



UNFreedom Day

News from Abahlali BaseMjondolo Movement



KZN Abahlali: Stories from the ground

It is really important to discuss the bigger idea of freedom. It is not enough to taste a little of it ourselves in a small group discussion but always to share with more people, more ears. Our view as Abahlali baseMjondolo is that it is discussed in every settlement to hear what people think and say about 'Freedom Day', to listen to their thinking about Freedom Day and the realities of shack fires, the Slum Act and so on. We need an open debate about notions of freedom, especially when so much of the people's lives is a contradiction to freedom. We need to make sure that as a Movement, we remain on the same page as the people's thinking and understanding. It might be a taste of freedom in itself to do this. So this space of discussing and listening is a small but important part of freedom – the freedom that comes from searching for the truth. Our country is caught in a politics that often prevents us to search for real truth. We don't say that we in the movements are perfect, but at least we are trying, we are opening these gates; at least we are on a right path to search for the truth. We have a deep responsibility to make sure that no-one can shut these gates.

When we have unFreedom Day as well as a new law like the Slums Act being pushed at the people by the same politicians, and all in the name and language of 'freedom', we see the contradictions in our country. It is true that we are told in SA that there is this freedom but there also evictions – they say we are free but it cannot be true when evictions and hunger continue.

Definitely we are not free when our rights are denied – like when we are harassed and shot for marching and expressing ourselves as a movement – and when the people's lives are affected by so much crime, disease, homelessness and unemployment.



Unfreedom is lived daily in shacks

by Umhlali from Kennedy Road

Shack-dwellers will never be free at all even though the leadership of South Africa require us to join forces in celebrating the so-called Freedom Day. They have a cause to celebrate on their own just because they are office-bearers today, an opportunity that never was during the apartheid era, as Africans were treated as morons.

Freedom is not only about independence from colonial forces, suppression, apartheid, or capitalistic systems whatsoever. It is about self-contentment on daily requirements other than human basic needs. Freedom is not imposed by whatever means, but it can be easily denied. Shacks themselves justify the lack of freedom in South Africa. The elected leaders opt to prioritise government expenditure on unreasonable causes, thereby manifesting ignorance and pure arrogance at the disastrous conditions that both farm-dwellers and shack-dwellers succumb to on a daily basis.

The ministers, provincial and municipal leaders and other elected authorities will never manage to fool shack-dwellers in any way. Proven experience has shown that they avoid any interaction with anybody living in shacks, thus when elected to higher posts, immediately provide housing subsidies to their kith and kin in order to avoid humiliation.

The result is an obvious big blow for the poor shack-dwellers as the middle income and higher income earners also begin to disassociate themselves with them.

However, questioning of the authorities will be crucial. What causes them to turn a blind eye on the poor who voted for them? Why is there an obvious consistency in terms of failure to deliver once they are elected to power? Who really distracts them from recognizing shack-dwellers? Will they continue to think that shack-dwellers are to be wiped out had they knew the PRACTICAL EXPERIENCE OF SHACKDWELLING? Would they not revisit their unrealistic policies afterwards? Until when will these policies be used as government propaganda? One day they announce the budget to build RDP houses, the next day they announce the Slums Act as a way of addressing the housing backlock.

Whatever, we still have to undergo the same 'Baptism of Fire,' come the 2009 General Elections. A relaunch of 'free housing for ALL' will be sung even by kids during the campaigns, and only once after expiry of government term will you see the government official seeking the shack-dwellers votes again. Once re-elected, God help, or maybe the devil knows where the hell the cronies suddenly disappear into, leaving the electorate tired and helpless!

Finally, as a member of Abahlali baseMjondolo I hope the movement speeds up the housing programmes, after interacting with the local municipality which is deemed the sole owner of the land upon which to build houses. Truly to my words, 'Backward Never, Forward Ever!'

The Slums Act

The Act aims to:

Eliminate 'slums' in KwaZulu-Natal, prevent new 'slums' from developing, upgrade and control existing 'slums' and monitor the performance of departments and municipalities in the elimination of 'slums' and the prevention of new 'slums' from developing. It has detailed plans to make sure that all of this really happens. The Act also says that it aims to 'improve the living conditions of communities' but it has no detailed plans to make sure that this really happens. It is therefore clear that its real purpose is to get rid of 'slums' rather than to improve the conditions in which people live.

Abahlali's view is that we do not need this Act. The first thing that we need is for government (local, provincial and national) to begin to follow the existing laws and policies that protect against evictions, forced relocations and which recommend in situ upgrades instead of relocations. After that we need laws that break the power that the very rich have over land in the cities and we need laws to compel municipalities to provide services to shack settlements while people wait for houses to be built.

What do our masses say?

Mr. James Pillay: The way I look at it, there is no freedom for the poor, we are hidden, no one wants to help us, the rich are still oppressing us, they only want to make money out of us, they don't want us to voice our opinions in the outside world, so where are we free: freedom is where everyone should be seen equally and when the government says the word 'free' he should really mean it for the poor people.

Mr. Bheki Ngcobo: There's no freedom because the needs for the poor community are not seen. There's unfair practice in our country.

Mr. R. Moonsamy: There's only freedom for the rich, what happens to the poor and how are they suffering, does it concern them? How free can one be when the country is run for the rich only? Where's the freedom when the rich are getting richer and the poor are getting poorer, where is this freedom for the poor when they are still crying out there?

Mr. A. B. Luthuli: They are free from 1994, but not ourselves. So come out people and fight for the freedom of speech that we deserve.

Mrs. Shamita Naidoo: What is freedom? Are you free? No! I'm not even allowed to fix the shack that I'm in, why? Because it's all about the rich and what they want. What's the point when we are being promised free things by councillors and high-positioned people – they just cannot make that commitment to the poor. The poor's grievances are of no use to them. They promise free education, houses, lights, and water, but where is it? If it was given, then I think the poor communities would say 'Yes! That is freedom!' and they would be happy to celebrate Freedom Day.



Zanele Gavu: Ok, if they want to give us freedom, why are they chasing us from the place that we live in? What is Freedom Day if we live less like this?

Lungile Khumalo: When we say our needs we don't receive anything but only to be reminded that we need to vote. Why do we vote if we are not cared for? Even now we are living in shacks and there are no adequate services such as proper sanitation.

Busisiwe Motha: The reason I say I am not free is that I still live in a shack and I have big family to squeeze in that shack. How can I say I am free when I still suffer abuse from whites by working long hours?

Thule Xaba: I'm not happy about Freedom Day because I'm still living in jondolos with no water, electricity, no freedom for the poor. I need to find a house in my area, I don't want to move.

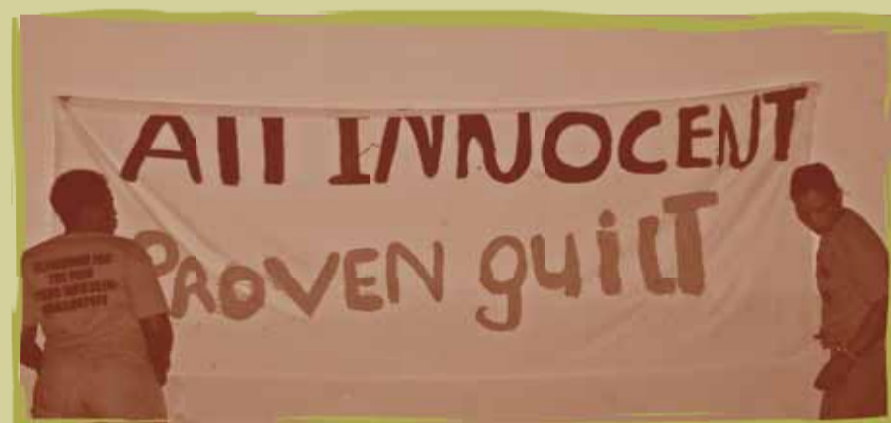


Zikelephi Kambula: 27 April is a Freedom Day. It's a freedom, I agree, but not to all the people of South Africa. Some people are not free. They're suffering with so many things. They do not even have houses to stay. They stay in shacks, no body cares for us, including me and my family. I have four children in a shack with no electricity, no toilet, even water is too scarce. This government promised to do things but nothing is done. They want us to vote every five years, but we do not know what we are voting for.

Nsingo: Freedom is not only about independence from colonial forces, suppression, apartheid or capitalistic system whatsoever. It is about self-contentment on daily requirements other than human basics. Elected authorities will never manage to fool shackdwellers in any way. We still have to undergo the same 'baptism of fire' come 2009 general elections. A re-launch of 'Free Housing for All' will be sung even by kids during the campaigns. Look at the high spreading of disease like HIV and AIDS. Look at the kids living in the streets of South Africa. Have a look at people staying in shacks: that's the worst part of it.

Zodwa Magwaza: How can I say I'm free if I live and sleep with snakes? How can I say I'm free if I can't live in my house because of snakes as long as electricity poles? Freedom is not about basic services delivery only but it's more than that. Instead it is a better life for all and freedom of my mind that one can see the world and challenge it.

Stand in Solidarity for our Rights at the Court Hearing



Update:

- Fourteen Abahlali who were unfairly arrested and charged were found **not guilty** and were cleared of all the charges on 29 January 2008
- Kennedy 6 who were unfairly arrested and charged for murder in 2007 were found **not guilty** on 27 March 2008
- On Sunday 20 April 2008, Jadhu Place fires claimed more than 400 shacks leaving 1500 people homeless
- **Abahlali Basemjondolo through their lawyers have taken the province to court to overturn the Slums Act on February 2008**

Have Your Say

What is story about unFreedom and your housing rights that have been violated? We want to hear from you. If you or your community would like to tell us your story, please contact Abahlali baseMjondolo at:



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