



**The Bill of Rights is a powerful tool for
uplifting ourselves and our communities.
But no-one will enforce our rights for us;
it's up to each individual to do it!**

Did you know that South Africa has a special document called the Bill of Rights that gives each of us a whole set of rights? Did you know that all laws that Government wants to pass and all acts that Government or others want to carry out, can be tested to see if they comply with the Bill of Rights?

One of the most important rights is the right to equality. No-one (Government or anyone else) can discriminate unfairly against any person. The Bill of Rights mentions different kinds of discrimination that we find in society and makes it clear that these aren't allowed. Examples include race, sex and sexual orientation (which means that no-one may discriminate against you if you're a gay or lesbian person).

Another of the most important rights is the right to dignity. It, like freedom and equality, is one of the founding values of our Constitution, which means that it's absolutely fundamental to South Africa. The right to freedom means that no-one may commit violence against you and that Government can't put you in jail unless it has a good reason to do so.

Other rights include the rights to life, privacy and not to be forced to work against your will or be a slave. The right to life means that the state can't take away peoples' lives, so the death penalty for criminals is not allowed in South Africa.

The Bill of Rights says that each of us has the right to believe whatever we want and to follow whatever religion we choose. We also have a right to say what we want to (freedom of expression), as long as it doesn't cause hatred or harm. Related to these rights are the right to demonstrate (protest peacefully) and freedom of association, which means we can spend time with whomever we want and join any organisation we choose.

Every South African citizen has the right to vote in elections (see Politics, Democracy and Voting). If you're not a South African citizen you can't vote, but if you're from outside South Africa and have been here for a long time you can apply to the Department of Home Affairs to become a citizen. Once you've done that, you'll be allowed to vote.

**Knowing your rights is a good way to empower
yourself. Although complicated procedures
must sometimes be followed to enforce your
rights, knowing about them is the first step
to enforcing them!**

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You have the right to move freely around South Africa and to leave whenever you want. You can choose to have any job and to be treated fairly by your boss. Many people don't know that you also have the right to a clean and healthy environment.

According to the Bill of Rights, Government can't take away your property without paying you for it. You also have the right to housing, water, food and healthcare.

You have the right to education, to practice your own culture as long as it doesn't affect other people and to appear before the courts if you need their help to resolve any dispute.

You also have the right of access to information, which means that you can ask Government (and in some cases, private organisations) for any information that you think you may need.

Do you know what administrative action is? Administrative action is any action which may affect your rights; for example, the decision of a headmaster to expel a student or Government's decision to give you a passport. (see Apply for an ID Book, Passport and Visa) You have the right to fair administrative action.

Many people think that criminals have no rights, but did you know that if you're sent to jail you have the right to be treated properly, to be given medicine and food and not to be harmed by the wardens? Also, if you're accused of a crime the court has to believe that you didn't do it until Government brings enough evidence to show that you did. You are innocent until proven guilty.

It's important to realise that it may take Government some time to provide everyone with these rights; it's not realistic to expect Government to provide them all right away!

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