

THE WOMENS' CHARTER

PREAMBLE:

We, the women of South Africa, wives and mothers, working women and housewives, Africans, Indians, Europeans and Coloureds, hereby declare our aim of striving for the removal of all laws, regulations, conventions and customs that discriminate against us as women.

A SINGLE SOCIETY:

We women do not form a society separate from the men. There is only one society, and it is made up of both men and women. As women we share the problems and anxieties of our men, and join hands with them to remove social evils and obstacles to progress.

WOMEN'S LOT:

We women share with our menfolk the cares and anxieties imposed by poverty and its evils. As wives and mothers, it falls upon us to make small wages stretch a long way. It is our lot to keep and care for the homes that are too small, broken and dirty to be kept clean. We know the burden of looking after children and our land when our husbands are away in the mines, on the farms and in towns earning our daily bread.

We know what it is to keep family life going in pondokkies and shanties, or in overcrowded apartments. We know the bitterness of children taken to lawless ways, of daughters becoming unmarried mothers whilst still at school, of boys and girls growing up without education, training or jobs at a living wage.

POOR AND RICH:

These are evils that do not need to exist. They exist because the society in which we live is divided into poor and rich, into non-European and European. They exist because there are privileges for the few, discrimination and harsh treatment for the many. The women have stood and will stand shoulder to shoulder with our menfolk in a common struggle against poverty, race and class discrimination, and the evils of the colour-bar.

NATIONAL LIBERATION:

As members of the National Liberation Movement and trade unions, in and through our various organisations, we march forward with our men in the struggle for liberation and the defence of the working people.

EQUALITY FOR WOMEN:

We resolve to struggle for the removal of laws and customs that deny African women the right to own, inherit or alienate property.

WOMEN WHO LABOUR:

Thousands of African women, like Indian, Coloured and European women, are employed today in factories, homes, offices, shops, on farms and in professions such as nursing, teaching and the like. As unmarried women, widows or divorcees, they have to fend for themselves, often without assistance of the male relative. Many if them are responsible not only for their own livelihood, but also that of their children.

Large numbers of women today are in fact the sole breadwinners and heads of their families.

FOREVER MINORS:

Nevertheless, the laws and practices derived from earlier and different states of society are still applied to them. They are responsible for their own person and their children. Yet the law seeks to enforce upon them the status of a minor.

NEED FOR EDUCATION:

We also recognise that large numbers of our women folk continue to be bound by traditional practices and conventions, and fail to realize that these have become obsolete and a brake on progress.

It is our intention to carry out a nation-wide programme of education that will bring home to the men and women of all national groups the realisation that freedom cannot be won for any one section or for the people as a whole as long as women are kept in bondage.

AN APPEAL:

We appeal to progressive organisations, to members of the great National Liberation Movement, to the trade unions, and working class organisations, to the churches, educational and welfare organisations, to progressive men and women who have the interest of our people at heart to join us in this great and noble endeavour.

1984 Year of the Women