

Remember June 16

Forward to a united front on youth demands

By **BUTI MANAMELA**
YCL National Secretary

The hip-culture that adorned the youth of 76 has been drastically replaced with the now more hip-culture of kwaito—but this does not mean that the challenges and consciousness that was dominant then has dissipated with that culture.

As the YCL we believe that the social, economic and political burdens that the youth of 76 shouldered then may be lighter today with the end of Apartheid, but in reality, not a lot has changed for an ordinary young person.

There artificial divide between the suburban bliss and the township grief remains intact.

Economic activity is still concentrated in the opulence of Sandton, whilst the poverty trap still sharpens its claws in the desolation of Alexandra.

This is a clear message to the youth of our times that the miseries which we hoped will dawn with the end of Apartheid are still on course and calls on us to act with the same fervor that our counterparts in 76 did in order to complete their daunting task.

This brings to question why we commemorate June 16, 1976.

It is beyond Hector Perterson or Tsietsi Mashinini.

It is beyond the teaching of Afrikaans or access to equal education through an end to Bantu Education.

As the YCL we see the continued commemoration of June 16 fixating in the minds of the youth of today the seed that our democracy was not a miracle.

It also teaches us that it is only through struggle that we can complete what the youth of '76 sparked.

Since 1994, we were made to believe that ours was a miracle ushered by the gods and their prophets.

Every revolution has its own heroes, and ours was Nelson Mandela.

Beyond Mandela, June 16 tells us that there was blood shed, there were lives lost and many young people spent time



YCL National Secretary Buti Manamela back in school uniform to mark Youth Day 2007

either incarcerated in the dungeons or in exile.

Daily, young people are faced with different realities irrespective of their race or gender.

Some of these are depressing, stressful and are a reflection of a dream deferred and a hope shattered.

These realities comprise of unemployment, poverty and HIV/AIDS.

They reflect that the foundations which held Apartheid and colonialism remain intact.

Most of these young people are confronted with a world of crime committed either by them or against them.

They are confronted with a world without access to education, which was one of the central demands of 1976.

They are confronted with a world without access to basic health care, and die from diseases which could have been easily prevented or cured.

Some of these young people may have houses, but fail to sustain them because of high costs of services such as water and electricity.

There are untold stories of youth had hoped to end the cycle of poverty through promises by institutions such

as Umsobomvu or the National Youth Commission, but saw that dream dissipate when these institutions failed to deliver.

There are young people whom, for them it is not about being able to pay the cost of government services, but about the absence of government within their reach.

These young people are located in the most rural of our areas.

Where they stay, there are no schools, no clinics, no Home Affairs offices, no visible municipal administrations, and no labour department inspectors to ensure that they are not abused as child workers or underpaid as farm-workers.

The challenge that we are faced with as leaders and organisations is to define and shape a role for young people in the current conjecture and mobilise them for its attainment.

We have committed a grave mistake in the past of believing that with the election of a black president things will come without struggle, and that the government will heed to our calls at all times.

We should ensure that we are the pressure point that reminds our elected leaders that the youth, which comprises more than 60% of the population, are gradually becoming angry with the slow pace of transition and the dislocation caused by capitalism.

Our new mandate should also calls on young people to move beyond the political divide and forge a united front aimed at addressing youth demands.

The tribute and commemoration we can give to the June 16 detachment is to ensure that the current generation defends that which they handed over to us.

As we take yet another glance at that recognizable picture of a shot Hector Peterson, we also need to remember that our miseries cannot end just through prayer but also through struggle.

As we replicate the energy of the youth of 76, we are called upon to remember that our new enemy is white