



MEDIA RELEASE

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EMBARGO: Immediate

Mayor reflects on the significance of Human Rights Day

21 March is Human Rights Day in South Africa and Knysna Executive Mayor Georlene Wolmarans reminded residents of the significance of this day in our country's history.

"Today we refer to 21 March as Human Rights Day. The United Nations calls it the International Day for the Elimination of Racial Discrimination. Some of us commemorate this date as Hero's Day and many South Africans will always remember it as Sharpeville Day," she said. "But it doesn't matter what we call it. What is important is that we always remember what happened on this day and appreciate its eventual outcome."

"This protest against the *dompas* saw 69 civilians shot dead and hundreds injured, and led to more South Africans being killed and injured during the days following the incident, with thousands being arrested and thrown into jail," she continued. "We cannot imagine the amount of pain and the intensity of despair suffered by those brave South Africans. But we can thank them for the freedom their sacrifice eventually secured for the rest of us."

"Not only did the outraged international community turn on the South African government of the day, but 21 March 1960 was a true watershed moment in our country's struggle for liberation and equality."

"There is a special significance in that our first democratically elected president, Nelson Mandela, signed South Africa's new Constitution in Sharpeville on 8 May 1996," said Wolmarans. "And today our country boasts with laws and statutory institutions that are there to protect the basic human rights of all South Africans."

The United Nations defined 30 articles of human rights in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, found on the basis of freedom, justice and peace. South Africa supports the Universal Declaration and many of its precepts have been included in our own Bill of Rights, Chapter 2 of the Constitution of the Republic of South Africa, 1996. And as the articles of our constitution can only be changed by a two-thirds majority in Parliament, it is difficult for anyone – including the government – to take away the basic rights of a South African citizen.

"Too many brave people have suffered to allow us all to have and enjoy these basic rights," Wolmarans concluded. "And we owe it to them to make sure that we know what these rights are, and to speak up when they are being violated."

Please visit <http://www.westerncape.gov.za/general-publication/know-your-human-rights> for more information on your basic human rights, and what to do if they are being violated.

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