

Comment & Analysis

It's time to uproot our archaic energy and mining regime

A week of protests begins tomorrow against Gwede Mantashe and the department of mineral resources & energy for failing in their duty to the people of SA and delivering instead wilful blindness to climate change, scandals, human rights abuses and ecological destruction

By SARAH ROBYN FARRELL, MAMETLWE SEBEL, CLEOPATRA SHEZI and ALEX LENFERNA

In the past couple of years, SA has lived through some of its worst load-shedding. The estimated economic cost has been in the hundreds of billions of rands, and we will have to face more years of it, due to government inaction to resolve the crisis. In addition to anger levelled at Eskom, growing outrage has been building against minister Gwede Mantashe's department of mineral resources & energy (DMRE), which has time and time again blocked new renewable energy projects that would most quickly resolve our load-shedding crisis.

Eventually, outrage against Mantashe was so strong that in June President Cyril Ramaphosa overruled him to lift the licensing requirements on energy projects below 100MW – easing the way for new energy projects to be built.

But, even though Ramaphosa's move will unlock new renewable energy, it threatens to drive a more privatised and corporate-dominated energy future. That's in large part because Mantashe's department has also failed to put in place policies to support a just transition to a more socially owned renewable energy future. It's one of many failures.

Within the DMRE, waste, inefficiency and scandal abound. For example, recent investigations revealed that it wasted hundreds of millions of rands on storage costs for solar water geysers that it isn't installing. Under Mantashe, the department also rigged the national electricity plan to favour unnecessary, polluting and expensive new coal projects.

Most recently, Mantashe and his department have been entangled in the controversy surrounding the R200bn Karpowership debacle. The freight tender has landed the department in court, facing accusations of "corruption and a procedurally unfair" procurement process.

Doing everything in its power to stall a transition to renewable energy, Mantashe's DMRE is rapidly working to lock SA into a future of fossil fuels by opening vast swathes of ocean and land to coal, oil, and gas exploration.

These polluting projects threaten to destroy livelihoods and devastate the ecosystems communities rely on. Many are also being pushed forward without meaningful participation and even against the wishes of communities, whose right to say no is being violated.

Meanwhile, the world's top climate scientists are sounding an alarm: a "code red for humanity". They warn that fossil fuel pollution is changing Earth's climate in unprecedented ways, with some changes now inevitable and "irreversible".

To avert the worst of the climate crisis, we have to do pretty much the opposite of what Mantashe's department is doing. Demonstrating this clearly, the International Energy Agency recently released a report showing that we should not invest in any new fossil fuel extraction to meet the vital United Nations Paris Climate Agreement's goal of keeping warming to 1.5°C.

Driving us deeper into dangerous climate change, SA is one of the world's most polluting nations. If every nation in the world were to follow our lead, global warming would reach 3°C-4°C. The difference between a 1.5°C and a 4°C world is "civilisation" as we know it, in the words of climate scientist professor Hans Joachim Schnellhuber.

Mantashe spreads misinformation, claiming that renewables will spell economic ruin. However,



ILLUSTRATION: NOLO MOIMA

researchers and economic reality have shown time and time again that the world has more than enough renewable energy potential to replace fossil fuels and more affordably meet the energy demands of every person in the world, while creating many more jobs than coal would.

Mantashe is out of step with both reality and his own party, which recently supported Eskom's plans to forge ahead with a just transition to renewables. Mantashe, however, is objecting to and attempting to block Eskom's move, thus posing a grave threat to our economy and environment.

Whether Mantashe likes it or not, the world and SA are transitioning away from fossil fuels. Our ageing coal infrastructure is due to retire and financiers refuse to fund new coal, knowing it to be an uneconomic and unwise waste of money.

As our coal plants and mines shut down, we will need to put in place policies for a just transition that protects workers and communities dependent on fossil fuels for their livelihoods. Thanks to Mantashe's head being in the sand, though, the DMRE still has no action plan to do so.

The department has failed to respond to the crises of the moment. In the face of these failures, what is needed is a deep transformation of the DMRE, preferably starting with Mantashe stepping aside to allow for more progressive and capable leadership.

Responding to the reality of the 21st century, the

department should recognise that we need a Green New Eskom leading a rapid and just transition to a renewable energy future. It should also facilitate more social ownership of renewable energy so the benefits are shared by the many, not just the few.

A transformed DMRE should enshrine, not violate, the fundamental democratic principle that communities have the right to say no to projects that threaten to harm them. It should also hold corporations accountable to promises they make to communities in social labour plans, rather than allowing them to leave behind legacies of pollution, degradation, and unemployment.

Rather than forcing us into an unsustainable coal-, oil- and gas-fuelled future, a DMRE suited to

the 21st century should lead the charge towards a just transition to renewable energy. It must implement a plan – as many countries have – for a skills, jobs and training programme that creates millions of jobs and leaves no-one behind in the move away from coal.

As things stand, though, Mantashe and the DMRE are acting with brazen undemocratic impunity, refusing to move in response to petitions, marches and massive public outrage against it. It is long past time that the people of SA took decisive action to ensure Mantashe's DMRE does not lock us into a future of deepening dysfunction and devastation.

That's why this week – starting tomorrow, September 20 – we are part of a broad civil society coalition leading a nationwide mobilisation to protest against Mantashe and the DMRE under the banner of #UprootTheDMRE. If you care about affordable energy, climate change, or the future of our country, we hope you'll join us.

* Farrell is a volunteer action & advocacy co-ordinator with the youth-led African Climate Alliance. Sebel is president of the General Industries Workers Union of SA and works in the environmental justice programme at Lawyers for Human Rights. Shezi is treasurer of United Front Johannesburg and is an energy and climate justice activist with the Soweto Electricity Crisis Committee. Lenferna is a climate justice campaigner with 350Africa.org and secretary of SA's Climate Justice Coalition.

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Come on men of SA, we can do better than this



RAY McCAULEY

The barbaric and horrific killings of a number of women recently have shocked and outraged the country and no doubt left their families and communities traumatised.

Fort Hare law student Nosicelo Mtebeni, who was murdered and dismembered in East London; the grade 1 pupil from Khensani Primary School in Soshanguve who was raped in the school's toilets; Palesa Maruping, who was found hanging from the ceiling of a house in Khuma Location in North West; and Pheliswa Sawutana, who was strangled to death in Kosovo informal settlement in Cape Town.

No woman or human being deserves such cruelty or to die like an animal; no parent should go through such pain. We hold our children close to our hearts and to be told your child has been murdered and dismembered must be the most painful experience a parent has to go through.

These horrific cases once more demonstrate the depravity of some of our men. These deaths are just

a few cases among many crimes committed against women involving murder, rape, kidnapping and the disappearance of girls and women in a context of what seems to be an out-of-control state of gender-based violence. We cannot allow violence against women and children to be considered as normal in our society.

Last month the minister of police, Bheki Cele, released the latest crime statistics, which show that SA has become a war zone and we are fast losing the war against crime and gender-based violence.

Criminals are taking over our communities. The stats reveal that contact crime has risen by 60.6%. Police registered 10,006 cases of rape between April and June 2021. This was an increase of 4,201 cases and 72.4% more than the same period in 2020. Murders claimed 5,760 lives in SA between April and the end of June 2021. Of the rape cases, 487 were domestic violence-related, while 164 murders were linked to domestic violence. On top of all this, a report came out that 23,000 girls fell pregnant between April and June 2021 in Gauteng.

Something has gone wrong in our country. This is not normal; the women who marched to the Union Buildings in 1955 fighting for women's and girls' rights must be turning in their graves because this is not what they fought for. As a society we are failing the women and girls of this country.

What kind of men turn on the women and children in their communities? What kind of men rape both women and children at this alarming rate, not to mention the physical and emotional abuse that women endure and suffer day in and day out? Come on men of SA – we are better than this, we can do better than this.

What is even harder to understand is that every year we celebrate Women's Month, and the idea is to promote women's rights and shine a spotlight on gender-based violence. Yet, despite all these efforts, year in and year out we see an alarming increase in the murder, rape and abuse of women and children.

Something urgently needs to be done to deal with our troubled society, or our troubled society will deal with us. I totally agree with the statement issued by We Will Speak Out SA titled "Words Fail Us". It says: "As long as women are the poorest, most marginalised members of our societies, and their bodies are degraded, beaten, raped and even

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cut into pieces, we have failed to respond to God's call to minister peace, love and justice. We need to continue to ask for forgiveness."

As a senior church leader myself, I take full responsibility that we have not responded to the urgency of this crisis we face as church leaders. It is for this reason that we have called upon President Cyril Ramaphosa to urgently gather the leaders of this country to respond to the many challenges we face, and at the top of the agenda must be this

terrible violence against women and children.

I believe that to overcome this scourge we need more than just the president speaking out – we need all of our leaders to condemn these crimes and say in no uncertain terms that we as South Africans will not condone these atrocities with our silence. Our collective stance should be clear: zero tolerance for those who perpetuate violence.

It is said that evil thrives when the good among us keep quiet. This is as true in the religious community as it is in every other sector. The questions must be asked: where are the community leaders? Where are the business leaders? And dare I say, where are the religious leaders? We are too quiet, or our responses are not good enough. Women and children are crying out for our leadership.

I hold a strong conviction and belief that gender-based violence is a crime of power – one that seeks to uphold patriarchal laws and control the female body in the framework of historically unequal power structures between men and women. It is a problem that belongs to society and therefore a crime by society.

We must all face up to this crime and address it in our different spheres of operation – in education, in the workplace, in our religious institutions, in our homes, in our laws and in just about every sphere of society.

We must all stand up and be counted, especially men from all walks of life, and sing with one strong voice #Notinmyname.

* Pastor McCauley is president of Rhema Family Churches and chair of the National Religious Leaders Council