will be the moment of renewal our people have been crying out for. It must deliver for our country a firm, capable and decisive leadership that will unite our movement and our people. It must mark a complete break from the tendencies and practices that are driving our people away from the ANC, and adopt a clear programme of action that will reverse the tide of unemployment and the scourge of poverty.

The latest poverty trends report tells us that more than half of all South Africans live in poverty. Even more concerning is the fact that young people are those most affected by the deepening poverty. Children aged 17 years and younger, Africans, females, people from rural areas, and those with little or no education are disproportionately affected.

That is why the voice of the youth must be heard at National Conference. Through the power of your ideas and the strength of your arguments you must ensure that Conference acts decisively to empower young people and end poverty.



You must vigorously campaign to ensure that the incoming NEC reflects a generational mix, bringing together the most committed, most trusted and most capable leaders of our movement. The people we elect to lead us must be made of sterner revolutionary stuff.

History has placed in your hands the rare opportunity to rebuild the ANC and fundamentally transform our country. You carry an immense responsibility to elect a collective leadership that will fulfil the aspirations of our people.

If we achieve this, we will ensure an overwhelming victory for the ANC in 2019. If we work hard and allow the best to rise, we will reclaim the metros of Johannesburg, Tshwane, Nelson Mandela Bay and Cape Town, and win back the Western Cape.

We have been through difficult times before. But we have always prevailed when we tell the truth and take the side of our people.

We dare not fail this time.

Comrades, we have won the political freedom for which so many of our people fought and sacrificed. Now we are called upon to enter a new phase of struggle, in which all our efforts, resources and energy are directed towards the achievement of economic emancipation.

We look to you the ANC Youth League to enrich our understanding of radical economic transformation and to advance policies that will free our youth from a life of want and indignity. The youth must be centrally involved in implementation of the National Development Plan.

There is great potential in the fact that most of our working age population is young. We have a significant opportunity to harness their energy, innovation, creativity and vibrancy in pursuit of sustainable economic activity. Education and skills development must stand at the centre of our efforts.

The Youth League needs to mobilise young people to take advantage of the many learning and training opportunities that are being made available. It needs to be at the forefront of struggles for free higher education for the poor, relevant content and better-quality outcomes.

This is the youth that will lead our knowledge economy. This is the youth that is fascinated by scientific invention and its use in the enhancement of our lives. This is a Youth League that attracts highly educated young men and women, entrepreneurs and aspirant industrialists. It values knowledge and celebrates innovation.



The ANC Youth League needs to unite the youth of this country. It needs to break down barriers of division and create a country where there will be neither whites nor blacks, just South Africans, free and united in diversity. It needs to occupy all spaces in our society, and be present in places of learning, in factories and on farms. It needs to build alliances with other youth formations around shared values and common developmental objectives.

We must do everything possible to ensure that never again in South Africa will opportunities offered to young people be defined by race, ethnicity, gender, class or religion. The Youth League needs to take up the challenges faced by young people every day. It needs to be at the forefront of the fight against rape on campuses and drug use in communities. It needs to be leading programmes to address teenage pregnancy and the alarmingly high rates of HIV infection among young women.

It needs to be bringing together broad coalitions of business, labour, civil society and government to expand training and work experience opportunities for young people.

The ANC belongs to the people. It is not a vehicle for self-enrichment or patronage. When we voluntarily join the movement, we take a vow that we do so “without motives of material advantage or personal gain”. We commit to place our energies and skills at the disposal of the organisation and carry out tasks given to us.

We take an oath pledging that we “will defend the unity and integrity of the organisation and its principles, and combat any tendency towards disruption and factionalism”. We therefore look to the members of the Youth League to provide leadership in all spheres of life, to earn respect, and to set an example.

It was the first President of the ANC Youth League, Anton Lembede, who told the young people of his day that:

*“We are not called to peace, comfort and enjoyment, but to hard work, struggle and sweat. We need young men and women of high moral stamina and integrity; of courage and vision. In short, we need warriors.”*



*“This means that we have to develop a new type of youth of stoical discipline, trained to endure suffering and difficulties. It is only this type of youth that will achieve the national liberation of the African people.”*

This is precisely the type of youth we find among the rank and file of the ANC Youth League today. These are young women and men of high moral stamina and integrity, of courage and vision.

You are the warriors of our age. This is your moment to change the course of history. This is your moment to renew, rebuild and unite the African National Congress.

I thank you.