



**NUMSA Human Rights statement
21 March 2025
Press statement**

The National Union of Metalworkers of South Africa (NUMSA) salutes the generation of the working class, who on this day, 21 March 1960 bravely stood up to the brutal Apartheid system. On this day, thousands of people marched against the Dompas system in Sharpeville, in a protest which was organized by the PAC. The Black and African majority was fighting back against the Dompas, which was a document which the racist government used to regulate Black people. It was the most hated document because it determined where you could live, where you could work, and where you would be buried.

The Dompas was a daily reminder of the dispossession of the masses because they were reminded that they did not belong in South Africa. Furthermore, it was used to justify arbitrary arrests of Black people. As many as 400 000 people could be arrested in a year, just for pass related crimes. The prisons were often bursting with black men whose only crime was not carrying the document. Families paid a fortune in fines for pass related offences.

The Dompas caused a lot of misery in the lives of Black people, and this is why the courageous community of Sharpeville was motivated to protest against the system. Unfortunately, despite the peaceful nature of the protest, the police shot live ammunition at the demonstrators, killing 91 and wounding 238 people.

This is why we salute the people of Sharpeville, who gave up their lives to fight against an unjust, oppressive racist system.

In 2025, Apartheid has been written out of the statute books because of the democratic breakthrough of 1994. Our country is a liberal democracy which means that the promises of democracy, such as quality education, quality healthcare and a decent life, are only guaranteed for those who are wealthy. The tiny elite can afford to live a better life, but they are surrounded by a sea of poverty, unemployment and inequality. This is because liberal democracy, by its very nature, can never improve the lives of the majority of people. It exists only to secure the wealth of the few, against the suffering of the many.

Currently the Government of National Unity, (GNU), which is a coalition between the former liberation movement, the ANC and our class enemy the Democratic Alliance, is a continuation of that. This coalition has been established to ensure that the wealth of South Africa, remains in the hands of the elite. The GNU exists to prevent any kind of genuine economic transformation, for the benefit of the majority of people, which can reverse the effects of Apartheid. Whilst the masses are drowning in the sea of poverty, a handful of billionaires are getting richer and richer.

The courage of the Sharpeville generation should inspire us to continue to work for genuine radical economic transformation for the masses. We cannot simply fold our arms and surrender to the failures of neo-liberal capitalism. We know that it will continue to fail the masses. Therefore, this is the time to unite and to build and strengthen progressive formations. It is in our DNA to defeat authoritarianism and oppression. Therefore, we have a responsibility

to the generation of 1961, to finish the work they started, by fighting for genuine freedom for all. The possibility of a better life for all does exist, once we begin to imagine a future free of capitalist oppression.

NUMSA is inspired by the words of Cde Chris Hani when he says,

“Socialism is about decent shelter for those who are homeless. It is about water for those who have no safe drinking water. It is about health care; it is about a life of dignity for the old. It is about overcoming the huge divide between urban and rural areas. It is about a decent education for all our people. Socialism is about rolling back the tyranny of the market. As long as the economy is dominated by an unelected, privileged few, the case for socialism will exist.”

Ultimately, this is the life we are fighting for. We want a life where the masses are not victims of the tyranny of the markets, and where the creators of wealth benefit from the sweat of their labour.

ENDS

Issued on behalf of NUMSA.

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