

Time Travel, the Freedom Charter in Kliptown 1955

Goals

To make South African citizens in post-apartheid South Africa to reflect on the importance and meaning of the Freedom Charter document, then and now

Facts

The idea of the Freedom Charter was first proposed by ZK Mathews at an annual general meeting of the ANC in 1953. The idea was eventually adopted by the ANC allies and united most of the liberation forces in South Africa: the South African Indian Congress (SAIC), South African Coloured People's Organisation (SACPO), the South African Congress of Democrats (SACOD) and the South African Commercial Trade Union (SACTU). This non-racial united front was known as the Congress Alliance and established a National Action Council for the Congress of the People and adoption of the Freedom Charter.

In order to ensure the success of the Congress of the People joint provincial committees were established throughout the country and were made up of the ANC, SAIC, SACPO and SACOD members.

A series of rallies and campaigns, big, small and secret meetings were held in houses, flats, factories, kraals, on farms and outdoors in many parts of the country. In 1955 the ANC sent fifty thousand volunteers countrywide to collect freedom demands from the masses of South Africa. These demands were written on all sorts of things that people could write on including, discarded pieces of corrugated cardboards.

Delegates for the Congress of the People were elected at public meetings; slogan: “delegates from every town, every suburb and every village”

In April and May 1955 the documents arrived in Kliptown. A committee of the National Action Council sorted the demands and suggestions into various categories. The practical preparations for receiving all the people in Kliptown were made by many, many foot soldiers in the volunteer corps.

25-26 June the Freedom Charter was read and adopted by three thousand people at an open field in Kliptown, probably the most representative gathering in the history of South Africa. The police stopped thousands of people to arrive at the meeting and finally dispersed the crowd on the second day.

The Freedom Charter is one of the most important documents demonstrating an equal and democratic society. It is the basis for the constitution of South Africa today.

Scenario, Meeting at WW Brown Baptist Church in Kliptown to prepare for the Congress of the People and the adoption of the Freedom Charter, May 1955

People are invited to an important meeting at the W Brown Baptist Church in Kliptown. Within a few weeks the text of the Freedom Charter has to be finished. A committee of the National Action Council has started to sort the tens of thousands of demands and suggestions into various categories. Some of these categories will be discussed today.

Thousands of people are expected to come to the Congress of the People 25-26 June. But there are indications that the government is going to make road blocks and prevent people to reach Kliptown. Anyway, there is so much to prepare: food, water, blankets, placards, posters, badges, pick stones to sit on, make a stand, find people who can contribute and support. More foot soldiers are needed. Maybe some more today will join the “Freedom Volunteers”?

The big question is what freedom means to us? From the papers that have reached the Council in Kliptown, you can see that the demands are very much the same: equal rights, jobs, better houses, better education, sharing of the wealth, security, a democratic state etc.

Today the issues of land ownership, mineral wealth, education and culture will be in focus. And of course everything is dependent on equal and human rights. How can we unite the different opinions? There is a need for sharp minds and finding the right words.

Placards and posters are going to be designed and made; songs and slogans practiced. A lot of practical details for the Congress of the People will be discussed: food, accommodation, transport..

People from all over Kliptown arrive at the church. Everybody is hoping that the police won't intervene today; no more violence. Mr Lollan (SACPO), Mr Modise (ANC) and Mr Majam (SAIC) will lead the meeting. It's time for a change, time for action...

Roles

Everybody keep their age and sex

The participants are people from Kliptown taking part in the meeting

Local leaders like Mr Lollan, Mr Modise, Mr Majam

Key Questions

- What does Freedom mean? In terms of land, wealth, jobs, education, equal rights? What are our demands?
- “How would you make South Africa a happy place for all?” What kind of South Africa do we want to live in? A country for everybody, regardless the colour of skin, income or social position? Is it possible?

Activities

- Discuss four categories and express it: (mineral) wealth, land ownership, education and equal rights
- Equal rights – make placards, posters, poems, slogans, songs...
- Land ownership - make placards, posters, poems, slogans, songs...
- Mineral wealth - make placards, posters, poems, slogans, songs...
- Education – make placards, posters, poems, slogans, songs... Prepare tea and biscuits
- Make rosettes. (Practical preparation for the congress: food, accommodation, stage etc)

Time plan

08.00 Prepare the site

08.30 Gathering at the site, introduction

09.00 Welcome learners and adults at the site, scenario, characters, dresses/ badges, rules

09.40 Initiation, song, prayer outside of the church
Starting of the meeting

09.50 Activities begin

10.40 Common discussion, resolution, songs

11.10 Ending of the Time Travel
Reflection

11.30 Lunch at Kliptown museum

12.30 Workshop on the Time Travel method; brainstorm on a public Time Travel at Freedom Square, June 2015

15.30 Tea/coffee

18 October 2012/ 16 September 2014

Kliptown Time Travel Committee

Mpho Kumeke, Hector Pieterse Museum

Ebbe Westergren, Helen Eklund, Kalmar läns museum, Sweden/ Bridging Ages