



**The Year of Charlotte Maxeke:
Promoting Human Rights in the
Age of COVID-19**

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Human Rights Month 2021

1 to 31 March

Human Rights Month is commemorated in March to remind South Africans about the sacrifices that accompanied the struggle for the attainment of democracy in South Africa. Human Rights Day on 21 March falls within this period.

This year we commemorate Human Rights Month under the theme: “The year of unity, socio-economic renewal and nation-building.”

The 1960s were characterised by systematic defiance and protest against apartheid and racism across the country. On 21 March 1960, the community of Sharpeville and Langa townships, like their fellow compatriots across the country, embarked on a protest march to protest against pass laws. The apartheid police shot and killed 69 of the protesters at Sharpeville, many of them shot while fleeing. Many other people were killed in other parts of the country. The tragedy came to be known as the Sharpeville Massacre and it exposed the apartheid government’s deliberate violation of human rights to the world.

The democratic government declared 21 March Human Rights Day to commemorate and honour those who fought for our liberation and the rights we enjoy today.

Our [Constitution](#) is hailed as one of the most progressive in the world. The Constitution is the ultimate protector of our Human Rights, which were previously denied to the majority of our people under Apartheid. We commemorate Human Rights Day to reinforce our commitment to the [Bill of Rights](#) as enshrined in our Constitution.

These rights include:

- Equality – everyone is equal before the law and has the right to equal protection and benefit of the law.
- Human dignity – everyone has inherent dignity and have their dignity respected and protected.
- Freedom of movement and residence – everyone has a right to freedom of movement and to reside anywhere in the country.
- Language and culture – everyone has the right to use the language and to participate in the cultural life of their choice.
- Life - everyone has the right to life.

Whether we are at the workplace, within communities, at schools, or with our partners and children, we all need to demonstrate the kind of responsibility that we would like to see in our country's future.

We call on all South Africans to use Human Rights Month to foster greater social cohesion, nation-building and a shared national identity. It is our duty as a nation to strive for inclusive socio-economic development while ensuring that we combat scourges such as racism, racial discrimination, xenophobia and all related intolerances as well as gender-based violence and femicide, which are undermining our human rights culture.

Event Category:

[Commemorative events](#)

RELATED INFORMATION

[Department of Justice and Constitutional Development](#)

[Department of Sport, Arts and Culture](#)

[Constitutional Court of South Africa](#)(link is external)

[The South African Human Rights Commission](#)(link is external)

[Constitution of the Republic of South Africa, 1996 - Chapter 2: Bill of Rights](#)