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Keynote address delivered by the President of the Republic, His Excellency, Jacob Zuma, at the 33rd Anniversary of the Soweto Student Uprising and the National Youth Day, Hunterfield Stadium, Katlehong, Ekurhuleni, June 16 2009

Date: Tuesday, June 16, 2009

- Programme Director;
- Minister in the Presidency responsible for youth development, Mr Collins Chabane;
- Ministers and Deputy Ministers;
- Premier of Gauteng, Ms Nomvula Mokonyane and all MEC's present;
- Executive Mayor of Ekurhuleni, Councillor Ntombi Mekgwe;
- Chairperson of the National Youth Development Agency, Andile Lungisa and all Board Members;
- Members of various youth formations;
- Distinguished guests;
- Mphakathi wase-Kathlehong,

Siyanibingelela nonke, Dimacheroni, Dumelang!

33 years ago today, the young people of our country made untold sacrifices so that we could be free. Some gave up the relative comfort of home and went to foreign lands, while others ended up languishing in prison, in pursuit of liberation.

Today we correctly celebrate that resounding voice of young people, which refused to be silenced in the face of bullets and torture.

It is appropriate that we commemorate Youth Day under the appropriate theme: "Celebrating a Vibrant Youth Voice".

The South African youth have never been silent, and have always been active participants in the life of this nation. They have always been actively involved in aspects, political, social and economic.

This year we mark Youth Month on a very high note, due to the unprecedented participation of the youth in the 2009 national general elections.

Our youth defied sceptics and came out in millions to exercise their democratic right to vote, and to choose the parties of their choice. Many voted for the first time. We

congratulate all 18 year olds on beginning a very important journey as new adult citizens of this country.

Through the 2009 elections, our youth demonstrated that it is "cool" to vote and to participate in the democratic processes of the country. You have made us very optimistic about the future.

We trust that this youth activism will not end with the elections, but will translate to a youth that contributes constructively to the national debate, to national service and other patriotic tasks.

In celebrating the vibrancy of our youth, we acknowledge with pride that you have not strayed away from the tradition of the patriotic and heroic June 16 Youth Generation.

On this day, we also celebrate the voice of young people who since the democratic breakthrough of 1994 have taken advantage of our democracy and opportunities it created.

Many young people have succeeded in many fields as professionals, entrepreneurs and role models working towards the creation of a better South Africa for all.

Others continue to contribute to the well being of others in various ways through voluntary work and other means.

On this day, we also reaffirm that we have heard the voice of youth in distress.

We are aware of unemployed youth, those in conflict with the law; those living in abject poverty and many who seek assistance in various ways in our townships and rural villages, to enable them to achieve their true potential in life.

As government, we have a responsibility to create an environment where our young people can extricate themselves from poverty and build successful lives.

Youth development is therefore a critical focus area for our government. We are therefore pleased to mark the 33rd National Youth Day, with the launch of the National Youth Development Agency, which will usher in a new era in youth development.

We acknowledge the contribution of the Umsobomvu Youth Fund as well as the National Youth Commission, out of whose merger the Agency has been formed.

The Agency will be charged with the implementation of the National Youth Policy of 2009-2014, which was adopted earlier this year.

The Agency has a lot of work to do. It has to develop an Integrated Youth Development Plan and Strategy without delay. It must initiate, design, co-ordinate, evaluate and monitor all programmes aimed at integrating the youth into the economy and society in general.

We expect the Agency to initiate programmes directed at poverty alleviation, urban and rural development and the combating of crime, substance abuse and social decay amongst youth.

This means that the Agency will work with various government departments that work in these areas, to improve the quality of life of our young people.

As you are aware, we have prioritised education over the next five years. Therefore, the creation of an environment which supports learning, skills development, and economic participation of the youth will be one of the primary tasks of the Agency.

We also expect the Agency to assist in promoting youth participation in democratic processes, community and civic decision-making and development at all levels. Already the seeds of this have been sown with the recent elections.

Our youth will need to participate in programmes to promote our culture and heritage, promotion of the Constitution and the national symbols and various other mechanisms that will cement pride in being a South African.

Most importantly, the Agency will need to take forward the programmes that address youth poverty and unemployment, through linking up unemployed youth graduates with economic opportunities.

The Agency, supported by all of us, must also strengthen efforts to expand the National Youth Service Programme and support young entrepreneurs.

Most importantly, the agency's response to the challenge of youth development should take into account our government's priorities in education, health, rural development, the fight against crime as well as the creation of decent work opportunities.

We have taken a position that all our youth must have access to education up to tertiary level. We urge the Agency to assist government in promoting that all young people stay in school until they finish matric.

The formation of the Department of Higher Education is also aimed at putting a particular focus on the acceleration of skills development of young people in higher education.

Two days ago, on 14 June 2009, the inaugural match for the Confederations Cup kicked-off at the Ellis Park Stadium between Bafana Bafana and Iraq.

We applaud many young men and women who have offered their services as volunteers to ensure that the country stages a safer and successful tournament.

This selfless character attests to the patriotism of our youth on matters of national interest.

Our country needs an active cadre of young people who participate in processes that contribute towards making South Africa a better country.

I therefore appeal that the youth be part of our programmes in rural development, poverty alleviation and crime prevention as these are a core component of youth development.

Next month we will be celebrating the 91st Birthday of Nelson Mandela, who remains a beacon of hope and inspiration to the youth.

I thank you.