

YOUTH DAY

# The power of young voices in South Africa

ON JUNE 16, South Africans celebrate Youth Day to commemorate so many young people who lost their lives standing up for what they believed in. The democracy that we now live in reminds us that though we are young, we are not without a voice. Those who lost their lives did not lose it in vain but instead laid the foundation for the freedom that we now enjoy.

So, reflecting on this during Youth Month, it is important for young people to remember that we have the power to bring about change and add value to decision-making processes.

As youth, we may think that we live in a time that is hopeless and forget that we are the hope. Recently, the Stellenbosch University (SU) community experienced a tragedy, the loss of a fellow student leader Antonio Britto. Britto inspired me in the way he led. At his memorial, I heard so many beautiful testimonies of how he supported other young leaders at SU. He gave those around him hope. This is a legacy we should strive for. That those around us, our peers know that they have a voice because we spoke first.

As young people, we must galvanise our collective energy to continue fighting for a future that we want to see. Let's channel this energy into job creation to help address youth unemployment in the country.

Celebrating Youth Day and remembering the Soweto Uprising of 1976 reminds us that our present circumstances were not always the norm. There was once a time when young people had to risk their lives for change, for a better future. I believe that even



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though we do not have to lay down our lives today, our cause is just as noble. Change is necessary in our country, and we cannot wait for older generations to make the right decisions or to hold themselves accountable. We must hold our current leaders accountable and rise to the occasion of being better and stronger. Supporting those who are in situations like ours.

I am a leader because others led before me. Because of the example of others, I had something I could follow. We must now set the example. In 30 years from now, someone could be writing an article about how the youth of today followed in the footsteps of their predecessors and brought about

lasting change – how, despite their difficult circumstances, they persevered and became the next generation of innovators, inventors, entrepreneurs, politicians, and much more.

I realise that this may sound overly optimistic, but I have seen in my own life the power of the youth. I have seen young people helping those in need, creating NGOs and foundations, building a legacy, taking risks, and starting businesses. I see hope in my peers. This is why I have this optimism. I see the potential, and it is about time we all see what our youth can do if we support them and give them the chance to support us as a nation and community.

As much as I believe in today's young people, I also must thank the youth who went before us. You are the reason we celebrate Youth Day. You are the giants on whose shoulders we stand. Now we ask, just as you fought to be heard, you take us seriously, you take our issues seriously. We are not asking you to solve our problems; you have done enough. We ask you to give us the platform to have an influence so that we do not have to put our lives at risk as you had to. Remember, the youth are our future. So let us invest in them.

I can write this because I have had the privilege to become a leader and a mentor to others. This is a privilege I shared with my mentors. The Bible says in 1 Timothy 4:12: "Do not let anyone look down on you because you are young, but set an example for the believers in speech, in conduct, in love, in faith and in purity." I hope to



embody this sentiment. I also hope that we, as young people, can set an example.

Being young is a gift. We have a unique perspective; there are things we have not seen or experienced. Yes, we may not always fully understand the sacrifices that had to be made for us to enjoy the freedom we have now, but every great leader today, every great scientist, every great person was once a youth with a dream, with a vision. A youth who had not experienced the hardship of their parents but was willing to fight for a future they believed in.

So, on this Youth Day I will consider my voice and the power I have as a young person. I will read Ingrid Jonker's *The child* and remember that he is not dead, his legacy lives on. We inherit this legacy, but we must also leave a legacy behind. We, as the youth of 21st-century South Africa, have a voice. We are free – now what will we do with it? What will our legacy be?

*Independent Media is running a month-long commemorative campaign marking the Soweto Uprising.*



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