



South African Federation of Trade Unions

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To: South African Government Climate Secretariat
Email: climatesecretariat@environment.gov.za

RE: NATIONALLY DETERMINED CONTRIBUTION: SUBMISSION BY THE SOUTH AFRICAN FEDERATION OF TRADE UNIONS

Comments on South Africa's climate commitment: Back to the drawing board for the Nationally Determined Contribution

Summary: Capitalism cannot solve the climate crisis, so state must ratchet up ambitions

The United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) tells governments to reveal and decrease the pollution that their capitalist economies are adding to the climate catastrophe. The 2015 Paris Climate Agreement's name for this is the "Nationally Determined Contribution" (NDC) to cut relevant emissions. The two main pollutants – known as Greenhouse Gases (GHGs) – are carbon dioxide (CO₂) and methane (CH₄). These mainly come from burning or extracting fossil fuels: coal, petroleum and gas. We insist that gas-associated venting, flaring and leakage of methane contribute to the climate catastrophe, so gas should never be misnamed a "bridge" or "transition" fuel.

We offer comments and ask reasonable follow-up questions that we anticipate the Department of Environment, Forestry and Fishery's Climate Secretariat, the Presidential Climate Commission and the rest of government cannot provide credible answers to, while they remain within a capitalist framework of thinking and acting on the climate catastrophe. The tendency since the early 1990s has been a "coerced harmony" strategy of insider "stakeholders" issuing documents, often in the National Economic Development and Labour Council and various sectoral forums.

These social compacts simply have not worked, because they have such strong neoliberal, market-oriented presumptions, at a time of systematic market failure, in financial speculation, the waning productive sector, the labour markets and even markets for basic goods and services where poor and working-class people suffer continual rip-offs.

It is time to acknowledge the limits of capitalist strategies, especially in an area as vital as cutting Greenhouse Gas emissions – not only because the rest of the world looks at South Africa and finds this government's work so far to be highly unsatisfactory.

Most importantly, Southern Africa is one of the ten main climate hotspots in the world, facing a 3-degree Celsius (3C) increase, with a 1.5C overshoot above pre-industrial temperature levels very likely during this decade. While the NDC document does reference climate science, acknowledging

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that South Africa is and will be heating at twice the global average, it really does not internalise what this means in terms of its commitments.

The labour movement needs to be central to a Just Transition implicit in NDC commitments

For more than a decade, since even before the United Nations held its climate summit in Durban in 2011, leading forces in organised labour questioned whether the underlying system of capital accumulation in South Africa – known as the Minerals Energy Complex (MEC), featuring the three dozen firms in the Energy Intensive Users Group that consume 40% of the electricity – could ever be transformed. Due to the MEC’s ability to escape regulation, South African capitalism was not only pleased to host apartheid’s migrant labour system and other manifestations of racism, but also generated what is still the world’s third-highest CO2/person/GDP ratio, the best indication of an economy’s carbon addiction, among countries with ten million people or more. (The only worse economies by this measure are in Kazakhstan and the Czech Republic.)

In view of this record, one of the most absurd statements in the NDC is its climate denialism: “South Africa bears a disproportionate burden of adaptation to the adverse impacts of climate change. It is an injustice that with a relatively small share of responsibility, our economy has been disproportionately negative affected by climate change.” Being third worst in the world as a carbon-addicted economy is hardly “a relatively small share of responsibility.”

How can this legacy be addressed? It won’t be through a state captured by carbon capitalists, where the President, Cyril Ramaphosa, is a coal-mining tycoon before his 2016 sale of Shanduka; the Finance Minister, Tito Mboweni, was the chair of controversial SacOil before re-entering politics in 2018; and the lead manager of the Presidential Climate Commission (Valli Moosa) was found in conflict of interest during Hitachi’s bribery of the African National Congress when he chaired Eskom and authorised Medupi and Kusile coal-fired power plants. It won’t be addressed through the National Business Initiative, whose agenda and “modelling” (with very dubious assumptions) appears dominant within the Presidential Climate Commission.

Instead, the most visionary approach to a Just Transition and emissions reductions was regularly to be found in *socialist* statements by the National Union of Metalworkers of South Africa. Other major unions have also held forth on why this country’s capitalist economy is not equipped to avoid the worst catastrophe ever encountered by humanity, and why much more serious state interventions are required.

Net Zero is rife with scams

For example, we insist that under a capitalist system attempting now to “privatise the air” through carbon trading (part of the South African Treasury’s own climate strategy evolving from a tokenistic carbon tax), “net zero” is *not zero*. If South Africa’s big companies want to continue polluting – e.g. at Sasol’s Secunda plant, which is the world’s single main point source of pollution – they can do so by buying a poor country’s right to pollute or emissions-reductions strategies in offset schemes and carbon markets. This will preclude any chance at industrialisation by the poor world.

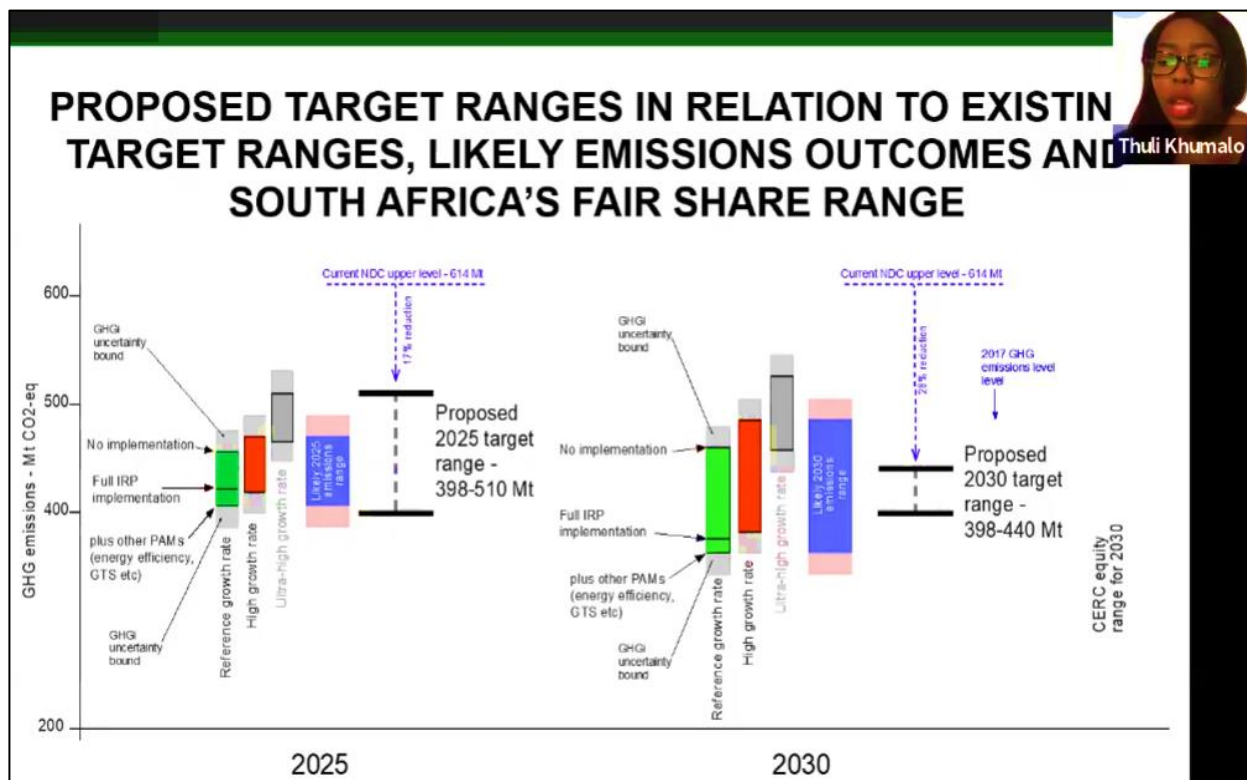
Moreover, a commitment to “net zero” by 2050 must be seen against the history of scamming on emissions offsetting, such as the initial pilot project, the R100 million Durban waste-to-energy widely understood as a failure. The potential for financialising nature in this way, at a time our own financial markets have zigzagged out of control, is extremely disturbing, and not yet factored into the pro-capitalist orientation of the NDC strategy. In part because such scams are widespread within the UNFCCC system, we believe the NDC framework does not have the ambition required to protect the citizenry of our country, region, continent and world.

A climate emergency

South Africa should immediately be put on a Climate Emergency footing, with funding allocated to ensure rapid Just Transitions that leave no worker and community behind. The specific “net zero” for

2050 target – given all the loopholes and false solutions associated with offsetting and emissions markets – is just not ambitious enough. To publish a 510 Mt high-end target in 2025 and 440 Mt high-end target in 2030, is to invite international humiliation.

To confirm this, the Climate Action Tracker – which does not incorporate many of South Africa’s many hidden carbon-intensive projects – already has assessed the NDC and found it “inadequate” for the 2C degree upper-bound target, much less the 1.5C degree desired limitation of global heating. This sort of humiliation reminds us of what President Ramaphosa suffered in September 2019, when he was not allowed to speak to the United Nations special summit on climate because of South Africa’s terrible performance on emissions cuts.



Nationalisation and public-utility transformation are vital to introduce effective NDCs

As one example of a topic not addressed, the Just Transition will require *nationalisation (without compensation) of fossil fuel and other high-emissions facilities*, in order to make the emissions cuts required, because marginal change by corporations based on incentives such as a (still woefully-inadequate) carbon tax won’t be sufficient. These fossil-fuel facilities – coal mines, fuel refineries and all the associated privately-owned infrastructure – are essentially “stranded assets,” and should be acquired without charge to the state, given the firms’ liabilities not only for closure but for scientifically-sound environmental and social reparations (similar, conceptually, to the mines’ long-delayed silicosis reparations payments).

We insist, as well, that instead of a nationalised-*corporatised* model of ownership, as exists with the likes of Eskom, Transnet and other State Owned Enterprises under the neoliberal capitalist model, these new holdings be considered as *public utilities* aimed at maximising the public good, especially the interests of poor and working-class people. That will entail not only hard work on closing the fossil-fuel facilities, but also in repurposing them for proper Just Transition activities.

The public utility model would then allow mines and refineries to be truly transformed spaces, serving the entire community and society, instead of either the thuggish zama-zama chaos or Black Economic Empowerment coal-asset dumping by Western multinational corporations, as now predominates in declining mining sites. In nearly all these sites, the current government has not been adequately responsible for the social misery, health crises and ecological decay. Likewise, the recently-

announced shuttering of refineries in Durban (Engen) and Cape Town (Glencore) is subject to intense contestation, especially with community groups demanding a “detox” instead of ongoing use as oil storage facilities.

Reparations for “non-fossil-fuel development” as a principle for poor and working people

No further fossil fuel exploration or drilling should be allowed; those in the communities affected should be given Just Transition payments consistent with the NDC’s most important statement, namely, a demand for *“support by the international climate and development and finance community for non-fossil-fuel development in Mpumalanga.”*

This is one of the few areas of the NDC that open the door for a major conceptual breakthrough: *leaving fossil fuels underground should be compensated by those economies (including that benefiting the wealthy in South Africa) which caused the crisis.* This is something that is owed these communities, as an “ecological debt” payment to the workers, for the ill-health, pollution, foregone future earnings, and many other features of their personal misfortunes, working and living in fossil-fuel sacrifice zones. These sites exist in the immediate vicinities of coal fields, coal-fired power plant zones, refineries, mines, smelters, petrochemical industries and other MEC facilities.

Cease the fictional claims of climate debt – and prepare to pay our climate debt

In terms of the NDC statement, there will no doubt be a debate about whether South Africa has any moral right to claim international subsidies given the MEC elites’ historic and current abuse of the earth’s carbon space. But the “support” the NDC team described in the April 30 Presidential Climate Commission was \$8 billion, from multilateral financing sources. We heard in mid-2019 that there would be magical sources of subsidised international finance, which never materialised; and we do not trust these sources, frankly, because no sane international lender or donor would look at the South African state as worthy of such an investment until a dramatic change in policy is accepted.

We don’t see that change, and we look at the Green Climate Fund and other international climate finance – a 2009 commitment at the Copenhagen climate summit of \$100 billion/year – to search in vain for any donors keeping their promise. Indeed, it is patently obvious that leading beneficiaries of South Africa’s capitalist economy – which is, to repeat, the world’s third most emissions intensive – should *themselves* be the urgent donors of climate debt payments to the region.

It is absurd, dangerous and a manifestation of an imperialist mentality, that South Africa is preparing SA National Defence Force troops for incursions into Mozambique to protect the fossil fuel discoveries of Western and Chinese multinational oil corporations in Cabo Delgado province, risking a backlash of attacks here in South Africa. What should immediately happen, instead, is a climate debt paid by South Africa to the Mozambicans who were victims of 2019 cyclones, including Kenneth in Cabo Delgado. They received a small fraction of donor aid – practically none from South Africa – in spite of climate change causing a hotter Mozambique Channel water temperature, that fed Cyclones Idai and Kenneth to record-breaking intensities.

Instead of bullets and drones, the South African government owes Mozambicans monies as a down payment on our elites’ climate debt – and not directed via a plainly corrupt government, but in forms that directly support basic income for the desperate residents of that resource-cursed area.

South Africa’s Just Transition must be bottom-up and genuine – by negating corporate power

We desperately need deep Just Transition plans, driven from below by workers and communities, but with active support from the state. The critical roles of Eskom, Sasol, coal mines, smelters, auto companies and other major emitters is not addressed. Yet without these plans coming to the fore in the next five years, this entire exercise is a fraud and will perpetuate climate injustice for workers.

We are also awaiting any systematic approach by not only emitting companies, but by their banks and other financiers, which will also bear the brunt of writing down their foolish investments in fossil fuels.

The NDC framework is fraudulent, as long as it does not put an end to fossil fuel financing in this decade.

South Africa must dispense with white-elephant, carbon-intensive mega-projects

The NDC is also fraudulent if it does not address the CO₂- and methane-intensive mega-projects underway, costing trillions in taxpayer and parastatal funds. These are simply not mentioned, nor are their likely greenhouse gas emissions apparently factored in:

1. the R800 billion Presidential Infrastructure Coordinating Commission Strategic Integrated Project #1, whose main purpose is exporting 18 billion tons of coal, with Botswana's 220 bn tons ready to follow Transnet's upgrade of the Lephalale-Richards Bay line, using corruption-riddled South China Rail locomotives;
2. the R400 billion Musina-Makhado Special Economic Zone, especially its 3300MW off-grid coal-fired power plant;
3. numerous exploratory fracking projects in the Karoo and Drakensburg;
4. Total's Brulpadda offshore drilling and many other exploratory drills by major oil companies;
5. a national gas pipeline designed by the Council for Scientific and Industrial Research;
6. the R218 billion Karpowership contract utilising Liquefied Natural Gas – with associated methane venting, flaring, leakage and explosion dangers – chosen (dubiously) ahead of many renewable energy generation and storage options;
7. the R250 billion Durban port-petrochemical expansion, including a pipeline from Durban to Johannesburg – rerouted to go through black not the original white neighbourhoods – that has triple the pumping capacity as the one built in 1965;
8. the desired import of Cabo Delgado gas (according to foreign minister Naledi Pandor) for which 3000 SANDF troops are being deployed to secure the area against guerrilla insurgents this week;
9. an expansion of sprawling suburban infrastructure as the property market has again begun to boom (outstripping even the record-setting Johannesburg Stock Exchange), with implications for auto and cement-related emissions;
10. at least R30 billion in automobile (non-electric) subsidies given to major firms for export subsidisation at a time South Africa's public transport system is buckling;
11. Eskom's extremely generous electricity subsidies to BHP Billiton/South32 and Anglo American under the Special Pricing Arrangement;
12. ongoing work on the Medupi and Kusile coal-fired power plants – each approaching R200 billion in spending, three times over budget – notwithstanding what are apparently fatal design flaws, rampant procurement fraud, and systemic problems in even simple mechanical features such as conveyor belts.

To illustrate the injustice of just the latter mega-projects, household electricity bills of the working class have soared 500% since 2007 in large part because of Medupi and Kusile. They should never have been built, but now that they are nearing completion in spite of ongoing structural flaws, it is overdue to address the open bribery of the ruling party by Hitachi, which in 2015 paid a R300 million fine for its criminality under the U.S. Foreign Corrupt Practices Act.

The failure of the NDC to mention, much less grapple with the challenge of cutting these emissions and providing a Just Transition to the workers and communities involved, so truly no one is left behind, is not just a glaring omission. It is a sign of bad faith by the NDC authors.

South Africa's NDC must be class, race and gender sensitised

Bad faith is also evident when the NDC document considers "South Africa" as a unitary concept, since this country has the worst inequality on earth. So it is a tiny share of South Africans – identifiable by class, race and gender – that has historically benefited from greenhouse gas emissions, mainly through their profitable investments or shareholdings in the MEC's climate-destructive activities. The rest of the country's people – more than two thirds of whom live below R50/day Upper Bound Poverty Line – pay enormous bills now for erratic electricity, and suffer the bulk of climate-catastrophic

damage. The NDC makes no attempt at including class, race, gender and generational analysis when it comes to assessing which polluters should pay, and how.

The NDC does not truly understand that climate catastrophe is especially felt by the poorest, such as 71 of our sisters and brothers – but especially women and youth – who died on Eastern Monday 2019, in Durban and the South Coast. In many cases the unprecedented “Rain Bomb” of 148mm within 24 hours washed away their bodies and their shacks, especially if they lived on the rivers’ edges. In many cases their badly-built “RDP Houses”, especially those built on slopes, collapsed on them. No wealthy people lost their lives.

In January 2021, Cyclone Eloise hit Limpopo and Mpumalanga Provinces after tearing through Mozambique, killing 10 South Africans, with seven people missing. This and other cyclones in 2019-21 killed well over 1000 people in our region, mostly in Mozambique, Malawi and Zimbabwe; these were clearly the result of the higher temperature in the Mozambique Channel; as Cyclone Idai’s course showed, it was unique in recorded history of moving into Malawi, then moving back out to the Indian Ocean to gather yet more force and returning through Beira and eastern Zimbabwe.

The same class, race and gender impact of climate catastrophe is evident when areas of our country suffer droughts. Consider the difficulties faced, as well, by women when it comes to energy access. Women’s roles in household reproduction are more arduous when there is no electricity for cooking, cleaning with hot water, heating, childcare and lighting. For increasing shares of poor and working families, these often currently require dirty energy – coal, paraffin, wood – with resulting exposure to particulate matter and the rising threat of airborne diseases during the Covid-19 and TB pandemics. Women, children and the elderly bear much more of the burden.

The NDC makes only one mention of the injustice of the climate catastrophe: “Poor communities have low capacity to adapt and thus suffer the most from impacts. Nevertheless, we have invested in adaptation, and thus made a fair contribution to the global effort.” We hope that in future, the NDC recognizes not just poverty as a fatal ingredient, but also gender and race bias.

Conclusion: The Climate Justice Coalition, Million Climate Jobs programme, Climate Justice Charter and protesters should guide government, instead of the MEC still capturing the state

The targets of more than 400 Mt of CO2 emissions that are the central objective of the NDC must be rethought, if South Africa is not to be considered a climate slacker, or even a rogue regime on a Trump/Bolsonaro/bin Salman scale. We suggest a target closer to 200 Mt, to begin to address the South African elite’s historic responsibility, in addition to working on what climate debt we owe our poorest and our neighbouring countries and the continent more generally.

Several initiatives exist in the climate justice movement to address the over-emitting capitalist economy, as do a myriad of protests against climate, energy and environmental injustices. None of these call for a revolutionary eco-socialist transformation overnight; but each does question whether the capitalist economy can be marginally reformed if we are to come to grips with the climate catastrophe. It is revealing that the NDC document utterly ignores these concrete alternatives, and cries of anger.

It is abundantly evident that, in contrast to taking economic and environmental justice seriously, the South African state has been captured since the 1652 takeover of the Cape by the Dutch East India Company, followed by Cecil Rhodes’ De Beers, the British South Africa Company’s invasion of neighbouring countries, and in the 20th century, the Anglo American empire and all the other mining houses that have engaged in super-exploitative practices. The 21st century has a new danger: Black Economic Empowerment in the fossil fuel sector.

In conclusion, SAFTU’s comments are highly critical of the South African government’s approach to what is innocuously termed “climate change.” Obviously, the capitalist economy is mainly to blame for what is an existential threat to life on planet earth. For business, it remains convenient to externalise the costs of operations, especially through pollution, including CO2 and methane.

It is vital to acknowledge just how depraved South African capitalism has become in recent decades, even after apartheid ended. For while Transparency International now ranks our politicians' and bureaucrats' "corruption perception" by society at 109th worst of 180 countries polled, the PwC biannual corporate economic survey during the 2010s ranked South African companies as the *most* corrupt of those measured (though in 2020 that ranking fell to a tie for *second most economically criminal*).

To overcome such embarrassments and acknowledge the harsh reality that such statistics reflect the obvious class and social conflicts in the *most unequal country in the world* (as measured by the World Bank), would begin to allow the NDC to become a reality-based empirically-sound standpoint to advance Climate Justice.

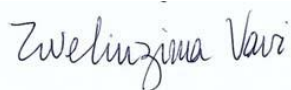
In spite of occasional rhetoric about justice, the contrast between a pro-business NDC document, and genuine Climate Justice campaigning, could not be more obvious. If the NDC is interested in civil society helping the state combat climate catastrophe, why is it impossible for the document to make *any reference* to the Climate Justice Coalition (in which SAFTU is a member), the Million Climate Jobs programme (which trade unions drew up in 2011), and the Climate Justice Charter moving through parliament, driven by grassroots organisations?

Why is it impossible to refer to any of the myriad anti-fossil fuel campaigns underway across the country (against coal mining and combustion, oil refining, offshore drilling, Karpowerships, fracking and even pipeline transport); to the labour movement's role in Just Transition advocacy; and indeed to all the other service delivery protesters – now at a record rate of five/day according to Police Minister Bheki Cele (twice the 2013-19 rate) – who are demanding changes in the electricity, water, sanitation, stormwater drainage, healthcare, education and other systems that are so integral to climate management?

And this seething anger at climate injustice, energy injustice, environmental injustice and economic injustice in all their racial, gender and class manifestations, still occurring 27 years into our democracy at the world's most extreme levels, is justified. Socio-economic degeneracy now worsening under capitalism's climate crisis is the central reason why we in SAFTU are socialists, and why we encourage the rest of the society to look hard at whether we owe it to ourselves and our future generations to rapidly transcend the capitalist mode of production, the way other prior generations replaced outmoded feudalism with capitalism.

FORWARD WITH CLIMATE JUSTICE FOR ALL!

Yours Sincerely,



Zwelinzima Vavi
General Secretary