

**External Communications Unit
Press / Media Release**

To : All media
Attention : News Editors & Journalists
Date : Wednesday, 14 March 2012

For the attention of all media houses

Human Rights Day to be held at the Walter Sisulu Square – Kliptown

The country and the entire world bow their heads to observe and commemorate one of the historic political events which took place in Sedibeng fifty two (52) years ago, the Sharpeville Massacre of the 21st March, 1960.

This year's Human Rights Day commemoration and celebrations will be held at the Walter Sisulu Square, Kliptown with the morning programme of wreath laying at the Phelindaba Cemetery and at the Memorial Site starting at 07:00, in Sharpeville, under the theme: **'Working Together To Promote Unity In Diversity and Human Dignity For All'**. **Programme of the day is attached**

This day has since the dawn of democracy in South Africa, been declared the Human Rights Day and it's one of the symbolic landmarks in the South African history.

The commemoration of this day is among other, to celebrate human rights for all, to honour the country's fallen heroes and heroines who resisted the then apartheid government's unjust pass laws and to highlight the importance of upholding human fundamental values and rights, as underpinned by country's Constitution.

The then apartheid regime's laws required that all Africans living or working in and around towns to carry a document (known as a Pass) with them at all times. Failure to carry this document would lead to arrest by the police and to people being sent away from the towns in which they lived and worked. Hence on the 21 March 1960, in many parts of the country, Africans planned revolt events in particular to protest against the pass laws.

It was on the 21st of March 1960 in Sharpeville that people embarked on a peaceful protest to go to police stations without their passes and to demand that the police arrest them. The idea was that so many people would be arrested that the jails would become so full that the country would not be able to function properly.

It was hoped that this would lead to the Pass Laws being scrapped. They were met by more than 300 police officers who opened fire, shot, maimed and killed these innocent protesters. More than sixty - nine people were killed and more than hundred and eighty injured by the shooting.



When the new democratic government took over in 1994, the 21 March was declared a public holiday and Sharpeville became the host of the day's commemoration event. Since then this event has grown in leaps and bounds.

“It is during a period like this one that we take a moment and remember our struggle heroes & heroines in the Region and the country. We believe that we are where we are today as a Region & nation because of their selfless sacrifices. Everything that we do for our people, we continue to strive to do it better for we know that the democracy we enjoy today did not come easy”, said the Executive Mayor of the Sedibeng District Municipality: Councillor MS Mofokeng.

This year's commemorative programme extends beyond one day as is usually the case. In addition, the objectives of this event, in the main, is to remind the country of the great suffering and loss of lives which accompanied the struggle for human rights; to celebrate the Constitution and the Bill of Rights; and to raise awareness on human rights, especially among women and young people.

These programmes are further meant to accord this significant day in our history its rightful status. With these programmes, the government will be taking the moment to report back to the communities of Sedibeng and those of Sharpeville in particular, on the achievements which the government have attained in bettering the lives of our people in the area.

Ends!

**Issued by the External Communications Department
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