

**Minister of Public Works  
Mr J Radebe  
20 January 1999**

[Back](#)

**Address at the National Summit on Youth Service**

Hlengiwe Bengu - Chairperson of the National Youth Commission;  
His Worship the Mayor, Cllr Isaac Mogae;  
Representatives of our National Youth Organisations;  
Representatives of National Government departments and other spheres of Government;  
Nkosi Patekile Holomisa;  
Business leaders, respected academics, NGO representatives;  
Student leaders;  
Members of the Media, and  
Ladies and gentlemen

It is a pleasure and honour for me to have been invited to address the launch of the Green Paper on the National Summit on Youth Service this morning. This summit will go a long way towards raising and confirming the hopes of millions of our people, especially the youth for a better and prosperous future in our beloved country. Indeed many of our young people are looking at the launch of the National Youth Service today and the conclusion of the Summit tomorrow with keen interest, asking themselves the question how this initiative builds on the democratic gains towards a better life and empowerment already made since the installation of our democratic government in May 1994.

This Summit carries the hopes and fears of our youth precisely because it brings together the various national youth formations, representatives of business and government. It is the structure of this Summit that will make sure that the interests of youth remain central to policy at all levels of government and society. The nature and purpose of this gathering over the next two days will be to make sure that the decisions of the Job Summit are also carried forward. This Summit is therefore an attempt to give practical expression to the resolutions of the Job Summit, especially in relation to programmes for youth empowerment.

The Summit comes at the very important period in the history of our country, and for our youth in particular. It comes a mere two weeks after the release of the matric results which indicates the "arrest" of the decline in and significant improvements in the management of matric examinations. Indeed the matric results still confirmed the fundamental contradictions and legacy of apartheid in our society. The inequalities, denial of access to better education and job opportunities for the majority of young South Africans still remain. It is at this time among these sections of our youth that despair and hope really begin. There is still much to be done by government, the private sector, labour and society as a whole to work in partnership to consolidate the gains and improve this situation.

Most importantly, the Summit comes as we approach the remaining months of the first ever-democratic government in our country and the elections for national and provincial government in 1999. This provides an opportunity to all of us to reflect honestly as to what contribution we are making towards the reconstruction and development of our country.

Central to this are our efforts in closing the gap between black and white in wealth and income, equal opportunities, growing the economy, creating jobs, transforming and improving education and eradicating poverty in our society. As we said and continue to say that there can never be genuine freedom, nation building and reconciliation unless the material basis and legacy of apartheid are totally eradicated from our society.

For the National Youth Commission and National Youth Organisations present here today, the central question remains whether we are succeeding in harnessing the militancy and energies of our youth towards the fundamental goals of reconstruction and development. Youth institutions must ask themselves the question whether they have succeeded in respect of positioning the interests of youth at the centre of our transformation process over the past four years. Does the National Youth Policy assists us in putting the interest of youth - defined in terms of education, job opportunities, delivery of social services and access to better recreational facilities at the centre of government's fundamental policies and activities?

The National Youth Service programme can contribute directly to the implementation of key goals of the RDP. These include infrastructural development, such as roads, houses, clinics, community centres, schools and so on. Basic services delivery, such as water and sanitation and other social services such as health and

welfare will also benefit from the programme. Government has already made substantial progress in meetings these needs. But there is still a lot to be done as inherited backlogs are huge.

There are perceptions, real and unreal, and different answers to the above questions. As government, we are proud of the achievements and sterling work of the National Youth Commission under the able leadership of Hlengiwe Bengu.

We are proud of the manner in which the National Youth Commission has approached some of the difficult questions facing the youth sector, including bringing together youth as part of efforts for nation building and reconciliation. The creative manner in which you transcended the debate of whether or not to establish a youth ministry, and focused on the real tasks of reconstruction and development will remain an important highlight of the important leadership role our youth continue to exercise in the transformation process. These are important contributions and achievements that we should not take for granted as a people.

Government has already committed itself to the NYS through the adoption of the National Youth Policy and the agreements reached at the landmark Job Summit. Public Works and other departments of state have already begun to examine how to implement the programmes in as short a time as possible. Again, the realigned CBPWP offers opportunities for this, as well as activities undertaken by Trade and Industry that will ensure both service activities and future job prospects for youth in such areas as eco-tourism and other opportunities in rural areas.

We have always argued that the important role of youth should not be confined to the struggle against apartheid, however important and glorious this remains. Youth mobilisation and organisation is critical to the success of our reconstruction and development efforts. Youth is not about the past but rather about the very future of our country and the institutions that embody the democratic will of the people.

We should continue to mobilise youth from all walks of life to participate in deepening democracy and progress in our country and the world as a whole. We have always located youth as an important part of the forces striving generally for social change and democratic renewal of our world. There are many examples of youth's heroic role in the past, including in our country. Looking back at this rich history, one is assured of victory and success in our endeavors.

In this context, ladies and gentlemen, the participation of youth in processes aimed at the renewal of our society, including the question of who governs our country and its future is critical. Much has been said about the apathy of youth in the recent past and its failure to register for the coming elections. This is indeed a genuine and serious concern from all of us. However we should be cautious in our approach, and not be alarmist and adopt conservative representations of youth in our society. We should not allow the view that puts the interest of our youth as being antithetical to democracy to take root. Our youth are not opposed to and alienated by the advent of the democratic process in all spheres of our society.

It is only the imaginations of cynics who always see negative things in the transformation process. They wish to disregard the fact that we have as government put in place policies and programmes that will meet the needs of youth in a manner that is acceptable to all youth in this country.

There are many factors contributing to this general situation. The progressive attitude towards youth is one that creates the necessary conditions for the expression of youth's full potential and energy in all spheres of our society - politics, economics, religion, sports, education, etc. Unlike conservatives and cynics, we do not fear the energies, self-activity and mobilisation of youth in our society. The challenge is to harness these energies towards the noble goals of reconstruction, development and renewal of our society and the world.

Again, I wish to congratulate the National Youth Commission for not losing perspective and priorities during this difficult period, including the attack on the work of the Commission and Chairperson. We are encouraged by the positive spirit in which the Commission and the Independent Electoral Commission (IEC) are collaborating to make sure that youth register and participate fully in the coming elections. It is the responsibility of all of us to make sure that on January 29, 30 and 31, 1999, our people and especially youth register for the elections.

The role of the youth in the reconstruction and development process is to learn and acquire the relevant skills to meet the material-technical, social, political and moral challenges facing a society undergoing fundamental transformation. The Green Paper on National Youth Service Programme you will be launching at this Summit is about this role. Youth Service and Community Service is a central element in the tasks of our youth to rebuilding our country.

The Youth Service Programme builds on a number of experiences aimed at creating employment and empower youth throughout the world. There are many interesting lessons from countries such as the USSR in 1919, the United States in the 1930s and Cuba after the 1959 revolution.

The National Youth Service Programme build on the various Roundtable Discussions and subsequent steps already taken by government departments such as Health, Public Works, Trade and Industry and Welfare and Population Development aimed at giving meaning to youth empowerment and employment. Ladies and gentlemen, government is implementing programmes that targets youth for employment in programmes such as the Community Based Public Works Programme and other infrastructure delivery programmes especially in the poorest regions of our country. These programmes provide for youth employment and skills in relevant areas of the economy. Through working with the NYC and youth formations more generally, we will continue to implement these programmes as we move towards and beyond the elections themselves.

In conclusion, I must emphasise that the White Paper on National Youth Service Programme builds on the commitment of government as a whole to fund projects where young people have been trained and have delivered a service. Right now, the obligations of youth are straightforward - register, participate in the election campaigns and vote in the election. We can only build on the foundations of our democracy with the direct participation of the youth. It is your future and the future of your children to come - do not neglect this historic opportunity and task.

I thank you.

[top](#)