



**The Freedom Charter: Adopted at the Congress of
the People, Kliptown, South Africa, on 26 June
1955**

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UNIT ON APARTHEID

UNIT ON APARTHEID

DEPARTMENT OF POLITICAL AND SECURITY COUNCIL AFFAIRS

July 1969

NOTES AND DOCUMENTS*

THE FREEDOM CHARTER **

(Adopted at the Congress of the People, Kliptown,
South Africa, on 26 June 1955)

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Statement by H. E. Mr. Abdulrahim Abby Farah (Somalia), Chairman of the
Special Committee on the Policies of Apartheid of the Government of the Republic
of South Africa, on 26 June 1969

Note on the Congress of the
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People and the

** On 26 June 1969, the Special Committee on the Policies of Apartheid of the
Government of the Republic of South Africa requested that
the Unit on Apartheid take steps to make the "Freedom Charter" more widely
known. This issue of "Notes and Documents" is published in
pursuance of that request.

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Acknowledgement, together with a copy of the publication containing the reprint,
would be appreciated.

No. 9/69

STATEMENT BY H. E. MR. ABDUWAHIM ABBY FARAH (SOMALIA), CHAIRMAN OF THE SPECIAL COMMITTEE ON THE POLICIES OF APARTHEID

OF THE GOVERNMENT OF THE REPUBLIC OF SOUTH AFRICA ON 26 JUNE
1969

Today, 26 June, is traditionally observed by the African National Congress of
South Africa and its associate organizations, as well as by many other bodies,
including anti-apartheid movements and various international organizations, as
"South Africa Freedom Day".

26 June was so designated because it was on 26 June 1950 that the first national
stay-at-home strike was organized as a mark of protest against the Suppression of
Communism Act and other undemocratic and unjust legislation. It was, again, on
26 June 1952, that the historic Campaign of Defiance of Unjust Laws was
launched. But above all, 26 June was chosen as "South Africa Freedom Day" as it
commemorates the historic adoption, on 26 June 1955, of the Freedom Charter by

the Congress of the People of South Africa, a multi-racial conference of the opponents of apartheid and racial discrimination.

The Freedom Charter, describing the democratic and humanist aspirations of the oppressed people of South Africa, is a historic document which is in full harmony with the purposes and principles of the United Nations and the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, and relevant resolutions of United Nations organs. It sets out the democratic changes required to enable all the people of South Africa to live in brotherhood, enjoying equal rights and opportunities without distinction of colour, race, sex or belief.

Its preamble reads:

"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 birthrights without distinction of colour, race, sex or belief;

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And therefore, we the people of South Africa, black and white together - equals, citizens and brothers - adopt this Freedom Charter. And we pledge ourselves to strive together, sparing neither strength nor courage, until the democratic changes set out here have been won't,

These are the objectives of the struggle of the South African people - a struggle which the United Nations General Assembly has recognized as legitimate and as deserving international support.

26 June, South Africa Freedom Day, should be a day for rededication to the cause of freedom, to the legitimate struggle of the South African people.

It should be a day to pause and pay our respects to all those who have lost their lives in the course of the struggle and those who have been imprisoned, interned or subjected to other restrictions for having opposed the policies of apartheid.

This is a day to renew our demand for the release of people like Nelson Mandela, Walter Sisulu, Govan Mbeki, Ahmed Kathrada, Dennis Goldberg and Raymond Mhlaba, who have been serving sentences of life imprisonment because they stood up for the principles of the Freedom Charter, the principles of the United Nations and the Universal Declaration of Human Rights; and for the

release of others like Abram Fischer who are in jail because of their opposition to apartheid and because of their courageous support of the struggle for freedom. In a statement issued on the occasion of the South Africa Freedom Day, the African National Congress has called upon the international community to stand up to the demands of the South African revolution and to give moral, political and material aid to the liberation movement. The United Nations has already recognized the legitimacy of these demands. They are enshrined in the Freedom Charter which, I repeat, is in full accord with the purposes and principles of the United Nations.

I feel that the Freedom Charter should be more widely known to the world by public opinion. I would suggest that the Unit on Apartheid be requested to take the necessary steps to this end. If I hear no objection, I will consider that this is agreeable to the Committee.

NOTE ON THE CONGRESS OF THE PEOPLE AND THE FREEDOM CHARTER

In a Joint memorandum to the United Nations Commission on the Racial Situation in the Union of South Africa (UNCORS), the African National Congress of South Africa and the South African Indian Congress stated in 1954:

"Your Commission in its report to the United Nations General Assembly at its last session recommended, inter alia:

"The United Nations might suggest ways and means in which the Union might draw up a new policy: for example, a round table conference of members of different ethnic groups of the Union, which would, in an effort toward conciliation, make proposals to the Government to facilitate the peaceful development of the racial situation in the Union of South Africa. The United Nations might offer its help to that conference by sending a number of United Nations representatives, so that all parties might be sure that the Principles of the Charter would guide the debates."

"In view of the intransigence of the Union Government it is almost impossible to expect such a recommendation receiving a favourable response from Dr. Malan's Government in the foreseeable future.

"However, the African National Congress has taken initiative in the matter and together with the South African Indian Congress, the South African Congress of Democrats and the South African Coloured Peoples' Organization is proposing to convene a Congress of the People by not later than June 1955.

"For the first time in the history of South Africa all racial groups are cooperating to bring about an assembly elected directly by the people throughout the country to frame a Freedom Charter embodying the demands and aspirations of all sections of the South African population." i/

The Commission noted this initiative with satisfaction. 2/ The Commission devoted a section of its report to the General Assembly in 1955 3] to the Congress of the People, held in Klipfontein on 25 and 26 June 1955, and reproduced the full

text of the "Freedom Charter" unanimously adopted by the Congress. The following are extracts from that report:

1/ Second report of the United Nations Commission on the Racial Situation in the Union of South Africa (A/2719), para. 203. 2/ Zj-4. para. 371.

Third Report of the United Nations Commission on the Racial Situation in the Union of South Africa (A/2953), paras. 291-95.

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"292. The preparation of this Congress was the principal object of the 42nd Annual Conference of the African National Congress, held at Durban from 16 to 19 December 1954, and attended by about 500 people. It was decided, inter alia: 'The Congress of the People will not be just another meeting or another Conference. It will be a mass assembly of delegates elected by the people of all races in every town, village, farm, factory, mine and kraal. It will be the biggest single gathering of spokesmen ever known in this country. The representatives of the people who come to the Congress will consider the detailed demands of the people which have been sent in for incorporation in the Freedom Charter, and will embody them into a declaration.

This Freedom Charter will be the South African Peoples' Declaration of Human Rights, which every civilized South African will work to uphold and carry into practice...'

"293. The 'Congress of the People' took place on 25 and 26 June at Kliptown, near Johannesburg.

Various messages were read, including a telegram from Mr. U. N. Dhebar, President of the Indian National Congress, worded as follows:

'It is indeed a great pleasure for us to know that the African National Congress, South African Indian Congress, South African Congress of Democrats and the South African Coloured Peoples' Organization are jointly convening a great assembly of elected representatives of the people of South Africa for the purpose of drawing up a Freedom Charter on 25 and 26 June ...'

"294. The following are the most striking passages in the description of the Congress by Manilal Gandhi in the newspaper of which he is the editor:

'Its grand success was beyond all expectations. It would not be amiss to say that never in recent history of South Africa is such a representative meeting of the oppressed people known to have been held. And it was held under the most difficult circumstances imaginable. For what did the Government not do to prevent it?

'There were 2,888 delegates from throughout the Union of South Africa present at the meeting despite the fact that about two hundred were prevented by the authorities at Beaufort West in the Cape Province and at Standerton in the Transvaal Province from proceeding to the meeting, under the pretext of not being in possession of permits required under the Immigration Law or passes

under the Native Pass Laws ..

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'Besides these delegates there had assembled at this meeting over three thousand of the public.

'The police, both European and African, and a squad of men from the Special Branch were present at the meeting from the beginning to the end.

Notwithstanding that provocative act, it must be said to the credit of the public that they were not sullen and angry but were happy and gay during the whole session. The weather too had been exceptionally kind ...

'After the preliminary work had been done the draft Freedom Charter was taken clause by clause and speeches were made on it.

'There was Justifiable emotion in the speeches made. It was a demonstration of the physical, mental and spiritual torture suffered by a vast majority of the people in this so-called democratic country...

'Things went on very smoothly until after lunch which was served to all the delegates between 2 and 3 p.m. during which period the whole crowd was entertained with songs and music.

'Then, half an hour after the afternoon session commenced, between 3.30 and 4 p.m., all of a sudden it was announced from the platform that armed police were coming towards the platform and that the people should remain calm...

'Then while the delegates on the platform were being searched the police stood by below with sten guns just ready for orders to shoot. They had a wild look on their faces. Some jeered at the delegates and while the delegates were shouting 'Africa' with their thumbs up some of the police were responding with their thumbs down...

'Once again it was to the credit of the organizers and to the vast assembly that they refused to be intimidated and kept their heads and proceeded with the remaining work...

'The whole draft Freedom Charter was then passed with acclamation and with the singing of the African National anthem, 'Nkosi Sikelele' with the representatives of the Government being present on the platform as though to bear witness to it. It was all an act of God...

'And then the searching of the three thousand delegates began ...

'Every delegate was searched and his name and address was taken and all the papers connected with the proceedings of the meeting were taken away.

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'Every European was, in addition, photographed. Searching went on till a little after 8 pm.

'The ideals set out in the Charter of Freedom cannot be taken exception to by anybody. It is not possible to reach the highest ideal all at once. We can reach it by stages during which it may be necessary to come to some honourable compromise with a Government that is reasonable, There can be no compromise where reason

is completely absent and unreasonableness, stark injustice and tyranny are the order of the day."

Concerning the significance of the Freedom Charter - which it adopted... Aits programme, the African National Congress said in 1965:

"To understand the meaning and significance of the Charter, it is essential to take into account the real, living background from which it emerged. This is no abstract treatise on human rights emerging from a secluded academy, to be subjected to hairsplitting legalistic analysis by parlour theoreticians. It is not only a statement of what should be, and what the people want to be in South Africa; it is at the same time an angry call of anguish against what is in South Africa ... Seen in this light, the Freedom Charter is both a manifesto of struggle and one of the most deadly indictments of a government and a system that has ever appeared.

"Thus, when it claims that South Africa belongs 'to all who live in it', this is not only a declaration of moral right, comparable with Lincoln's famous 'this country belongs to the people who inhabit it'. It is at the same time a pointed reminder that 87 per cent of South Africa today, including all the wealth and development created largely by African labour, is reserved for the exclusive ownership and occupation of the white minority. When it claims that 'every man and woman shall have the right to vote for and to stand as a candidate for all bodies which make laws' - a claim accepted at least in theory in nearly every country - it must be read in a context where these rights are denied to four-fifths of the population and made the privilege of those whose fair skin colour enables them to claim to be of 'pure' European origin. When the Charter demands that 'all national groups should have equal rights' and goes on to demand that all shall have equal status in the state, in schools and courts; that people should have the right to use their own languages and be protected by law against racialist insults and incitements, this is no abstraction but a very real reaction to a very real, and ugly situation - a society where only two languages, those of the white minority, are 'official', where national cultures are suppressed, where gross discrimination is the rule in employment, education, and every field and area of the country's existence. This section demands that 'all apartheid laws and practices shall be set aside;' here, indeed, is the heart not only of the Freedom Charter.

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"It was no abstract devotion to socialistic ideas which resulted in the Charter's demanding that mines, banks, and monopoly industries be transferred to public ownership. The people of South Africa know full well that the whole structure 'of apartheid and white domination is founded on the insatiable greed of the owners of these vast industries for forced cheap labour; and that the Charter must remain a dream while they hold the keys to the country's economy. Similarly the demand for

redivision of the land must be read in the context of the existing 'restrictions of land ownership on a racial basis'. As Helen Joseph, now entering her third year of house arrest, has written: 'Every clause of the Charter had been born out of their hopes and their heartaches, out of their poverty and the denial to them of fundamental human rights. Every clause mirrored the conditions in which the non-white people lived in South Africa.'" ij/ The Freedom Charter, published by the African National Congress, London, 1965.

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Adopted by the Congress of the People,
Iliptown, South Africa,
on 26 June 1955

We, the People of South Africa, declare for all.2u 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 gvernment founded on injustice and inequality;
that our countrj 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 birthrid ts 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 Chater. And we
pledge ourselves to strive together, sparing neither strength nor courage,
until the democratic changes set out here have been won.

The people shall RovernI

Every man and woman Phall 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 nal groups shall have eaul rightsj

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;

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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 all 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 redivided among 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 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 of culture shall be opened.

The government shall co-ordinate, 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;

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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, to 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;

South Africa shall be a fully independent state, which respects the rights and sovereignty of nations; There shall be peace and friendship

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 the peoples of Africa to independence and self-government shall be recognised, and shall be the basis of close co-operation; Let all who love their people and their country now say, as we say here: 'These freedoms we will fight for, side by side, throughout our lives, until we have won our liberty'.