

*Programme Director and Provincial Chairperson of the NYDA in Gauteng, Mr. Simon Molefe.
Deputy Chairperson of Gauteng Ms. Tasneem Motara*

The Director of the International Youth Policy Support Center of Belgium, Mr. Jan Vanhee

The Representative of the Flemish civil society present, Mr. Bram Vermeiren

Mr. Thulani Tshefuta, President of the South African Youth Council and the leadership of the youth council present.

NYDA Executive Managers present

Captains of Industry,

Distinguished Guests,

Comrades, Colleagues and Friends

It is indeed a privilege and a great pleasure to launch this undertaking in order to promote volunteerism by the NYDA and the government of Flanders under the theme "Promoting and Up-scaling Youth Volunteering in Civil Society Organisations."

I was very encouraged to hear about the success of the open space methodology. That's is exactly what we want, for youth to lead, and the state through the NYDA to support. You must shape the agenda for our growth and prosperity.

I raised a point of discussion with the President of SAYC, in this open space, the US passed the Serve America Act in 2009, India just recently legislated the Right to Work for Youth between the ages of 18 and 24, is it not time to reignite discussions around legislating the National Youth Service in South Africa, that I leave to you.

Some might ask what the relevance is of launching an undertaking of such nature as the actions that stem from the agreement are of greater importance than the mere lip service of the agreement itself.

However, an undertaking or agreement of this magnitude deserves celebration and recognition considering the potential it has to change the lives of so many impoverished and disheartened young people. Furthermore, let us consider for a minute the weight of the word 'undertaking'- an undertaking is a mission to complete a defined task, in fact it is a declaration of responsibility to see that task through to the end. We at the National Youth Development Agency have long since taken on the responsibility of promoting a culture of youth service in South Africa. In fact, we have taken on the task of intensifying the global movement of youth service as a strategy for youth development and socio economic development at large. That being said, we cannot do it alone. We thereby want to encourage Flemish companies doing business in South Africa to contribute meaningfully into the expansion of the National Youth Service Programme both locally and globally.

The project `Promoting and Up-scaling Youth Volunteering in Civil Society Organisations` is a three year partnership between the NYDA and the Government of Flanders, Ministry of Education, Culture and Science, Flemish Ministry of Education, Youth, Equal Opportunities and Brussels. The three year plan will put in place the building blocks for up-scaling youth volunteering in South Africa by addressing the following 5 key priorities: Capacity Building with the aim of strengthening the capacity of volunteer-involving and volunteer-placement organizations. The development of a funding framework to support the up-scaling of youth volunteering, Thirdly is the area of Knowledge Generation focusing on the development of an indigenous knowledge base around youth volunteering in South Africa, Fourthly is the key priority area of Infrastructure Building to create mechanisms and structures for youth to access information about volunteering and the available volunteer opportunities. And the last priority area being that of Marketing and Advocacy in order to raise the profile of volunteering

in South Africa and reposition youth volunteer work as an opportunity for growth and development.

The cooperation on Youth Development between the Government of South Africa and the Government of Flanders has a rich history since its inception in 1996. The continuation of this long standing cooperation was formally agreed upon during the Joint Commission¹ between the Government of South Africa and the Government of Flanders, held in Pretoria in November 2009. The NYDA and the Youth Division of the Flemish Government committed to further their partnership, with the focus on stimulating volunteerism amongst youth, fostering social cohesion and building citizenship through community service.

Upon this formal agreement at the Joint Commission in November 2009, the NYDA has started preparing the new partnership in cooperation with Volunteer Service Overseas and other civil society organisations like the Volunteer Centre, Volunteer and Service Enquiry Southern Africa (VOSESA) and The South African Association of Youth Clubs (SAAYC).

The theme `Promoting and Up scaling Youth Volunteering in Civil Society Organisations` was decided upon for the partnership with the Flemish Government because of three reasons.

Firstly, because of the significant benefits that are likely to flow from involving young people in volunteering and community service programmes. Youth engagement in a community can be beneficial not only to the future of an individual, but to community advancement as well. Through youth service, young people can obtain not only practical work experience and skills, but they also learn firsthand about various aspects of life in the community in which they work. Their exposure to socio economic factors broaden their horizons and with this they mature and develop a deeper understanding of themselves.

Secondly, it was decided that this partnership should focus on promoting volunteering in the civil society sector because of its relevance in responding to the strategic objectives of the NYDA, as our National Youth Service programme is one of our core programmes.

And finally, the privilege for us to work with the government of Flanders because of their embedded culture of youth service and the vigour with which Flemish youth give of themselves in volunteerism.

Youth service models throughout the world have been designed to serve particular goals. Our National Youth Service Programme for example, established in 2004, was explicitly designed with the goal of providing youth with service opportunities across a range of sectors to enable young people to develop their skills in order to access employment or generate income.

We have recently partnered with the Lovelife ground - BREAKERS to roll out a South African French Youth Service Exchange Programme. The ground-BREAKERS youth service programme engages thousands of young people to educate peers about the risks of HIV/AIDS in schools and community centres nationally. Our South African - French Exchange Programme allowed ten young people from the ground-BREAKERS programme the opportunity to travel to the Burgundy region of France last week where they have commenced volunteer work in French NGO's for a period of six months. We will also be hosting ten French young people in July this year when they will commence work in loveLife centres around the Western Cape Province. The aim of this Exchange Programme is firmly

¹ See Annexure 1: `Agreed Minutes of the Fourth Permanent Joint Commission between the Government of South Africa and the Government of Flanders, Pretoria, 10 November 2009`

set on skills development and we at the NYDA are confident that our South African volunteers will not only make a meaningful contribution to these French communities during the next six months but also bring back vital skills to improve their own communities in South Africa.

Youth Service programmes such as the European Volunteer Service and Canada World Youth were setup with the aim of bringing people from different countries together to promote international understanding and identity. As Africans we too should have a vision of forming an African Youth Service Core to promote African identity and understanding.

Service is a proven strategy for reconnecting disconnected young people to their communities. It is also a strategy for nurturing a shared value system based on respect and dignity for self and others. Thus we must elevate and expand youth service beyond national boundaries. In doing so, we will not only build local bridges for social cohesion but begin construction on international bridges as well. As the NYDA, we have taken this task quite seriously. In the past few days we have begun construction on 2 such international bridges of social cohesion. First with our French counterparts and today with the Government of Flanders. We hope that this bridge for greater social cohesion amongst South African and Flemish youth in particular and Global Youth in general shall be as sustainable as those built in previous years.

Our success in building a better life for all lies in service towards a more humane society. The aim is to see that everyone gets good food to eat, clothes to wear, houses to live in and basic services for all. Young people represent a diverse and resourceful cohort waiting to be mobilized to achieve this aim. Young people can be a resource for providing integral services to their communities, for providing the good food, the quality housing, clothes to wear and basic services for all.

Cultivating a culture of youth service can be seen as an effective strategy to meet critical national needs and provide important skill building for young people. Instead of being thought of as only beneficiaries young people should be viewed as “valued, competent agents for change”. Service enables young people to reverse their former patterns of behaviour, to become less individualistic, by not only learning new values, but also by being accountable for living those values. Instead of being a drain on society, the youth can create visible and valued contributions. Instead of causing disruptions, the youth can identify and solve problems or even transform the entire system of greed, crass materialism and exploitation. All it takes is for service to become habitual. It should be seen as taboo for every young person *not* to conduct at least two to three hours of service a week. This could mean helping the elderly, assisting in building houses, perhaps even becoming HIV/AIDS counsellors or providing tutoring services at a rural school on a voluntary basis.

As the NYDA, we say, let us focus our objectives to raise the profile of Volunteerism in South Africa.

Let us grow the number of volunteer-involving opportunities and increase the numbers of young people actively involved in volunteer work!

Let us afford our youth with the opportunity of building a better life for themselves, for their families and for their communities at large.

Let us make Volunteerism Fashionable, For a Better Country, For a Better Life!

I THANK YOU!