



The Freedom Charter Revolutionary Programme of the ANC First National Consultative Conference

26 April 1969

For over two hundred and fifty years, the African people fought wars of resistance against the European invaders in defence of their motherland – South Africa. Despite their heroism, courage and tenacity, our people were defeated on the battlefield by the superior arms and organisation of the Europeans.

Although the conflicts and problems of South Africa have largely centred on the relationships between the Africans and Europeans, they are not the only peoples who form the South African population. The Coloured and Indian people are, like the Africans, oppressed by the dominant European minority.

The South Africa of today is the product of the common labour of all its peoples. The cities, industries, mines and agriculture of the country are the result of the efforts of all its peoples. But the wealth is utilised by and for the interests of the white minority only.

The African National Congress was formed in 1912 to unite the Africans as a nation and to forge an instrument for their liberation. From the outset the African National Congress asserted the right of the African people as the indigenous owners of the country, entitled to determine its direction and destiny. Simultaneously, our forefathers recognised that the other groups in the country – the Europeans, Indians and Coloureds – were historically part and parcel of South Africa.

Democratic Principles

The ANC rejected the claims of the European settlers to domination and fought against all attempts to subjugate them in the land of their birth. But in the face of the gravest injustices, the ANC never once abandoned the principle that all those who had their home in the country of the Africans were welcome, provided only that they accepted full and consistent equality and freedom for all. In this the ANC was not merely bowing to history and reality but believed that it was correct in principle to make this position clear. Over and over again in the face of manifest inhumanity, the ANC absolutely refused to be provoked into abandoning its democratic principles.

The ruling white minority rejected the concepts of the ANC, and to that extent the movement, and the people fought and will fight them.

Congress of the People

In the early fifties, when the struggle for freedom was reaching new intensity, the need was seen for a clear statement of the future South Africa as the ANC saw it. Thus was born the Congress of the People campaign. In this campaign, the African National Congress and its allies invited the whole of South Africa to record their demands, which would be incorporated in a common document called the Freedom Charter. Literally millions of people participated in the campaign and sent in their demands for the kind of South Africa they wished to live in. These demands found final expression in the Freedom Charter.

The Freedom Charter was adopted at the Congress of the People representative of all the people of South Africa, which met at Kliptown, Johannesburg on June 25 and 26, 1955. The three thousand delegates who gathered at Kliptown were workers, peasants, intellectuals, women, youth and students of all races and colours. The Congress was the climax of the campaign waged by the African National Congress, the South African Indian Congress, the Coloured People's Organisation, the South African Congress of Trade Unions and the Congress of Democrats. Subsequently, all these organisations adopted the Freedom Charter in their national conferences as their official programme.

Thus the Freedom Charter became the common programme enshrining the hopes and aspirations of all the progressive people of South Africa.

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"High Treason"

From the moment the idea of the Congress of the People and the Freedom Charter was mentioned, the white Government of South Africa termed it "high treason". After the Congress of the People was held and the Charter adopted, fresh threats were uttered by the government. Eventually, 156 leaders of the liberation movement were arrested on December 5, 1956 and charged with plotting to overthrow the State and replace it by a new one along the lines laid down in the Charter.

This long trial which lasted four-and-a-half years resulted in the acquittal of all the accused. By that time the Freedom Charter had become one of the most famous documents in the history of man's struggle for freedom.

The Charter was not the statement of this or that section of the population. It was a declaration of all the people of South Africa. It was a simple, honest, unpretentious document reflecting the desires and ideas of millions of common people. Therein lay the power of its revolutionary message. And always it should be borne in mind that both in its wording and intent the Charter projected the view not of present-day South Africa but that of the country as it should and will be after the victory of the revolution.

Today the African National Congress and its allies are engaged in an armed struggle for the overthrow of the racist regime. In its place the ANC will establish a democratic State along the lines indicated in the Freedom Charter. Although the Charter was adopted 14 years ago, its words remain as fresh and relevant as ever. Some who have forgotten its actual terms or the kind of document it is, or who detach this or that phrase from the document taken as a whole, imagine that the conditions of armed struggle somehow invalidate some provisions of the Charter.

What we believe is that the Charter may require elaboration of its revolutionary message. But what is even more meaningful, it requires to be achieved and put into practice. This cannot be done until State power has been seized from the fascist South African government and transferred to the revolutionary forces led by the ANC.

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The Preamble of the Freedom Charter

The first lines of the Charter declare 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 the people.

The expression "South Africa belongs to all who live in it, black and white" embodies the historical principle that has characterised the policy of the African National Congress towards the peoples who have settled in the country in the past centuries. The African people, as the indigenous owners of the country, have accepted that all the people who have made South Africa, and helped build it up, are components of its multinational population, and will be in a democratic South Africa – one people inhabiting their common home.

No government can justly claim authority unless it is based on the will, not just of the whites, but of all the people of the country. The Freedom Charter thus begins by an assertion of what is and has been a cardinal democratic principle that all can live in South Africa, whatever their origin, in equality and democracy – that the South Africa of the future will not be a country divided unto itself and dominated by a particular racial group. It will be the country of all its inhabitants. It is

the white people who in the past, as now, have rejected this principle, leaving the people no alternative but to convince them by the truth of revolutionary struggle. The preamble ends by calling on the people, black and white, as equals, countrymen and brothers, to pledge to strive together sparing neither strength nor courage until the democratic changes set out in the Freedom Charter had been won.

The preamble, couched in terms similar to many famous documents reflecting man's aspiration for freedom, called for a new State resting on the will of the people – a repudiation of the existing State and a call for revolution. Hereunder we examine, briefly, each section of our Charter.

“The South Africa of the future will not be a country divided unto itself and dominated by a particular racial group.”

The People Shall Govern!

The Republican constitution of South Africa passed in 1961 is a monument to racialism and despotism. In terms of this constitution, supreme legislative authority is vested in the white fascist State President, the House of Assembly and the Senate. Only a white person can be elected State President. The House of Assembly and the Senate consist exclusively of white representatives elected by an exclusively white electorate. Therefore, the power to make laws in our country is a monopoly of the white minority.

The same applies to other organs of government, such as the four provincial councils of Natal, Cape, Orange Free State and Transvaal, which are headed by a white Administrator assisted by an all-white Executive Council. Organs of local government such as District Councils, Municipal Councils and boroughs are manned entirely by white people. Such organs of local government as there are for non-whites consist of the Transkei Legislative Council and an executive, the Indian Council, the Coloured Council, urban Bantu authorities, Territorial Authorities and other such bodies. These are all undemocratic institutions with little or no power and serving merely as a sounding board for the white minority government.

The administration in South Africa is similarly manned at all significant levels by white persons. A successful armed revolution will put an end to this state of affairs.

The Parliament of South Africa will be wholly transformed into an Assembly of the People. Every man and woman in our country shall have the right to vote for and stand as a candidate for all offices and bodies that make laws. The present administration will be smashed and broken up. In its place will be created an administration in which all people irrespective of race, colour or sex can take part. The bodies of minority rule shall be abolished and in their place will be established democratic organs of self-government in all the Provinces, districts and towns of the country.

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All National Groups Shall Have Equal Rights!

In South Africa not only does the system at present enforce discrimination against individuals by reason of their colour or race, but in addition some national groups are privileged, as such, over others. At the moment, the Afrikaner national group is lording it over the rest of the population, with the English group playing second fiddle to them. For all the non-white groups – the Africans, Indians and the Coloureds – the situation is one of humiliation and oppression.

As far as languages are concerned, only Afrikaans and English have official status in the bodies of State such as Parliament or Provincial Councils, and in the courts, schools and the administration. The culture of the African, Indian and Coloured people is barely tolerated. In fact, everything is done to smash and obliterate the genuine cultural heritage of our people. If there is reference to culture by the oppressors, it is for the purpose of using it as an instrument to maintain our people in backwardness and ignorance.

Day in and day out, white politicians and publicists are regaling the world with their theories of national, colour and racial discrimination and contempt for our people. Enshrined in the laws of South Africa are a host of insulting provisions directed at the dignity and humanity of the oppressed people.

A democratic government of the people shall ensure that all national groups have equal rights, as such, to achieve their destiny in a united South Africa.

There shall be equal status in the bodies of State, in the courts and in the schools for the African, Indian, Coloured and whites as far as their national rights are concerned. 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 laws against insults to their race or national pride; the preaching and practice of national, racial or colour discrimination and contempt shall be a punishable crime; and all laws and practices based on apartheid or racial discrimination shall be set aside.

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The People Shall Share in the Country's Wealth!

Today most of the wealth of South Africa is flowing into the coffers of a few in the country and others in foreign lands. In addition, the white minority as a group has over the years enjoyed a complete monopoly of economic rights, privileges and opportunities.

An ANC government shall restore the wealth of our country, the heritage of all South Africans, to the people as a whole. The mineral wealth beneath the soil, the banks and monopoly industry shall be transferred to the ownership of the people as a whole.

At the moment there are vast monopolies whose existence affects the livelihood of large numbers of our people and whose ownership is in the hands of Europeans only. It is necessary for monopolies which vitally affect the social wellbeing of our people, such as the mines, the sugar and wine industry, to be transferred to public ownership so that they can be used to uplift the lives of all the people. All other industry and trade that is not monopolistic shall be allowed, with controls to assist the wellbeing of the people.

All restriction on the right of the people to trade, to manufacture and to enter all trades, crafts and professions shall be ended.

The Land Shall be Shared Among Those Who Work It!

The indigenous people of South Africa, after a series of resistance wars lasting hundreds of years, were deprived of their land. Today in our country all the land is controlled and used as a monopoly by the white minority. It is often said that 87 percent of the land is "owned" by the whites and 13 percent by the Africans. In fact, the land occupied by Africans and referred to as "reserves" is State land from which they can be removed at any time but which for the time being the fascist government allows them to live on.

The Africans have always maintained their right to the country and the land as a traditional birth right of which they have been robbed. The ANC slogan "Mayibuye i-Afrika" was and is precisely a demand for the return of the land of Africa to its indigenous inhabitants. At the same time, the liberation movement recognises that other oppressed people deprived of land live in South Africa. The white people who now monopolise the land have made South Africa their home and are historically part of the South African population and as such entitled to land. This made it perfectly correct to demand that the land be shared among those who work it. But who works the land? Who are the tillers?

The bulk of the land in our country is in the hands of land barons, absentee landlords, big companies and state capitalist enterprises. The land must be taken away from exclusively European control and from these groupings and divided among the small farmers, peasants and landless of all races who do not exploit the labour of others.

Farmers will be prevented from holding land in excess of a given area, fixed in accordance with the concrete situation in each locality. Lands held in communal ownership will be increased so that they can afford a decent livelihood to the people and their ownership shall be guaranteed. Land obtained from land barons and the monopolies shall be distributed to the landless and the land-poor peasants. State land shall be used for the benefit of all the people. Restrictions of land ownership on a racial basis shall be ended and all land shall be open to ownership and use to all people, irrespective of race.

The State shall help farmers with implements, seeds, tractors and dams to save soil and assist the tillers. Freedom of movement shall be guaranteed to all who work on the land. Instruments of control such as the "Trek Pass", private gaols on farms and forced labour shall be abolished. The policy of robbing people of their cattle in order to force them to seek work in order to pay taxes shall be stopped.

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All Shall Be Equal Before the Law!

In terms of such laws as the notorious Suppression of Communism Act, the Native Administration Act, the Riotous Assemblies Act, the Terrorism and Sabotage Acts, and many other laws, our people suffer imprisonment, deportation and restriction without fair trials. These laws shall be abolished. No one shall suffer imprisonment, deportation or restriction without fair trial.

In our country, petty government officials are invested with vast powers at their discretion to condemn people. These powers shall be ended. The courts of South Africa are manned by white officials, magistrates, judges. As a result, the courts serve as instruments of oppression. The democratic state shall create courts representative of all the people.

South Africa has the highest proportion of prisoners of any state in the world. This is because there are so many petty infringements to which a penalty of imprisonment is attached. In a new South Africa, imprisonment shall be for serious crimes against the people only, and shall aim at re-education, not vengeance.

It has been a standing policy of white governments in South Africa to prevent Africans and other non-whites from holding responsible positions in the police force. The present police force and army are instruments of coercion to protect white supremacy. Their whole aim is punitive and terroristic against the majority of the population.

It is the major aim of the armed revolution to defeat and destroy the police force, army and other instruments of coercion of the present state. In a democratic South Africa, the army and police force shall be open to people of all races. Already Umkhonto we Sizwe – the nucleus of our future people’s army – is an armed force working in the interests of people drawn from the land for their liberation. It consists of people drawn from all population groups in South Africa.

All Shall Enjoy Equal Human Rights!

South Africa has numerous laws that limit or infringe the human rights of the people. One need only mention the notorious Suppression of Communism Act; Proclamation 400 which imposes a state of emergency in the Transkei; the Proclamation of 1963 which bans meetings of more than ten Africans in scheduled areas; the Native Laws Amendment Act which introduces racial discrimination in churches and places of worship; and the Bantu Education Act which makes education without a government permit an offence – surely an offence unique in the world, to educate without a permit!

All the above Acts and regulations will be swept away by a people’s government. 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 Pass Laws of South Africa result in the arrest of an average of a thousand persons a day. These laws control and prohibit movement of our people in the country. There are also laws that restrict movement from one province to another. As part of their checking of the people, numerous police raids are organised during which homes are broken into at any time of the day or night. Many laws give the police powers to enter people’s homes without warrant and for no apparent reason except to terrorise them.

All this shall be abolished. The privacy of the home from police raids shall be protected by law. All shall be free to travel without restrictions 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.

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There Shall Be Work and Security!

As with everything else, the rights of collective bargaining of workers in South Africa have been twisted and warped by racial ideas and practices.

Africans do not have the right to form registered trade unions and are prohibited from going on strike. Other workers are forced to belong to racially divided unions. The government has the

power to determine what jobs shall be reserved for what racial groups. People of different races are paid differential wage rates for the same work. Migratory labour is a chief feature of the South African economy and leads to massive social upheaval and distress, particularly among Africans.

In the Democratic State the ANC is determined to achieve, 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, 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, to form trade unions and join political organisations. The use of child labour, the housing of male workers in single men's compounds, the system whereby workers on wine farms are paid tots of wine as part payment on their wages, contract labour – all these pernicious practices shall be abolished by a victorious revolutionary government.

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The Doors of Learning and Culture Shall be Opened!

One of the biggest crimes of the system of white supremacy is the damage it has done to the development of the people of South Africa in the fields of learning and culture.

On the one hand, the minds of white people have been poisoned with all manner of unscientific and racist twaddle in their separate schools, colleges and universities. There has been made available to them all the worst forms of so-called Western culture. The best creations of art, writing, the theatre and cinema which extol the unity of the human family and the need for liberty are only made available in dribs and drabs, whilst the general position is one of a cultural desert.

As far as the non-white people are concerned, the picture is one of deprivation all along the line. One has to think hard to discover whether or not there is even one single theatre, drama school, ballet school or college of music to which non-whites are admitted in South Africa. In Cape Town, there is some ridiculously slight opening for Coloured people. Otherwise 80 percent of the people of South Africa are by and large confined to patronising the few cinemas whose fare is the most inferior type of American cinema art.

A vigilant censorship system exists to ensure that these racially separate cinemas do not show non-whites anything that is considered to be bad for them by the authorities. It is not only that non-whites are virtually debarred from the cultural production of mankind, but in addition, everything has been done to prevent them developing their own national cultures. Publishing is

strictly controlled. Apart from the most banal forms of music, the people are not encouraged or allowed to produce such music as enhances their spirit. Such music as contains protest against conditions of life is searched for and prohibited.

The languages of the people are not permitted to be developed by them in their own way. Ignorant and officious white professors sit on education committees as arbiters of African languages and books without consultation with the people concerned. The grotesque spectacle is seen of the white government of South Africa posing as a 'protector' of so-called Bantu culture and traditions of which they know nothing. The arrogance of the fascists knows no bounds! They apparently love African culture more than the Africans themselves!

The truth is that they wish to preserve those aspects of the African tradition that contain divisive tendencies likely to prevent the consolidation of the African people as a nation. The forces represented in the present state, after combating education of non-whites for over one hundred years, suddenly decided to take over all education as a state responsibility. The result was the introduction of a racially motivated ideological education, a lowering of standards, the emergence of tribal colleges, and the intensification of racial separation in university education. Science and technology are hardly taught to non-whites. The training of doctors and other medical personnel is derisory.

The Democratic State shall discover, develop and encourage national talent for the enhancement of our cultural life. All cultural treasures of mankind shall be open to all by free exchange of books, ideas and contacts 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.

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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 the rights of other citizens to organise themselves and participate in political life. The colour bar in cultural life, in sport and education shall be abolished.

There Shall be Houses, Security and Comfort!

Migratory labour and its concomitant of separation of families, social problems and distress is one of the tragedies of South Africa. Residential segregation is the order of the day throughout South Africa, with massive shortage of and bad housing for non-whites, and huge homes and flats, most of which are either empty or not fully used, for the white minority. The infant mortality

rate in our country is among the highest in the world, and the life expectancy of Africans among the lowest. Medical services are haphazard and costly.

The Democratic State established after the victory of the revolution shall ensure the right of people to live where they choose, to be decently housed, and to bring up their families in comfort and security. The vast unused housing space in such areas as the flatlands of Hillbrow and Johannesburg shall be made available to the people. Rent and prices shall be lowered, and adequate amounts of food shall be made available to the people.

A preventative health scheme shall be run by the state. Free medical care and hospitalisation shall be provided for all, with medical care for mothers and young children. Slums, which have to some extent been demolished in the nine major centres of the country, shall be eliminated in the middle of towns and rural areas where the majority of the people live. New suburbs shall be built where proper facilities shall be provided for transport, lighting, playing fields, creches and social centres.

The aged, the orphans, the disabled and the sick shall be cared for by the state. Every person shall have the right to leisure, rest and recreation. Fenced locations and racial ghettos shall be abolished and laws that result in the break-up of families shall be repealed.

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There Shall be Peace and Friendship!

In the wake of the victorious revolution, a Democratic People's Republic shall be proclaimed in South Africa. This shall be a fully independent state that respects the rights and sovereignty of nations. South Africa shall strive to maintain world peace and the settlement of international disputes by negotiation – not war. Peace and friendship amongst all people shall be secured by upholding the equal rights, opportunities and status of all.

The Democratic State shall maintain close neighbourly relations with the states of Lesotho, Botswana and Swaziland in place of the present veiled threats and economic pressure applied against our brothers and sisters in these states by white supremacy.

Democratic South Africa shall take its place as a member of the OAU and work to strengthen Pan-African unity in all fields. Our country will actively support national liberation movements of the peoples of the world against imperialism, colonialism and neo-colonialism. Diplomatic relations will be established with all countries regardless of their social and political systems on the principles of mutual respect for each other's independence, sovereignty and territorial integrity.

The economic and cultural interests of those countries which sympathise with and support the struggle of South Africa for freedom shall be respected.

The revolutionary struggle is in its infancy. It will be a long, hard road.

To accomplish the glorious task of the revolution, maximum unity among all national groups and revolutionary forces must be created and maintained. All South African patriots, whatever their race, must take their place in the revolution under the banner of the African National Congress.