



PUBLIC PROTECTOR  
SOUTH AFRICA

**Address by Public Protector Adv. Busisiwe Mkhwebane during the  
Young Independents Call For Nominations 2017 in Cape Town on  
Thursday, 08 December 2016**

**Independent Media Executive Chairman, Dr Iqbal Survé;**

**Group Executive & Founder of The Young Independents, Mr Mike  
Ntsasa**

**The Executive of Independent Media;**

**Youth people;**

**Academics;**

**Students;**

**Professionals**

**Ladies and gentlemen;**

**Inspiring and Aspiring leaders**

Good evening!

Let me start by congratulating Independent Media for this noble initiative.

The media is usually seen as the sector of society that either makes or breaks people, with many inclined to agree mainly with the “breaking people” part.

It is inspiring to see that through your corporate social investment programmes, you also do a lot to “make people”.

I am honoured to have been chosen to address this year’s Young Independents Call for Nominations. Most importantly, I am privileged to speak to the people in whose hands the future of this country is, the youth.

Nine years ago, a teenaged young man and his high school friends were basking in the sizzling Limpopo sun when one of the friends asked: *“Why doesn't somebody invent something that you can just put on your skin and then you don't have to bathe?”*

That is all it took for young Ludwick Marishane, from a poverty stricken village of Motetema in Limpopo, to break away from the societal rite of passage that sees many of us completing matric and getting a university degree with the sole aim of getting employment and retiring at 60.

You know the story. Marishane is the founder and inventor of DryBath Gel, a hygiene product that has since taken the world by storm, working as an effective substitute for a normal bath or shower, ensuring that you stay clean and fresh while using little or no water.

Now 26 years of age and one of South Africa’s youngest entrepreneurs, Marishane innovatively invented the product at a tender age of 17 to fill a gap he saw in the world and in the process help save water, a scarce resource for many.

His is an inspirational story of a young man from humble beginnings, who broke with convention and became his own boss in his formative years, in the process creating opportunities for himself and others across international borders.

And his amazing story has not gone unnoticed.

In 2011, Marishane, who holds a Bachelor of Business Science from the University of Cape Town, was awarded the Best Student Entrepreneur in the World accolade. In the same year, technology giant, Google, named him as one of the 12 Brightest Young Minds in the world.

Two years later, Time Magazine, an influential global publication, named him as one of the “Top 30 under 30 People that are going to change the world”.

Marishane said the following about his achievements:

QUOTE

*“On the gravel roads of Limpopo, with an allowance of R50 a week, I came up with a way for the world not to bathe. What is stopping you?”*

UNQUOTE

This for me, is the key question that every other young person in the country should ask themselves: What is stopping me from also thinking out of the box, breaking with the norms and traditions and identifying a problem that I can turn into an opportunity to be exploited?

Our country is facing a lot of challenges: Our economy is stagnating; many of our people live below the breadline; unemployment is on the rise, with the latest figures from Statistics South Africa placing the unemployment rate at a 13-year high of 26.7%; and then there is the ever widening gap between the haves and the have-nots.

The situation is even more hostile to the youth themselves. Youth unemployment rate, which tracks joblessness among those younger than 24, is at the moment among the highest in the world at 55%, a 5% increase year-on-year.

Then there is academic exclusion of young people as more and more households struggle to keep up with rising university tuition, a phenomenon that has prompted the birth of the #FeesMustFall movement.

Young people are also terrorised by disease. We learned with sadness last Thursday that the rate of new HIV infections is still extremely high, particularly among adolescent girls and young women. There is also the issue of substance abuse, with many young people addicted to illicit drugs such as *tik* and *nyaope*, among others.

Another Statistics South Africa survey, profiling the social status of young people between the ages of 15 and 34, showed last year that about 70% of the country's youth were more likely to be victims and perpetrators of crime, including assault, robbery and property theft than adults.

With all these problems, we look to you, the youth, to come up with solutions. Like Ludwick Marishane, we look to you to find the kind of solutions that will also double up as opportunities to address other issues such as poverty, inequality and unemployment.

There is a popular saying by onetime American President, John F. Kennedy, that goes: "*Ask not what your country can do for you, ask what you can do for your country.*" This statement can't ring more relevant today than it ever did before.

But why are we burdening the youth with the responsibility of coming up with solutions to such big problems? Shouldn't this be the duty of adults? Shouldn't we leave this responsibility at the doorsteps of Parliamentarians, Cabinet or big business?

Yes, maybe we should. We elected the politicians to solve our problems, didn't we? We consume big business' products and it is high time they gave back. Not so? Maybe it is unfair to overburden the youth with adults' problems? Government MUST create an enabling environment as the active agent of the State.

But then again, maybe there is a backstory to this. Throughout history young people across the globe have always taken the lead in helping to resolve the problems their countries grappled with.

In our own backyard, at the height of the oppression of black people in the 1940s, it was young people such as Mandela, Tambo, Slovo, Sisulu,

Lembede and Sobukwe, to mention but a few, who took it upon themselves to exert more pressure on the government of the day to liberate the disenfranchised.

One of the women that led the 1956 anti-pass laws march to the Union Buildings, Sophie Williams De Bruyn, was in her late teens when she joined her older counterparts, Lillian Ngoyi, Helen Joseph and Albertina Sisulu, to take the apartheid government head-on.

Needless to say, the 1976 Soweto Uprisings were led by young people just as today's generation of youth is spearheading the struggle against runaway university fees that are threatening to keep most of them outside the lecture halls.

We can, therefore, argue on the basis of this rich history that it is not a big ask to call on young people to take it upon themselves to find solutions to the challenges that are standing between our country and prosperity.

Indeed, we are in serious need of young people who have it in themselves to transcend any boundaries set by past experiences and convention and who will use their training and God-given talents help us out of the difficulties we face.

Young people should not just follow the societal norm of going to school with the sole aim of swelling the ranks of some firm or government department. South Africa yearns for a generation of young people that will set out to create employment for others, alleviate poverty, close the gap between the rich and the poor and, solve the disease and substance abuse problem.

Programme Director;

Allow me to digress a little at this point. It would be remiss of me not to exploit this opportunity to do what the Constitution enjoins me to do, which is to see to it that the Public Protector is accessible to all persons and communities.

As some of you might be aware, I lead an institution that is among the six independent constitutional bodies that have the mammoth task of strengthening and supporting constitutional democracy.

Why should you, as young people, care to know about us?

We exist to protect your right to proper conduct in state affairs. Section 182 of the Constitution empowers me to investigate, report on and remedy any alleged or suspected improper conduct in state affairs.

Improper conduct may refer to abuse of power, abuse of state resources, improper enrichment, undue delays in the provision of public services and discourteous treatment by any state functionary.

We exercise our powers and functions with impartiality and without fear, favour or prejudice.

On a number of occasions we were approached by young people running their own businesses and trading with the state. These are young people who are doing exactly what we are calling on you to do: create opportunities for yourselves and others.

Unfortunately these young people's business was hamstrung by an organ of state that was abusing its power and withholding payment for services rendered, thereby strangling these young people's business.

We stepped in, investigated and found that indeed the young people's allegations were substantiated. We ordered the organ of state involved to pay up.

In another instance, we got approached by a young person who was concerned about the well-being of his community after a sewage pipe burst that saw human waste flooding the streets in his neighbourhood for days on end.

Children had to jump over the streams of toxic waste on their way to school. Toddlers played not far from the stench. This posed a big health hazard for the community.

When phone calls to the municipality did not bear fruit, the young person concerned knew exactly who to turn to. We stepped in and within hours, municipal engineers and plumbers were on the scene not only fixing the leak but overhauling the entire system to prevent a recurrence.

What we admired about these young people is that they knew on which door to knock when things were not going the right way. They could have taken to the streets, barricaded the roads, burned things down and pelted law enforcement officers with missiles.

But they knew better than to destroy the very infrastructure they will need the following day. They knew that engaging in violent conduct may only land them in jail, earning them criminal records that will only take opportunities away from them, condemning them to a life of poverty.

And so they chose to use an avenue that our Constitution created for the public to hold the government to account and their problems were solved. We can help you too. We can help you ensure that the government delivers to you an improved quality of life and a freed potential that the Constitution promises.

We sure can also step in to ensure that government creates a conducive environment for you to become the kind of young person South Africa needs, the kind of young person that will be part of the solution to our problems, not part of the problem.

Although we already have a few young people that are walking down that path, we need to produce more of them. We need more who will not only follow in the footsteps of Ludwick Marishane but also think like him or do better.

When he was asked what kind of world he dreamt of, Marishane said the following:

QUOTE

*“My ideal world would have limited economic inequality. Let us say the richest person in my world would not be a thousand times wealthier than the poorest person.”*

UNQUOTE

South Africa can be better. It can be the best country in the world. But it is its youth that can spark the change that can carry it there. It is in your hands. **START IN YOUR LOCAL COMMUNITY.**

Thank you.

**Adv. Busisiwe Mkhwebane**

**Public Protector of South Africa**