

From Wikipedia:

The **Freedom Charter** was the statement of core principles of the South African Congress Alliance, which consisted of the African National Congress and its allies the South African Indian Congress, the South African Congress of Democrats and the Coloured People's Congress. It is characterized by its opening demand; "The People Shall Govern!"^[1]

In 1955, the ANC sent out fifty thousand volunteers into townships and the countryside to collect 'freedom demands' from the people of South Africa. This system was designed to give all South Africans equal rights. Demands such as "Land to be given to all landless people", "Living wages and shorter hours of work", "Free and compulsory education, irrespective of colour, race or nationality" were synthesized into the final document by ANC leaders including Z.K. Mathews and Lionel 'Rusty' Bernstein. The Charter was officially adopted on June 26, 1955 at a Congress of the People in Kliptown. The meeting was attended by roughly three thousand delegates but was broken up by police on the second day, although by then the charter had been read in full. The crowd had shouted its approval of each section with cries of 'Afrika!' and 'Mayibuye!'^[2] Nelson Mandela only escaped the police by disguising himself as a milkman, as his movements and interactions were restricted by banning orders at the time. ^[3]

The document is notable for its demand for and commitment to a non-racial South Africa, and this has remained the platform of the ANC. Members of the ANC with opposing Africanist views left the group after it adopted the charter, forming the Pan Africanist Congress. The charter also calls for democracy and human rights, land reform, labour rights, and nationalization. After the congress was denounced as treason, the South African government banned the ANC and arrested 156 activists, including Mandela who was imprisoned in 1962. However, the charter continued to circulate in the revolutionary underground and inspired a new generation of young militants in the 1980s.^[4]

On February 11 1990, Mandela was finally freed and the ANC came to power soon afterwards in May 1994. The new 'Constitution of South Africa' included in its text many of the demands called for in the Freedom Charter. Nearly all the enumerated concerns regarding equality of race and language were directly addressed in the constitution, although the document included nothing to the effect of the nationalization of industry or redistribution of land, both of which were specifically outlined in the charter.



"We, the People of South Africa, declare for all our country and the world to know that South Africa belongs to all who live in it..."

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History

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- South Africa in the 1950s
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- Significance of the Congress of the People and the Freedom Charter
- The Treason Trial

The Freedom Charter

Significance of the Congress of the People and the Freedom Charter

The campaign for the Congress of the People and the Freedom Charter was the climax to a decade or so of multifaceted and creative resistance to white minority rule and domination by a disenfranchised black majority. Coming shortly after the Defiance Campaign of 1952, it was a unique and imaginative response to an increasingly repressive and racist government that narrowed the scope for extra-parliamentary dissent and opposition. In the first instance, the campaign originated from the legal limits imposed by a repressive state. More fundamentally, the campaign responded to another need – that of developing the organisational and social bases of the Congress movement and clarifying its political policies and principles and social goals.

The campaign occurred in a phase of transition when the Congress movement experienced rapid growth and expansion in of both mass membership and organisation. In the three years following the Defiance Campaign, the formation of the South African Coloured People's Organisation, the South African Congress of Democrats, the Federation of South African Women, the South African Congress of Trade Unions and the South African Communist Party. This remarkable organisational development and growth was loosely held together by



The crowd at the Congress of the People, Kliptown, 1955

Through the different components of the Congress Alliance, the Congress movement had come to represent the progressive and democratic interests of Africans, Indians, coloureds and whites as well as women, youth, workers, and to a lesser extent, peasants and agricultural workers. The campaign for the Congress of the People and the Freedom Charter transformed what was essentially an urban-based movement into a fully-fledged national movement. Organisational advances were made in the rural areas as a result of volunteers

exist previously. The campaign also succeeded in minimising ideological feuding and rivalry among black liberal-Christians, communists, conservatives and Africanists.

The new-found ideological cohesion that was established during the campaign marginalised the Africanists in the Congress Alliance and led to their defection shortly afterwards.

The Freedom Charter gave greater content and meaning to abstract goals such as "freedom", "national liberation" and "self-determination of the African masses". It gave concrete detail and substance to the Congress slogan, "Freedom in our lifetime", by articulating what that freedom would mean in practical terms in various spheres of life in South Africa. The Charter provided a clear and concise set of policies, aims and objectives and principles of the Congress Alliance. It served as a vision of a post-apartheid South Africa, which was to be used as a mobilising and organising weapon in the struggle for democracy.

The most remarkable feature of this campaign was that it attempted to do what had never been done before in the history of South Africa – it allowed ordinary people, irrespective of race,

a collection of individual leaders in the Congress movement and by a shared adherence to vaguely held policies and principles. The campaign for the Congress of the People and the Freedom Charter altered this state of affairs permanently. It served to consolidate and unify loosely associated political organisations into a principled alliance based on a coherent political programme. It enabled the Congress leadership to construct a structured relationship between the different components of the liberation forces in South Africa on a common and shared vision of an alternative and radically different social order.

For the very first time the Congress movement assumed a fully non-racial character, making it broadly representative of the South African population.

collecting demands and making invaluable political contact with influential rural people such as chiefs, priests, teachers or Advisory Board councillors.

The campaign also revived congress branches in the urban areas that had been weakened in the aftermath of the Defiance Campaign. The campaign led to the establishment of numerous local Congress of the People committees which drew in a range of social, cultural, religious, sports, educational, traders and non-political youth groups into the work and activities of the Congress movement. In some areas it also provided the stimulus for the creation of new ANC branches.

The campaign for the Congress of the People and the Freedom Charter introduced within the liberation movement a degree of ideological uniformity and cohesion that did not

language, sex, religion, class, educational standard, personal beliefs and values and organisational affiliation to speak about their hopes and dreams of the future.

The adoption of the Freedom Charter by the Congress of the People and subsequently by each component of the Congress Alliance signified a major break with the past traditions of the South African struggle. This was no longer a civil rights movement seeking to be accommodated in the existing socio-economic and political structures of society. It called for a fundamental restructuring of all aspects of South African society. The Congress of the People had placed the question of social transformation squarely on the agenda of the liberation movement in South Africa. Now there came into being a national liberation movement.

I Govern!

unless it is based on the will of all the people



"We, the People of South Africa, declare for all our country and the world to know that South Africa belongs to all who live in it..."

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The Freedom Charter

Adopted at the Congress of the People, Kliptown, on 26 June 1955



*UDF meeting, mid 1980's, probably Soweto.
Photograph by Paul Weinberg@ South Photographs*

We, the People of South Africa, declare for all our country and the world to know:

that South Africa belongs to all who live in it, black and white, and that no government can justly claim authority unless it is based on the will of all the people;

that our people have been robbed of their birthright to land, liberty and peace by a form of government founded on injustice and inequality;

that our country will never be prosperous or free until all our people live in brotherhood, enjoying equal rights and

opportunities;

that only a democratic state, based on the will of all the people, can secure to all their birthright without distinction of colour, race, sex or belief;

And therefore, we, the people of South Africa, black and white together equals, countrymen and brothers adopt this Freedom Charter;

And we pledge ourselves to strive together, sparing neither strength nor courage, until the democratic changes here set out have been won.

The People Shall Govern!

Every man and woman shall have the right to vote for and to stand as a candidate for all bodies which make laws;

All people shall be entitled to take part in the administration of the country;

The rights of the people shall be the same, regardless of race, colour or sex;

All bodies of minority rule, advisory boards, councils and authorities shall be replaced by democratic organs of self-government.

All National Groups Shall have Equal Rights!

There shall be equal status in the bodies of state, in the courts and in the schools for all national groups and races;

All people shall have equal right to use their own languages, and to develop their own folk culture and customs;

All national groups shall be protected by law against insults to their race and national pride;

The preaching and practice of national, race or colour discrimination and contempt shall be a punishable crime;

All apartheid laws and practices shall be set aside.

The People Shall Share in the Country's Wealth!

The national wealth of our country, the heritage of South Africans, shall be restored to the people;

The mineral wealth beneath the soil, the Banks and monopoly industry shall be transferred to the ownership of the people as a whole;

All other industry and trade shall be controlled to assist the wellbeing of the people;

All people shall have equal rights to trade where they choose, to manufacture and to enter all trades, crafts and professions.

The Land Shall be Shared Among Those Who Work It!

Restrictions of land ownership on a racial basis shall be ended, and all the land re-divided amongst those who work it to banish famine and land hunger;

The state shall help the peasants with implements, seed, tractors and dams to save the soil and assist the tillers;

Freedom of movement shall be guaranteed to all who work on the land;

All shall have the right to occupy land wherever they choose;

People shall not be robbed of their cattle, and forced labour and farm prisons shall be abolished.

All Shall be Equal Before the Law!

No-one shall be imprisoned, deported or restricted without a fair trial; No-one shall be condemned by the order of any Government official;

The courts shall be representative of all the people;

Imprisonment shall be only for serious crimes against the people, and shall aim at re-education, not vengeance;

The police force and army shall be open to all on an equal basis and shall be the helpers and protectors of the people;

All laws which discriminate on grounds of race, colour or belief shall be repealed.

All Shall Enjoy Equal Human Rights!

The law shall guarantee to all their right to speak, to organise, to meet together, to publish, to preach, to worship and to educate their children;

The privacy of the house from police raids shall be protected by law;

All shall be free to travel without restriction from countryside to town, from province to province, and from South Africa abroad;

Pass Laws, permits and all other laws restricting these freedoms shall be abolished.

There Shall be Work and Security!

All who work shall be free to form trade unions, to elect their officers and to make wage agreements with their employers;

The state shall recognise the right and duty of all to work, and to draw full unemployment benefits;

Men and women of all races shall receive equal pay for equal work;

There shall be a forty-hour working week, a national minimum wage, paid annual leave, and sick leave for all workers, and maternity leave on full pay for all working mothers;

Miners, domestic workers, farm workers and civil servants shall have the same rights as all others who work;

Child labour, compound labour, the tot system and contract labour shall be abolished.

The Doors of Learning and Culture Shall be Opened!

The government shall discover, develop and encourage national talent for the enhancement of our cultural life;

All the cultural treasures of mankind shall be open to all, by free exchange of books, ideas and contact with other lands;

The aim of education shall be to teach the youth to love their people and their culture, to honour human brotherhood, liberty and peace;

Education shall be free, compulsory, universal and equal for all children; Higher education and technical training shall be opened to all by means of state allowances and scholarships awarded on the basis of merit;

Adult illiteracy shall be ended by a mass state education plan;

Teachers shall have all the rights of other citizens;

The colour bar in cultural life, in sport and in education shall be abolished.

There Shall be Houses, Security and Comfort!

All people shall have the right to live where they choose, be decently housed, and to bring up their families in comfort and security;

Unused housing space to be made available to the people;

Rent and prices shall be lowered, food plentiful and no-one shall go hungry;

A preventive health scheme shall be run by the state;

Free medical care and hospitalisation shall be provided for all, with special care for mothers and young children;

Slums shall be demolished, and new suburbs built where all have transport, roads, lighting, playing fields, creches and social centres;

The aged, the orphans, the disabled and the sick shall be cared for by the state;

Rest, leisure and recreation shall be the right of all:

Fenced locations and ghettos shall be abolished, and laws which break up families shall be repealed.

There Shall be Peace and Friendship!

South Africa shall be a fully independent state which respects the rights and sovereignty of all nations;

South Africa shall strive to maintain world peace and the settlement of all international disputes by negotiation - not war;

Peace and friendship amongst all our people shall be secured by upholding the equal rights, opportunities and status of all;

The people of the protectorates Basutoland, Bechuanaland and Swaziland shall be free to decide for themselves their own future;

The right of all peoples of Africa to independence and self-government shall be recognised, and shall be the basis of close co-operation.

Let all people who love their people and their country no say, as we say here:

**THESE FREEDOMS WE WILL FIGHT FOR, SIDE BY SIDE, THROUGHOUT OUR LIVES,
UNTIL WE HAVE WON OUR LIBERTY**

THE ADOPTION OF THE FREEDOM CHARTER | SIGNIFICANCE OF THE CONGRESS OF THE PEOPLE AND THE FREEDOM CHARTER

country and the world to know that South Africa belongs to all who live in it, black and white, and that no government can justly claim authority unless it is based on