

# National Human Rights Day



South Africa's National Human Rights Day is celebrated on the 21<sup>st</sup> of March. The day is dedicated to celebrating our unique constitution, and the Bill of Rights in particular. The South African Human Rights Commission (SAHRC) aims to “promote respect for human rights, promote the protection, development and attainment of human rights, and to monitor and assess the observance of human rights in SA”.

National Human Rights Day commemorates the day in 1960 when non-white South Africans gathered together to protest the country's pass laws. The pass laws meant that all non-white South Africans had to present their pass books to police when asked, under threat of being arrested.

The protesters presented themselves, without their pass books, for arrest outside various police stations, but at the Sharpeville police station, the police opened fire and 69 people were killed, and 180 were wounded. This incident sparked international criticism and is often cited as the turning point in South Africa's history. The South African Human Rights Commission is one of the institutions which the constitution provides for, and was established in 1996.

## What are human rights?

Human rights are those rights granted to all people equally, regardless of gender, age, race, nationality, sexual orientation or anything else. These are the rights which are defended under the Bill of Rights in South Africa, as part of our constitution. These are the most basic rights of people. The Bill of Rights is considered to be the cornerstone of democracy in South Africa. Human

dignity, equality, and freedom are the main aspects of the Bill of Rights which the Bill seeks to uphold.

Some provisions of the Bill of Rights include:

- Equality of all citizens in which all citizens have equal right to protection under the law.
- The right to human dignity.
- The right to life.
- The right to freedom and security of the person including bodily and psychological integrity.
- No one may be enslaved, subject to servitude or forced labour.
- The right to privacy.
- The right to freedom of religion, belief, and opinion.
- The right to freedom of expression.
- The right to assemble, demonstrate, picket, and petition.
- Freedom of association.
- Every citizen is free to make political choices, such as forming a political party and partaking in political activities.
- No citizen may be deprived of their citizenship.

Use this day to reflect on your own rights and responsibilities as a South African citizen.