

FOOD & ALLIED WORKERS' UNION



MEDIA STATEMENT ON 16 JUNE – NATIONAL YOUTH DAY 2026:

“THE STRUGGLE HAS NOT STOPPED, IT HAS CHANGED”

reality: the struggle for youth liberation in South Africa is far from over. While the youth of 50 years ago fought against a brutal, oppressive political regime, today's youth fight a desperate war against economic exclusion, poverty, and systemic unemployment.

The battlefield has shifted from the streets of Soweto to the lines outside labour centers and the digital queues of job portals. True liberation cannot exist without economic freedom, and for millions of young South Africans, that freedom remains frustratingly out of reach.

Economic Exclusion and Unemployment Is The New Enemy

The current statistics paint a grim picture of the modern youth struggle as Economic Exclusion becomes the new enemy:

- **Severe Unemployment:** Over 4.5 million young people remain unemployed and locked out of the economy.
- **The "NEET" Crisis:** Millions are categorized as Not in Employment, Education, or Training (NEET), leading to widespread despair.
- **Graduates Stranded:** Even those with tertiary qualifications find themselves holding degrees but facing empty hands.
- **The Experience Trap:** Entry-level jobs demand years of experience, shutting the door on first-time job seekers.

Today's Digitalised Job Market Require Skills To Match

While yesterday's struggle was for equal education; today's struggle is for relevant education and efficient skills development. The modern global economy demands digital literacy, technical expertise, and critical thinking. Yet, our current landscape reflects a profound skills mismatch:

- **The Digital Divide:** Rural and township youth lack affordable access to data, devices, and internet infrastructure.
- **Outdated Curricula:** Educational outputs do not match the rapidly evolving demands of the private sector.
- **Underfunded TVETs:** Technical and vocational training institutions require urgent modernization to become hubs of excellence.

Job creation and skills development need to complement each other. We cannot solve today's crisis with yesterday's blueprints. We call upon government, the private sector, and all progressive organisations and civil society to unite in implementing a radical economic rescue plan for our youth:

1. **Massive Skills Revolution:** We demand immediate, fully funded upskilling and reskilling programs focusing on software development, green energy, agriculture, and advanced manufacturing.
2. **Scrapping Experience Requirements:** We urge corporate South Africa to eliminate the "minimum experience" barrier for entry-level roles, focusing instead on aptitude and willingness to learn.
3. **Igniting Youth Entrepreneurship:** We must cut the red tape for young entrepreneurs, providing them with accessible seed capital, mentorship, and guaranteed market access.
4. **Expanded Public Works & Internships:** Government must scale up paid internship programs across all departments to give youth their vital first stepping stone into the workplace.

Call of Action To All Spheres Of Society

The youth of 1976 altered the course of South African history. The youth of today possess that same resilient spirit, but they cannot win this economic war alone. We call on all sectors of society to move past rhetoric and deliver the tangible opportunities, skills, and jobs that our youth rightfully deserve.
