

World Youth Festival - anti-imperialist love fest

Written by Sapa

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The 17th World Youth Festival was not a “wine and dine festival”, but rather about people who want a better world, National Youth Development Agency chairman Andile Lungisa said on Wednesday.

Briefing the media in Pretoria about some of the hiccups experienced since the start of the festival on Monday, Lungisa said no one was going to die after the festival on the basis that they were not given a three-course meal.

After complaints from some delegates that they were not being given food, Lungisa said the organisers would make sure no one went to bed hungry.

There was some bad blood between youth from various countries. The delegation from Western Sahara had apparently been involved in physical fights with the Moroccan delegation. Their two countries are politically at loggerheads

Israel was also a target as the words: “Go home Israel” scribbled across its designated stand at the Tshwane Events Centre by unknown people.

Meanwhile, the festival was described as an improvement and far better than the last few festivals, particularly the one held in Venezuela.

President of the World Federation of Democratic Youth, Tiago Vieira denied the perception that the conference was a conference of communists, saying reducing it to that would be completely wrong.

The conference was held under the theme, “Let’s defeat imperialism for a world of peace, solidarity and social transformation”.

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The NYDA was a platform that brought together young people from across the globe to work together to build a better world and oppose human right abuses, he said.

Lungisa said participants were not prisoners and could not be restricted from doing certain things, including playing kissing games.

The number of people attending and participating in workshops grew on Wednesday as many delegates squeezed inside various designated halls, in contrast to the scene outside where groups of mostly South Africans were singing and dancing.

Lungisa has defended this behaviour, saying South Africa was a nation of song and dance.

“They are playing during lunch. They are not prisoners... this is not a prisoners festival but a youth festival. They will continue kissing each other.

Lungisa said teething problems involving the late arrival of buses and the shortage of food, and the water situation which forced many living in Soshanguve's Tshwane University of Technology to bath with cold water had been addressed.

“As we move forward, we are getting better.”

He light-heartedly dismissed the fact that a group of youths forced their way into the media centre on Tuesday night as an “act against imperialism”.

They emptied rubbish on the floor, leaving a crack on the glass door.

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The youths demanded that he address their grievances but left without seeing him.

“People are running all over wanting to defeat imperialism now.”

Lungisa urged the media to keep the focus on the content by attending sessions rather than reporting on things happening outside.

There has been widespread criticism over the festival’s budget which was initially R400-million, and was only later cut to a more modest R69-million.

Of this, R29-million came from government and R40-million from the National Lottery Board.

According to the NYDA, there were 15 000 youth from around the world currently in the country for the festival. - Sapa