

International Day for the Elimination of Racial Discrimination

by Dave Collett

What does the term 'racial discrimination' mean? It means to treat a person differently based on race rather than capability. In most countries, this is considered against the law and many people have been put into prison for racial discrimination.

"I have fought against white domination, and I have fought against black domination. I have cherished the ideal of a democratic and free society in which all persons live together in harmony and with equal opportunities. It is an ideal, which I hope to live for and to achieve. But if needs be, it is an ideal for which I am prepared to die".

Nelson Mandela

Nelson Mandela is one of the world's greatest heroes for his struggle to free the people of South Africa. He spent his whole life fighting for racial equality. He formed a political party called Umkhoto we Sizwe in 1961 after all forms of peaceful protests failed. He travelled abroad for his cause even though he knew of the danger he was posing to himself when he returned to South Africa. Not long after, he was arrested and sentenced to life imprisonment. He was released in 1990 after being in jail for 28 years. Three years later, in 1993, he was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize for his efforts to abolish racial discrimination in South Africa. He is an inspiration to all the deprived and oppressed people in the world and has never tolerated any form of racism.

In the beginning, the aim of 'apartheid' was to keep the white people in South Africa in total control of the country as well as dividing the races. In the 1960's, the Grand Apartheid plan was created to emphasize the separation of territories and police repression.

The apartheid laws were created in 1948. White people weren't allowed to marry non-white people and there was a sanction of 'white-only jobs'. By 1950, all South Africans were categorized into three categories: white, black or coloured. People who belonged to the coloured category were neither black nor white, maybe from an Asian or Indian background.

This table below is one example of the apartheid policy and how effective it was in keeping the black people of South Africa oppressed. As you can see from the table although the black population was much higher, they had fewer doctors and teachers. Therefore young children died early and the older ones received little education.

	Blacks	Whites
Population	19 million	4.5 million
Share of Land	13%	87%
Share of National Income	Below 20%	75%
Ratio of average earnings	1	14
Minimum taxable income	360 rands	750 rands
Doctors/population	1/44,000	1/400
Infant Death rate	20% (urban) 40% (rural)	2.7%
Annual expenditure on education per pupil	\$45	\$696
Teacher/pupil ratio	1/60	1/22

Disproportionate Treatment circa 1978. Source: (Leo80)

It was obligatory for a black person to carry a passbook containing their fingerprints, photo and information whenever they wanted to enter a non-black area. This meant that Africans who lived in their homelands needed passports to enter South Africa, their own country!

March 21, 1960 marked a tragic day in the history of South Africa. A big group of blacks in the township of Sharpeville were protesting peacefully by refusing to carry their passes and as many as 69 people were shot by the police and 187 people were wounded. This incident was known by many people as the Sharpeville Massacre. Despite this tragedy, the white regime had no intention of changing the unjust laws of apartheid. Later on, the United Nations General Assembly declared March 21 as the International Day for the Elimination of Racial Discrimination. Due to the problems of 'apartheid' South Africa was expelled from the United Nations in 1974.

Now the United Nations calls on all international communities to work together to fight against racial discrimination as well as to commemorate this tragedy in hopes of a better future for the world.

www.britishcouncil.org/learnenglish