

# South Africa under Apartheid and the Role of the UN

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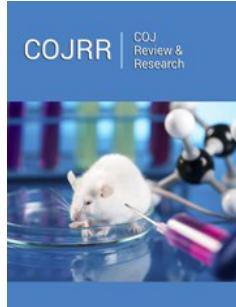
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## Abstract

Being an international organization, the United Nations has played an outstanding role in facilitating cooperation in international law, international security, economic development, social progress, human rights and maintenance of world peace. The pursuit of human rights has been remained a focus point in the objectives of the UN. The atrocities of the World War II and genocide, highlighted the need that the new organization must work to prevent any similar tragedies, which would be expected in the future. So on the basis of early objectives, the UN has created legal framework for considering and acting on complaints about human rights violations. The UN has succeeded to promote peace as well as to ensure human rights at global level. The UN ensuring human rights and peace through a special mechanism, peace-keeping missions and forces, state to state contact and through its observers. The apartheid in South Africa is one of the most painful examples of the human rights violation in which majority of black inhabitants were curtailed extremely based on racial segregation. The apartheid was developed after World War II by the Afrikaner-dominated National Party, and the UN stimulated this issue immediately at its first gathering in 1946, placing South Africa on the agenda. The UN successfully resolved the issue of human rights violations in South Africa, but ultimately it took very long time to eradicate apartheid from South Africa and after forty years, South Africa was able to conduct fair and free elections with cooperation of the UN and other international communities

**Keywords:** South Africa; Apartheid; UN

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## Introduction

The word Apartheid derives from the Afrikaans word for “apartness”. It was a governmental sanction on the bases of racial segregation through political and economic discrimination against non-white majority of South Africa [1]. Among many injustices, blacks were forced to live in segregated areas, and they were not allowed to enter in the areas restricted for them unless they had a special pass in the issue of human rights. Throughout the period of 1948 to 1993, the UN played outstanding role in the prevention of human rights in South Africa [2]. The United Nations has created a global structure for protecting human rights, based mostly on its Charter, non-binding declarations, and legally binding treaties and on various activities having the aim of advancing democracy and human rights throughout the world [3].

In South Africa, the UN had played a vital role through conferences and passing resolutions to condemn apartheid crime. The United Nations General Assembly adopted a resolution to condemn South Africa's racist apartheid policies and requested on all its member states to end economic and military relations with the country [4]. Till the election of 1994, in South Africa, the UN supported South African movements against the violation of their rights and provided all types of assistance to South Africa but there were several hurdles and difficulties in the way of the UN to take action or measures to stop the violation in South Africa. In the result, violation continued in South Africa and about forty years it remained in practice [5]. The measure adopted by the UN to resolve the issue were not sufficient, because mostly campaigns of the UN against apartheid were in the form of resolutions, conferences and some other ways of criticism. There was an urgent need of taking an action and to decide something practically due to the piteous conditions of human rights in South Africa, but the UN failed to do that.

Being an International organization, the UN have authority to remove human rights violation in any state or could also remove violation through its peace keeping forces, but in case of South Africa the UN was unable to do anything like that. No doubt the reasons were not only the deficiency of the UN efforts, because other Western countries did not support the UN fully and they continued trade relations with South Africa [6]. Secondly the UN respected all its member states and could not pressurize them to abandon their relations with other state. To condemn apartheid policies, it was important to make a pressure on South Africa through boycotting domestic relations and aid. These were some of the major reasons, which delayed South African freedom from violation. But after a long period through continuous condemnation and so many efforts, the UN succeed to stop violation by conduct fair and free elections in South Africa in 1994 [2].

### **The world organizations and the human rights**

Especially after the WWI, the human rights were considered to be a subject of international laws and regulations. The main objectives of the creation of the League of Nations after the World War I and the International Labor Organization were to provide and promote the peace throughout the world by ensuring and enforcing human rights. Several attempts were made to establish a human rights system under the League of Nations. Minority committee and a mandates commission were established to hear complaints from the minority and to deal with the persons who were living in mandate territories. However, all these efforts came to an end with the outbreak of the World War II. After the World War II, the human rights had become more advanced and governed by international law [6]. The creation of the United Nations Organization was a major development in promotion of human rights. The UN has established a global structure and a common platform to promote and provide human right as well as to condemn the violations of human rights. The UN has created a special system or mechanism so as to secure and promote human rights. In 1948 the UN introduced a Universal Declaration of Human Rights. That was a first international document which had declared all fundamental civil, political, social, cultural and economic rights [5].

### **South Africa**

South Africa is a multinational and multiethnic state having a variety of cultures and languages. South Africa is located at the southern tip of Africa. It is divided in to nine provinces. The territories of Namibia, Botswana, Mozambique and Switzerland are the neighboring countries of South Africa. South Africa has a 2,798 kilometers coastline [7]. All the languages and ethnic groups have political representation in the country's Constitutional democracy. Eleven languages are officially announced [8]. South African English and Afrikaans are the most popular speaking languages by the majority of the White and coloured people. The communities of Europe, Asia and mixed races also exist in South Africa at large scale. South Africa has a mixed economy with high rate of poverty and low GDP per capita. South Africa is therefore enlisted as a poor country. Unemployment also seems at large scale in South Africa. South Africa ranked as the top 10 countries all over the world due

to inequality of income [9]. South Africa is a parliamentary republic. The president is the head of state and head of government too. The president said to be in power only if he maintains the confidence of the parliament. Since the end of the apartheid, the African National Congress was a dominant party in Africa by securing 60 to 70 percent of the total votes [10].

### **Human rights violations under apartheid**

Apartheid was in fact the system of racial segregation. Through this policy, the National party had deprived the majority of non-whites to all their fundamental rights. Apartheid sparked a significant resistant as well along trade embargo against South Africa. Some laws were however introduced under the policy of apartheid [11]. The series of laws, which was bases on the racial discriminations and Afrikaner's superiority, was implemented in the 1910s through the establishment of a Population Registration Act. Many acts and laws were introduced to humiliate the South African people. In every field of life, the people of South Africa deprived from their basic rights [12].

### **Conclusion**

The policy of racial discrimination, which was existed in South Africa, contained those specific elements which would not be found in the history of any other state. It is right to conclude that apartheid was a special instance of racial discrimination in which the exploitation of people of racial group was to retain the privileged status of another or ruling group. The measures, which were adopted by the Whites under apartheid, were only to preserve all sorts of facilities. This type of racial discrimination has never found equal in any other country. The role of the UN proved a powerful support against the victim of apartheid. The UN Trust Fund practically supported South African poor people against racial policy of apartheid and prepared them to get rid from colonization. All that actions proved efficiency of the UN as well as a permanent struggle to secure human rights and finally South Africa got its independence through those measures.

A further action of the UN "voluntary embargo" against the military weapons of South Africa was proved as more pressure on the white leaders and they felt a security threat. The military arm embargo affected South Africa greatly with mixed results. However, the UN was failed to stop the Western powers to stop the supply of weapons but the boycott from the UN enabled South Africa to develop its own sophisticated manufacturing industry which lifts it virtually self-sufficient in amour and artillery. That was the way to made South Africa self-dependent. Secondly an oil embargo also instituted by OPEC in 1973. These types of boycotts from the International organizations was to mean an opposition of South Africa to stop violence. The international community's boycotted South Africa in all fields on the call of the UN. It showed the UN's efficiency that they agreed to suspend their cultural, sports, economics and social relations with South Africa, which finally led to the end of apartheid. In short, the UN took all the measures to eradicate apartheid which would be possible. No doubt the UN made South Africa self-dependent by interrupting in government

affairs and keeping an eye on the policies of the government of South Africa.

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