

Our Hosts, the Acting Premier of Gauteng, Mr Panyaza Lesufi and the Executive Mayor of Sedibeng District Municipality, Cllr Busisiwe Modisakeng, Minister of Arts and Culture, Mr Nkosinathi Mthethwa and all Ministers present Deputy Ministers, Members of the Gauteng Provincial Executive Council and Members of Parliament and Provincial Legislature present, President of the Pan Africanist Congress Leaders of various political parties represented here, Leaders of Labour, Faith-based organisations, and Civil Society, Community of Sedibeng, Distinguished Guests, Ladies and Gentlemen,

Dumelang! Sanibonani! Good Day!

I am humbled and honoured to join the community of Sedibeng to mark our country's Human Rights Day.

In the past, we commemorated this day as Sharpeville Day.

It is a day which serves as a painful reminder of our struggle for a united, non-racial, non-sexist, just and prosperous South Africa.

It is a day to pause, think and reflect. We commemorate not only to remember, but also to measure how far we have come in achieving the ideals cherished by those who lost their lives in the struggle.

On this day we remember the tenacity and indomitable spirit of our people. We celebrate their bravery and courage. They stood fearless in defiance against the murderous and illegitimate apartheid regime.

And so today we still evoke the memory of one of the finest stalwarts of the liberation movement, Robert Sobukwe, who died forty years ago.

We give credence and gratitude to his struggle and that of many of his luminaries.

We grant them this honour to claim their rightful place in history; to learn from them, to learn what it means to one's soul for a deeper love of country and one's people.

On that fateful day, fifty eight (58) years ago, an illegitimate and brutal apartheid regime sought to silence an unarmed and defenceless people with guns.

When the last order to shoot finally stunned in silence, 68 souls lay dead, strewn over the streets of Sharpeville, with nearly 200 wounded.

Their rivers of blood remain deep in this soil.

For us who live today, for us who enjoy their fruits of freedom, it must remain a constant reminder that our freedom was paid for. Our remit is to pay it forward for those who are yet to come.

Long after we have lived, future generations must say we inherited a struggle, we made good on the promise of our forebears, and then left for them a united and prosperous South Africa.

Each generation must take up its struggle for unity and freedom and keep paying it forward.

Never must our pain and memory of the past paralyse us.

The guns may be silenced, but we must never stop the irreversible march to meaningful freedom and democracy— a democracy where all our people will benefit from our struggle of radical socio-economic transformation.

Compatriots,

At the heart of the struggle for human dignity and freedom lay the struggle against the despised pass laws— the carrying of *die dompass*— which sought to subjugate black South Africans as inferior and subhuman.

These were pass laws that stripped black South Africans of their citizenship, restricted their movement, and excluded them from business opportunities and well-paying jobs.

It was deliberately designed to oppress them and to render them beggars in land of their forefathers.

As early as 1922, the Stallard Commission set up by the Smuts government wrote in its report that,

"The native should only be allowed to enter urban areas, which are essentially the white man's creation, when he is willing to enter and to administer to the needs of the white man, and should depart there from when he ceases so to minister."

Therefore, *die dompas* became a symbol of black humiliation, of subjugation, and of exile.

So the anti-pass campaigns led by gentle giants like Robert Mangaliso Sobukwe and Nelson Mandela was a continuation of anti-pass resistance.

Just as we have to pay forward our struggle, many South African women came before them.

Sharpeville gave impetus to earlier anti-pass struggles led by Charlotte Maxeke in 1913 in Bloemfontein.

It was a continuation of the struggle in the fifties against passes spearheaded by women like Bertha Gxowa, Lilian Ngoyi, Rahima Moosa, Sophie DeBruin-Williams, Helen Joseph, and the women of Zeerust.

Their struggle was taken forward by the generation of young lions and black consciousness activists in the seventies, COSATU, and the UDF in the eighties.

At the heart of all these campaigns against the indignity of the passes, was the struggle for equality and citizenship. At its core was a struggle for fundamental human rights.

When President Nelson Mandela paid it forward, he recited Ingrid Jonker's Poem, *Die Kind* (The Child), written in the aftermath of the Sharpeville and others massacres throughout the country, in his inaugural speech to Parliament in 1994:

"The child is not dead

the child lifts his fists against his mother

who shouts Africa!...

The child is not dead

Not at Langa nor at Nyanga

nor at Orlando nor at Sharpeville

nor at the police post at Philippi

where he lies with a bullet through his brain...

the child is present at all assemblies and law-giving

the child peers through the windows of houses

and into the hearts of mothers

this child who only wanted to play in the sun at Nyanga

is everywhere

the child grown to a man treks on through all Africa

the child grown to a giant journeys

over the whole world

without a pass!"

Madiba described Ingrid Jonker as a woman who transcended a particular experience. She had unclothed herself of her skin colour. She became a South African, an African, and a citizen of the world.

As a decent human being, she shared fully the pain of her South African people.

She humanised herself, she asked her people the question: what superiority and justice could we claim when the police fatally wound an African baby in her mother's arms in Philippi, when we kill the black child in Soweto for demanding a decolonised education, when we deny those who work the land the right to own it.

In our journey to heal the wounds of the past and rebuild our country, our nation yearns for many more Ingrid Jonkers who will fight – without regard to race - for the rights of children in our townships and villages.

All South Africans, black and white, must be outraged by the death of five year old Viwe Jaliin a school latrine pit toilet in Mbizana.

Oliver Tambo was born in Mbizana. What would he say to us who busk in the glory of his struggle, if we still fail to protect our children, years after Grade R learner, Michael Komape, died in a similar undignified manner in 2014.

Why would The Lion of the North, Peter Mokaba, not turn in his grave when he learnt that recently, a five year old girl in grade R, was electrocuted at a school in Limpopo.

What do we say, when in November last year, five children died a gruesome death in Soshanguve when an overhead light fell on them.

What do we say to our innocent children about a police officer who molests children placed in his care, children who have entrusted justice and salvation to him after they were raped?

What has gone wrong? Why have we become so numbed to the tragedies that rob our children of their innocence?

And so on this day, as we remember Sharpeville, as we celebrate our human rights, we have many questions to answer to in our quest for renewal and unity.

We must begin to do things differently. We must again become men and women of moral stamina, courage and conviction. We must be like those who died in Sharpeville.

For rights come with responsibilities. We must all do our part with utmost regard for the life of others, especially those that are vulnerable and marginalised.

It requires that we return to our values that embrace the sanctity of life.

It requires that we conduct ourselves ethically. That we give the highest quality of service to our people. That we become public servants again. That

we use our freedoms and democracy to serve our people selflessly at local, provincial, and national government.

Our real hope for the renewal, the regeneration of the soul of our nation, rest in our ability to fix our public service and improve the performance of our developmental state.

Our state must be led by men and women of high moral rectitude, and dedication; people who have made it their mission to selflessly serve and improve the lives of ordinary South Africans; people who have nothing else but the interest of our nation at heart.

Fellow Compatriots,

Today South Africa also joins the nations of the world to mark the United Nations International Day for the Elimination of Racial Discrimination.

We are called upon to work together to advance human rights, inclusion, and unity. We must create a world free from the evil clutches of racism and social exclusion.

As government, we condemn the resurgence racism in our country.

It is an indictment on all of us that after defeating the inhumane apartheid system, racial abuse and racial attacks are on the rise.

They are everywhere. On the factory floor, in board rooms, in multi-national clothing stores, at pubs, gas stations, and at the farms.

All of this renders the struggles and the deaths of the people in Langa, Sharpville, Boipatong, Bisho and many others worthless.

We cannot count ourselves worthy of their contributions if we fail to rise above racial prejudice and unite as a nation.

Fellow South Africans,

This year we commemorate Human Rights Day during the year of a global human rights ambassador, Nelson Rolihlahla Mandela.

We mark it under the theme "Promoting and Deepening Human Rights Across Society."

Madiba taught us that *"to deny people their human rights is to challenge their very humanity."*

In honour of Madiba's memory, we urge our citizens to work tirelessly to expand the frontiers of freedom, justice, and peace.

To succeed, we must all start from the standpoint that people are born with their inherent dignity.

On a day like this, we implore those in leadership in government, business, and communities to be actively involved in championing the rights of all our people, especially the vulnerable and marginalised.

We implore mayors, councillors, ward committee members, civil servants to embrace the ethos of *batho pele*.

Our Constitution demands that we work collaboratively to render quality services and improve the living conditions of our people.

We also urge our people, in the spirit and ethos of *Thuma Mina*, to rise and lend a hand to make South Africa a better place to live in.

To build a country is an enormous challenge requiring a new sense of patriotism.

It requires that we return to our people's traditions of sacrifice and voluntarism.

It requires that we get involved in small but important tasks like helping township and rural youth with their homework to improve educational outcomes.

It requires that we become part of the activist movement that rises early, that eats healthy, exercises, and cleans its streets.

It requires that we become active in remote and rural communities to help impoverished families access social security grants.

We must not look away at the plight of children living in the streets without food, shelter, and access to health.

We urge law students, law firms, universities, NGOs, and communities to contribute their skills and time to ensure that such children are cared for, that their rights to dignity and access to food are fully realized.

Whilst efforts have been made by the Department of Justice and Constitutional Development to educate people about their rights and responsibilities, much still remains to be done.

To raise human rights awareness, the Department of Justice and Constitutional Development is involved in initiatives like the National Schools Moot Court Competition (NSMCC) which it undertakes in partnership with the DBE and the University of Pretoria.

We urge our South African media to also utilise its vast resources and skills to partner with government in educating our people about their rights and how they can enforce them.

Access to justice must never be a privilege to be enjoyed by the rich and powerful. Our justice system and institutions must work for the poor and the needy.

We encourage our young people, especially black women, to follow careers in law. We need more human rights lawyers to defend the socio-economic rights of people living in informal settlements and villages.

Our children in schools and communities must be empowered through popular programmes like Street Law about our laws and how to enforce the law.

Fellow South Africans,
Human Rights Day reminds that irrespective of our race, gender, status, or creed, we are all part of the human family.

It's a day where we are reminded that our Bill of Rights is the bedrock of our democracy and freedom.

It's a day reminding us that South African workers have fought hard to resist inhumane working conditions, slave-wages, and unfair labour practice.

So today we must rededicate ourselves to the course of defending the rights of the most vulnerable among us.

But it is also a day that must remind us that freedom and democracy remain meaningless if the majority of South Africans remain trapped in poverty, without work, without bread, and without land.

Compatriots,
As a country, we owe our flourishing human rights ethos to a global human rights icon like founding President Nelson Mandela and his generation.

We must all rise and lend a hand to make sure that no child travels long distances without shoes to dilapidated schools without clean water, sanitation, and electricity.

We must all rise and lend a hand in building communities where women can walk freely at night without fear that they will be raped or killed.

We must put shoulder to wheel to help families rehabilitate their sons and daughters who have surrendered their lives to drugs and alcohol abuse.

We need parents, teachers, traditional leaders and spiritual workers to educate our children that it is not *cool* to lay hand on a women. To teach them that to beat a woman is an insult to our culture and traditions. To teach them that when a woman says no she means exactly that, NO.

To honour Madiba and to deepen human rights, we must do more to fight the root causes of violent crimes and high murder rates in our country.

We must unite to fight the triple scourges of poverty, unemployment, and inequality.

Compatriots,
Human rights can only thrive where there is freedom, where communities are overcoming discrimination.

They thrive when we work together to fight the stigmatisation of people living with HIV.

They thrive in conditions where people living with mental illness are supported and their humanity affirmed. Not where they are shamed, starved, neglected, sexually abused, and beaten.

President Mandela taught us that, *"For to be free is not merely to cast off one's chains, but to live in a way that respects and enhances the freedom of others"*.

Within the spirit of the Sustainable Development Goals that **We Leave No One Behind**, I call on South Africans that we walk the extra mile in upholding the rights of persons with disabilities as equal citizens and residents of South Africa.

Our country is emerging from a painful period in which 144 persons with psychosocial disabilities perished because we did not do enough as government to uphold their rights to self-representation, to protection from harm, to access to quality care.

The past few years have regrettably also seen the emergence of killings of children and adults with albinism and of desecration of their bodies.

Two years ago we lost the lives of three Deaf children when the boarding facility they were supposed to be safe in, burnt down due to insufficient disability inclusive emergency measures.

As we celebrate Human Rights Day today, as the world celebrates World Down Syndrome Day today, let us individually and collectively, speak out and act with more urgency, in solidarity, when we witness abuses and human rights violations against people with disabilities.

We must refuse to be numbed by the persistent cruel murderers of our people. We must refuse to embrace cruelty and torture as a new normal as we saw recently with the murder and burning of 21 year old TUT student and Taxify driver, Siyabonga Ngcobo.

We cannot rest as a nation when our daughters die painfully and their bodies are burned. We saw this with the murder of 22 year old Karabo Mokoena last year.

We call on all South African men to get involved in ending the murder of women who die in the hands of their partners.

Each day we must remind young boys and men that women's rights are also human rights.

Men of good moral conscience must stand up against the discrimination, abuse, and murder of people in the LGBTI community.

Fellow South Africans,

We must never allow the face poverty and landlessness to become the new dompas.

We dare not let the sacrifices of the people of Sedibeng be in vain.

To honour them, we must remain vigilant and jealously guard the gains of our freedom.

In service delivery, we must *Return to Basics* to involve communities in our municipality plans and to utilise our people as drivers of change.

We must use the limited state resources for the benefit of all our people, not for the benefit of the connected few.

This new era demands that their rights are fully protected and that they are never treated with contempt.

On Human Rights Day, we must ask ourselves if our words and actions are befitting the honour of the victims of the the blood that was shed at Sharpeville, Sebokeng and Boipatong.

Driving here this morning and listening to residents, it is clear that our people believe that our government can do much better to improve their lives.

I will be working closely with Premier David Makhura to make sure that we speedily respond to their concerns.

My office and the Premier's Office will coordinate efforts to deepen service delivery, alleviate poverty, and eliminate unemployment.

This work begins now. My office is adopting Sharpeville as one of its priority projects.

We will begin by simple actions of cleaning the graveyards of where our heroes and people are buried.

When we commemorate sixty years of the death of the victims of Sharpeville in two years, we must be able to say it pays to respect human rights and the rule of law.

We must be able to say that our people were correct to adopt our first Bill of Rights called the *African Claims* at the ANC 1943 National Conference.

We must affirm the correctness of their logic is stating that,

"We, the African people, regard as fundamental to the establishment of a new order in South Africa the abolition of all enactments which discriminate against the African on grounds of race and colour."

The governing party's programme of accelerated radical socio-economic transformation seeks to address these historical demands which were raised in the African Claims and the Freedom Charter.

Fellow South Africans,

This region of Sedibeng is an important station in South Africa's liberation route.

It stands out as our mecca of freedom.

Our pilgrimage to Sharpeville gives us the possibility to taste the deep wells of liberty.

The streets, smells, and sounds... the courage and smiles on the faces of the people of Sedibeng evoke the echoes of a place deeply rooted in history and memory.

Coming to Sharpeville, Sebokeng, and Boipatong gives us another chance to sip from the overflowing fountain of our people's resilience and heroism.

They risked life and limb to defend our dignity and humanity.

We dare not fail them.

We dare not allow poverty, landlessness, and despair become our new *dompas*.

The *dompas* is dead.

But the child is not dead.

The conscious voice of Ingrid Jonker must reawaken to remind us, black and white that, "*Die kind is nie dood nie.*"

We must find one another.

And together we must build the South Africa of our deepest aspirations.

I thank you.

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