



**KEYNOTE ADDRESS BY THE EXECUTIVE MAYOR OF DIPALESENG LOCAL MUNICIPALITY, CLLR. NB KHANYE AT THE EXECUTIVE MAYOR'S SCHOOLS DEBATE COMPETITION ON THE 14<sup>TH</sup> JUNE 2025 AT THE COUNCIL CHAMBER**

**Thank you, Programme Director,**

**Honourable Speaker of Council**

**Honourable Councilors**

**Honourable Principals, Educators and Learners,**

**Distinguished Guests,**

**Municipal Manager and his Management Team**

**Officials**

**Ladies and Gentlemen,**

Good morning.

It is both a privilege and an honour to stand before you today as we commemorate a chapter in our nation's history that continues to define us – the story of the youth of 1976 under this year's theme “Skills for the changing world – Empowering youth for meaning.

Almost five decades ago, young people, many not much older than the learners seated here, rose up in defiance of an oppressive system that sought to limit their potential and silence their voices. The Soweto Uprising was not just an act of rebellion – it was an act of purpose, conviction, and unimaginable courage. Those brave souls – Hector Pieterse,

Tsietsi Mashinini, and countless others – stood in defense of dignity and equality, demanding the right to learn, to think, and to dream freely.

**Today, we remember them. But more than that, we honour them by asking a critical question: What does it mean to be young in South Africa after 30 years of democracy?**

We have come afar. In 1994, we walked into the sunlight of a new freedom. We cast off the chains of apartheid and built the foundations of a constitutional democracy that is admired around the world. Our Bill of Rights enshrines your right to education, to expression, to equality. You have opportunities your parents and grandparents could only dream of.

But with these freedoms comes responsibility. You are not only the beneficiaries of democracy – you are also its custodians.

Let me say this clearly: you are not just the leaders of tomorrow. You are the leaders of now.

And one of the most powerful movements (which also happens to be a personal passion of mine) shaping our now and our future — especially in Africa — is what economists and social scientists are calling “Womenomics.”

Womenomics is a recognition that when women participate fully in the economy — as entrepreneurs, professionals, innovators, and leaders — nations grow, societies thrive, and futures are transformed.

It is not just about gender equality. It is about economic necessity.

Across the continent and around the world, countries that invest in the education, empowerment, and economic participation of young women see faster development, stronger families, and more resilient economies.

**So I say to you, the youth of today: how will *you* be remembered?**

Will you be remembered for using your voice – like the youth of 1976 – to speak truth to power? Will you be remembered for rising to the challenges of your time: unemployment, climate change, inequality, technology, drug & substance abuse, crime and education reform?

Or will you be remembered for allowing history to slip through your fingers?

**This debate competition today is not just about winning arguments – it is about sharpening your minds for leadership. It is about learning to listen deeply, speak clearly, and think critically.**

South Africa needs young people who are bold enough to ask hard questions, wise enough to seek facts, and brave enough to lead. We need youth who will embrace innovation, pursue education with excellence, and serve their communities with humility.

The youth of 1976 fought for the right to learn. You must now fight to use that education for transformation. In a digital world, literacy is not enough – we need digital fluency. In a world of fake news, we need critical thinkers. In a time of global shifts, we need young South Africans who are globally aware but locally rooted.

**You must position yourselves as:**

- **Innovators:** South Africa needs entrepreneurs, scientists, engineers, creators. So create solutions, don't wait for them.
- **Change-makers:** Get involved in your schools, your communities, and your country. Volunteer. Start initiatives. Lead.
- **Ethical leaders:** Let integrity and ubuntu guide your choices. Leadership is not about position – it's about service.
- **Lifelong learners:** Your education doesn't end at the classroom door. Stay curious, read widely, and never stop growing.

As we reflect on 30 years of democracy, we must acknowledge our achievements but also confront our shortcomings. Corruption, poverty, and inequality still haunt us. But the

baton has been passed to you. You are the generation that must now dream beyond liberation – you must build a just, inclusive, and thriving society.

In closing, let me remind you: the youth of 1976 marched so that you could speak freely. Speak wisely. The youth of 1976 died so that you might live freely. Live purposefully.

Let us honour their memory not only with our words, but with our actions.

As we stand committed to shaping a brighter future for our communities, we must never forget that lasting change begins in the classroom. As Nelson Mandela so powerfully reminded us, ‘Education is the most powerful weapon which you can use to change the world.’ It is through investing in the minds of our young people that we secure not only their future, but the future of our entire municipality.

Of course, education isn’t just about textbooks and exams—it’s also about life skills. You know what they say: ‘Give a man a fish and you feed him for a day. Teach him to fish—and he’ll sit in a boat all day telling stories about the one that got away!’ But in all seriousness, our goal is to equip our young people not just to succeed, but to thrive—with knowledge, skills, and just a little bit of humor and a bit of fun along the way

To all the participants in today’s debate – you spoke with courage, listened with respect, and thought with vision. You are not just debaters. You are future leaders. And the future is watching.

**I wish you all the best in your future endeavors as well!**

**Thank you.**