

## President Cyril Ramaphosa: Launch of Youth Employment Service Initiative

27 Mar 2018

Address by President Cyril Ramaphosa at the launch of the Youth Employment Service initiative, Riversands Incubation Hub, Johannesburg

Programme Director,  
Premier of Gauteng, Mr David Makhura,  
Ministers and Deputy Ministers,  
Business leaders,  
Representatives of organised labour,  
Representatives of youth formations,  
Distinguished guests,  
Ladies and gentlemen,

This is an occasion of great significance for our country and our people.

It marks the official launch of an initiative that is set to change the lives of many young South Africans in cities, towns and villages across the country.

This is a timely, worthy and ambitious response to youth unemployment – which is perhaps the greatest and most pressing social and economic challenge facing our country at this moment in our history.

It is the young people of this country who, more than most, must daily grapple with the misery and indignity of poverty and unemployment.

It is they who must worry that their futures will be dashed by the devastating legacy of the past.

It is they who, as they look for work, are faced with disappointment and frustration, with doubt and despondency.

We are gathered here today because we all know only too well the depth and extent of youth unemployment in this country.

We know that millions of young people do not complete school and many that do, do not have the skills that our economy needs.

We know about the extreme difficulties that poor black South Africans experience in finding employment.

Without access to networks, without information about opportunities, without exposure to the world of work, even those with further education often struggle to bridge the gap between learning and earning.

We know too about the great distances that separate the places where young people live from the places where they may find work, and the great cost that they

must incur simply to look for employment.

We are gathered here today – as business, government, labour, civil society and young people – because we know the challenges that young black South Africans face, and we are determined to confront them.

All of us who are gathered here today are bound together by a firm conviction that the future of our country and the prosperity of our people depends on how we respond to this challenge.

We are certain that although the difficulties may be great, although the obstacles may be daunting, we have the means, the will and the resources to overcome them.

Through the initiative that we are launching today, we are determined to demonstrate the power of collective action in pursuit of an ambitious and far-reaching agenda.

For what we are seeking to do, through this and other initiatives, is to provide pathways for young people into the world of work.

We see this initiative as one pillar of a broad and comprehensive national effort to create opportunities for young people.

Another, central, pillar of this effort must be the development of the skills and capabilities of young people.

Starting at the very beginning, in early childhood development, we are working to improve the quality and value of the learning that young people receive in our basic education system.

We are working to ensure that all learners who enter primary school remain in school to complete their studies.

Access to higher education and training has expanded dramatically over the last two decades, significantly increasing the number of people in the workforce who hold degrees and diplomas.

Yet while we are making progress, there is much more we need to do to match the skills that are being produced in our institutions with the needs of our economy, both now and into the future.

We are investing, for example, more effort and more resources into TVET colleges, which have the potential to produce on a significant scale the technical skills that will underpin the industrialisation of our economy.

By partnering with the private sector, we are seeking to ensure that training in TVET colleges is suited to the requirements of the companies that seek these skills and that

TVET college graduates are more easily able to find positions in these companies.

This is part of a broader challenge we face, of ensuring that young people are adequately prepared for the world of work.

Another pillar of the national effort to create opportunities for young people must therefore be programmes to promote work readiness.

Understanding the constraints that young black work seekers face, we need effective, sustainable and scalable programmes to prepare these people for first time employment.

By the same measure, we need to appreciate the concerns that employers have in taking on inexperienced young people.

One of the measures that government has introduced to address these concerns is the Employment Tax Incentive, which reduces the cost to employers of hiring young people.

Public-private partnerships like the Harambee Youth Employment Accelerator go even further by preparing young people for work through training and matching programmes.

The initiative we are launching today complements the work already being done to tackle youth unemployment.

It provides a vital ingredient that has been missing – the provision of meaningful work experience for young people on a scale that will have a significant and lasting impact on employment, on the economy and on broader society.

It therefore gives me great pleasure to formally launch the Youth Employment Service, known as YES.

The YES initiative has been made possible through the hard work and commitment of many people in the private sector, in government, in labour and in other organisations.

I wish to express my gratitude in particular to Stephen Koseff and Colin Coleman for having taken up the challenge we put to you two years ago and for having pursued it with such determination and zeal.

Thank you to the companies who have come forward to provide work experience opportunities to the first 100 YES participants – Unilever, Sasol, Investec, ABSA and Netcare.

Thank you to all the companies that have shown interest and who have committed to becoming part of the programme.

By providing one-year paid work experience opportunities to thousands of unemployed young people, these companies will not only be measurably improving their prospects to find employment, but will be helping to build a more inclusive, more sustainable economy.

I thank you.

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