



PARLIAMENT
OF THE REPUBLIC OF SOUTH AFRICA



WOMEN'S PARLIAMENT

2019

“Gender and Institutionalism: Towards Strengthening the National Gender Machinery as a response to addressing Gender Based Violence in South Africa”

FAST FACTS – WOMEN'S CHARTER



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What is the South African Women’s Charter?

It is a declaration of intent by the Federation of South African Women (FEDSAW), which clearly defines the rights, and privileges *for women, by women* in South Africa.

Who was involved in drafting the Women’s Charter?

This pioneering Women’s Charter was drafted by the founding members of FEDSAW, which included veteran activists such as Helen Joseph, Lilian Ngoyi and Florence Mkhize, Ray Alexander and Dora Tamana who fought for women’s rights. It was adopted at the inaugural conference of FEDSAW, in Johannesburg on the 17th April 1954.

At the inaugural conference, there were close to 150 delegates representing 230 500 women, who came from all over South Africa representing “the women of South Africa, wives and mothers, working women and housewives, African, Indians, European and Coloured”. Delegates were drawn mostly from the Congress Alliance, South African Indian Congress, South African Congress of Democrats, South African Coloured Peoples Organisation and the trade union movement.

What are the aims of the Women’s Charter?

At the time the Charter expressed the philosophy and aims of the newly established Federation of South African Women (FEDSAW). These include:

1. The right to vote and to be elected to all state bodies, without restriction or discrimination.
2. The right to full opportunities for employment with equal pay and possibilities of promotion in all spheres of work.

3. Equal rights with men in relation to property, marriage and children, and for the removal of all laws and customs that deny women such equal rights.
4. For the development of every child through free compulsory education for all; for the protection of mother and child through maternity homes, welfare clinics, crèches and nursery schools, in countryside and towns; through proper homes for all, and through the provision of water, light, transport, sanitation, and other amenities of modern civilization.
5. For the removal of all laws that restrict free movement, that prevent or hinder the right of free association and activity in democratic organisations, and the right to participate in the work of these organisations.
6. To build and strengthen women's sections in the National Liberatory movements, the organisation of women in trade unions, and through the peoples' varied organisation.
7. To co-operate with all other organisations that have similar aims in South Africa as well as throughout the world.
8. To strive for permanent peace throughout the world.

Why does the Women's Charter continue to be important?

The charter continues to unite women against political, social, legal and economic injustices.

What are some of the laws that Parliament has passed in support of the aims of the Women's Charter?

1. **Domestic Violence Act 116 of 1998:** The Act gives survivors of violence a maximum protection from domestic abuse.

2. **Criminal Law (Sexual Offences and Related Matters) Act 32 of 2007:** The Act deals with all legal aspects of or relating to sexual offences.
3. **Promotion of Equality and Prevention of Unfair Discrimination Act 4 of 2000:** The Act ensures that women have equal enjoyment of rights and freedoms to redress the wrongs of the past.
4. **Employment Equity Act 55 of 1998:** The Act ensures that discrimination in employment; occupation and income within the labour market are curtailed. The Act also encourages equitable representation at all levels in both private and public sectors of women and other historically disadvantaged persons.
5. **Prevention and Combating of Trafficking in Persons Act 7 of 2013:** The Act gives effect to the Republic's obligations concerning the trafficking of persons in terms of international agreements and provide for an offence of trafficking in persons and other offences associated with trafficking in persons.
6. **The Protection from Harassment Act 17 of 2011:** The Act applies to both sexual and non-sexual harassment. The Act addresses harassment and stalking behaviours, which violate constitutional provisions of the right to privacy and dignity of individual persons.

References

1. The Women's Charter adopted at the Founding Conference of the Federation of South African Women. Johannesburg, 17 April 1954
2. http://www.saha.org.za/women/the_womens_charter.htm
3. <http://www.historicalpapers.wits.ac.za/?inventory/U/collections&c=AD1137/R/>
4. www.sahistory.org.za