

Media Statement

For immediate release

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SALGA COMMEMORATES HUMAN RIGHTS DAY

Human rights are rights inherent to all human beings, whatever the national or ethnic origin, colour, religion, language, sex or any other status. All human beings are regarded as equally entitled, without an unfair discrimination, to human rights. These rights are all universal, interdependent and indivisible. This means that the improvement of one right facilitates advancement of the others, likewise, the deprivation of one right adversely affects the others. These rights include rights to life; equality before the law and freedom of expression; economic, social and cultural rights; rights to work, social security and education; or collective rights such as the rights to development and self-determination.

Human rights entail both rights and obligations. While individuals are entitled to human rights, individuals are also to respect the human rights of others. At the State level, the State assumes obligations and duties to respect, to protect and to fulfil human rights. However the principle of obligation is being challenged perpetually. Nelson Mandela articulated the challenge by stating that “the very right to be human is denied every day to hundreds of millions of people as a result of poverty.”

Local government is the sphere of government that interfaces with communities the most. As such, the White Paper on Local Government (1998) puts forward a vision of a developmental and accountable local government that is able to address human rights of communities. According to the White Paper, local government is uniquely placed to promote people-centred and people-driven development.

Despite continued local government’s challenges in providing access to services to the poor and vulnerable persons, it is recognised that significant progress has been made in terms of meeting human rights by the local government since 1994. The provision of around 12.5 million people with access to housing, along with further improvements in access to other basic services including adequate water, sanitation, electricity and refuse removal have been registered by the services of the local government.

On Human Rights Day this year we must reflect on the progress we have made in advancing human rights as a South Africa and consider what we still need to do in the future to promote human rights even further. We must remember what Nelson Mandela once said: “To deny people their human rights is to challenge their very humanity.”

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