



# CLIMATE JUSTICE CHARTER

# Climate Justice Charter

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Join the Climate Justice Charter Movement!

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# Climate Justice Charter<sup>1</sup>

## 1. For Climate Justice Now

As Africans, we live together on a vast and beautiful continent where the human story began. All of us are linked to the first human who walked upright, dreamed, thought and co-existed with plants, animals, rivers, oceans and forests. Today this common humanity and its future is in serious danger. South Africa cannot ignore this challenge. The continued use of oil, gas and coal to power our economy and society is making our world unliveable for all life.

The Earth is being damaged by this system that puts profits before life. Every year, temperatures are rising with disastrous consequences. With a 1-degree Celsius increase in planetary temperature since the start of the industrial revolution, everything is changing fast: increasing extreme weather shocks (droughts, floods, wildfires, tornadoes, heat waves), ecosystem collapse, sea level rise, together with major stresses on the Earth's systems. We are sad because a future with a stable climate is being lost. Our recent drought has taught us that lesson. We are angry because our rulers are not listening. The inequality and suffering of our people, including during the Covid-19 pandemic, has worsened. Yet, we are hopeful because climate science is on our side. Like the science of Covid-19, climate science is calling for caring action now. This Charter is a call to all who care about human and non-human life to act together in advancing a pluri-vision – of people's dreams, alternatives and desires for a deep just transition.

Mines, refineries, waste incinerators, airlines, cement industries, and cars have brought pollution, illness, poisons and suffering to our communities. Chemical-

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<sup>1</sup> This Climate Justice Charter emerges out of six years of campaigning, during the worst drought in South Africa's history, by the South African Food Sovereignty Campaign and the Cooperative and Policy Alternative Centre. It has been informed by grassroots input from water stressed communities, the media, labour, faith based communities, youth, climate scientists, academics, women's organisations, environmental and social justice organisations, as well as, think pieces by leading activists. A conference held in November 2019 consolidated a draft which was then placed online for public comment. A final round of public input was provided at a Climate Justice Assembly held on 16 June 2020. This document is the outcome of this process of dialogue and climate justice resistance.

based and export agriculture contributes to various diseases. Yet we have rallied. With lessons learned about these harms and the importance of the life enabling commons (land, water, biodiversity, energy, earth system and cyber sphere), we continue to advance our commitment to justice, anchored in people's power. Hence, we consciously choose to end the war with nature.

More climate shocks and ecological crises will result in more suffering (and more pandemics), for the majority, particularly workers, the poor, people with disabilities, landless and the vulnerable. These are not simply natural disasters but failures of leadership. As we defend the web of life and live with climate breakdown, we seek to end race, class, gender and ecological injustice. We cannot let grassroots women and children be the shock absorbers of this crisis, like before and during Covid-19. Invisible care work in households and sacrifices by women in poor communities contributes to blunting the edge of suffering while male domination and violence continues. A carbon free society and effective life supporting systems mean emancipation for all, including for future generations, from this eco-cidal system. This is the struggle of our time and our historical task as South Africans, as humans and as part of the wider living earth community.

## **2. Goals of the Charter**

This Charter aims to:

- 2.1 Advance an awareness that we thrive and co-exist on one planet. Earth is a common home for all species. Thus, we seek to affirm our role and responsibilities as guardians of our planet's ecosystems and the delicate web of life it supports.
- 2.2 Inspire a break with the thinking that caused the crisis and that reinforces the obsession with growth, progress and domination. The power of humanity is constrained by the limits, cycles, tipping points and boundaries

of all ecosystems. More of the same thinking that harms Earth, is forcing it to react with a power we cannot match.

2.3 Reconnect with an Earth-centred conception of what it means to be human. Nature is endless, and we are just one small part of it. We have to appreciate that every element of an ecosystem has an intrinsic value and must be respected.

2.4 Deepen cooperation. We thrive most as humans when we express solidarity, share, live slowly, are free, affirm our needs and preserve the foundations of our life world. The time to challenge and end the selfish, greedy, competitive, violent and conquering conception of the human has arrived.

2.5 Overcome the crisis of corporate-captured political leadership, which is incapable of thinking beyond the short term, 'business as usual' games and which fails to understand the root causes of the problems. We reject their false solutions that prolong the use of carbon and perpetuate the unjust life destroying system.

2.6 Strengthen our democracy, constitution and transformative constitutionalism, by claiming our rights and building united people's power, as we confront the climate emergency and worsening socio-ecological crises.

### **3. Principles for Deep Just Transitions**

Every community, village, town, city and workplace has to advance the deep just transition to ensure socio-ecological transformation. The following principles shall guide the alternatives, plans and processes towards a deep just transition in our society:

3.1 **Climate justice:** Those least responsible must not be harmed or carry the cost of climate impacts. Hence the needs of workers, the poor, the landless,

people with disabilities, grassroots women, children and vulnerable communities have to be at the centre of the deep just transition. The benefits of socio-ecological transformation must be shared equally.

- 3.2 **Social justice:** Climate justice is social justice. Confronting all forms of discrimination and oppression as it relates to race, class, gender, sex and age, to secure climate and social justice.
- 3.3 **Eco-centric living:** To live simply, slowly and consciously, in an eco-centric way, which recognises the sanctity of all life forms, our inter-connections and enables an ethics of respect and care.
- 3.4 **Participatory democracy:** All climate and deep just transition policies must be informed by the voices, consent and needs of all people, especially those facing harm.
- 3.5 **Socialised ownership:** In workplaces and communities, people's power must express itself through democratic control and ownership, including through democratic public utilities, cooperatives, commoning, communal ownership and participatory planning, including participatory budgeting, in towns and cities, to ensure collective management of the life enabling commons and systems.
- 3.6 **International solidarity:** Everyone's struggle is a shared struggle to sustain life. In the context of worsening climate shocks, international solidarity is central to the deep just transition as it serves to unite all who are struggling for emancipation and for a post carbon world.
- 3.7 **Decoloniality:** Colonial, neo-colonial and imperial domination are driving us towards extinction. This is based on the worship of extractivism, technology, finance, violence and markets. We will actively delink from this system as we affirm an emancipatory relationship between humans and with non-human nature rooted in our history, culture, knowledge and the wider struggle of the oppressed on planet earth.

**3.8 Intergenerational justice:** Care for our planetary commons and ecosystems is crucial for intergenerational justice; to secure a future for our children, youth and those not yet born.

#### **4. Systemic Alternatives for Transformative Change**

We face many crises but the climate crisis is the most dangerous. Through addressing the climate crisis, which affects everything, we can also advance solutions to all socio-ecological crises and more generally end the war with nature. Systemic alternatives are necessary to address the causes of climate change, its risks and pressures for systems collapse.

There are people's alternatives to fossil fuels, which can meet our basic needs, enhance our capacity to deal with climate disasters and prepare us to regenerate life-supporting systems. Such systemic alternatives have been imagined and are part of people's struggles to decarbonise societies now as part of the deep just transition. We are committed to advancing such alternatives and democratic systemic reforms from below.

**4.1 Democratic and Deep Just Transition Plans:** Top-down approaches to the deep just transition assume people cannot think for themselves and do not have answers. Together, every community and workplace needs to develop a deep just transition plan. This should be done in a democratic manner to enable an energy transition to decarbonise, whilst meeting essential needs, and advancing systemic alternatives, goals and principles as set out in this Charter.

**4.2 Socially Owned and Community-Based Renewable Energy through a Rapid Phase-Out of Fossil Fuels:** Our dependence on coal, oil and gas has to be ended as it is accelerating climate breakdown, ultimately leading to an unliveable world. Nuclear energy is dangerous and costly. Instead, we will advance socially owned and community based renewable energy systems

(such as solar, wind, hydro and tidal power), supported by participatory budgeting and incentives (such as feed in tariffs) for our workplaces, homes and communities. Such energy technologies must be industrialised in South Africa, using renewable energy. Efficient use of energy and technology will be crucial in this transition. Divestment from fossil fuels, an end to fossil fuel subsidies and an end to extraction (such as fracking, more coal mines and offshore extraction) are imperative. All big energy generators such as Eskom and Sasol have to commit to deep, just transition plans, to secure the interests of workers, affected communities and future generations.

**4.3 Feed Ourselves through Food Sovereignty:** The current industrial food system produces hunger, uses water inefficiently, destroys nature, releases carbon and is generally unhealthy. Commercial fishing has destroyed marine ecosystems and undermined the rights of subsistence fishers. Every community must prioritise small scale, agroecological farming to meet local needs. The right to food must give food producers, small scale subsistence fishers, informal traders and consumers the power over their own food commons systems to ensure that culturally appropriate and nutritious food is available to all. Moreover, biodiversity, control of seeds and resources for production need to affirm the importance of indigenous knowledge, local markets, control of the water commons, the eco-social function of land, and good health. Big farms need to be deconcentrated to ensure land justice, but in a manner that is fair, strengthens reconciliation and builds solidarity.

**4.4 Democratise the Water Commons:** Water is controlled by a few while many are in desperate need. Industrial farms, mines, coal generated electricity, sugar and timber plantations are some of the major users of water. As a public good, water needs to be conserved by all and it must be protected from pollution. Furthermore, water use has to be democratically planned and effectively regulated while affirming citizens' rights to consume this scarce and precious resource. Water and sanitation infrastructure must be upgraded, managed and monitored to ensure efficient use. Water savings



from phasing out coal generation and big industrial scale farming will enhance the water commons. A water conscious society has to be promoted.

**4.5 Enjoy Life through Working Less:** Work for everyone as the means to survive and earn income is no longer possible. Unemployment, low paying jobs and long working hours harm society. In a heating world, working hours must be reduced, at least to a four-day week. Decent, zero carbon climate jobs must be guaranteed and supported by collective, values-based and eco-centric approaches to production, consumption, financing and ways of living through the solidarity economy. Such an economy is based on needs and democratises economic power. Together with a universal basic income grant system (UBIG) complementing existing public goods, all workers can be protected in the transition required and society more generally will have a cushion. The UBIG will generally promote human cultural flourishing in a post work society.

**4.6 Eco-mobility and Clean Energy Public Transport Systems:** The car industry carries a major responsibility for undermining clean energy public transport systems and for wasteful investment in expensive road infrastructure. These harms can be brought to an end with greater support for walking, bicycles, clean energy motor bikes, horses and donkeys as eco-mobility modes of transport. Cities and towns also need to be car free and provide infrastructure for eco-mobility. Every community needs to be integrated into a mass transit system involving buses, trains and trams running on renewable energy and hybrid technologies based on local eco-manufacturing. The transportation of goods must also shift to rail. Non-electric cars based on fossil fuels must be phased out. Air and sea transport must also be decarbonised or limited.

**4.7 Zero Waste and Simple Living:** Mass consumption of commodities and ‘celebrity lifestyles’ are resource intensive, wasteful and carbon centric.

Moreover, landfill sites, incineration of waste and pollution of ecosystems are harmful. Zero waste closes the loop through recycling, reuse, solidarity economy principles and sustainable design in our economy so that there is less (or zero) extraction of raw materials. Certain technologies, like single use plastic, have to be banned. Together with simple living, we can live with minimal resource and carbon footprints.

**4.8 Eco-social Housing, Buildings and Transition Towns:** Many existing homes are not designed to deal with climate extremes. Moreover, many are still homeless in our society while the rich have golf courses. We need to retrofit existing buildings and homes to handle more heat and weather extremes. Similarly, new homes must be designed as part of eco-communities, villages, towns, municipal rental schemes and cities where construction methods use natural materials, have minimal impact on the environment and provide for eco-social land needs of individuals as part of a community. Such needs are for housing, agroecological food production, sustainable water use, biodiversity, child rearing and culture. Cement is not used in this context given its huge carbon footprint and has to be phased out as a building technology.

**4.9 Beyond Mainstream Economics:** The assumptions that economics makes about human behaviour, nature, profits, markets, commodities and growth is destroying everything. Mainstream economics merely justifies the wealth for a few, their destructive use of resources, and resulting pollution and carbon emissions. Our economies have to serve our needs as socio-ecological beings and the needs of ecosystems. We need an economics that takes into account ecological footprints, happiness, well-being, the resilience of ecosystems (through regular audits), the commons, and planetary boundaries. Our economics must be orientated around concepts and tools that assess the state of all living creatures and ends the harm to humans as well as non-human nature. This should serve as the basis of agenda setting, policy, resource allocation and democratic planning.

**4.10 The Rich Must Pay their Ecological Debt:** The wealthy in our societies have consumed resources excessively, negatively impacted on ecosystems, and have huge carbon footprints. They owe us all an ecological debt and have to carry the financial burden of the deep just transition. This means a climate debt tax for the rich; high taxes on airline travel, private jets, luxury vehicles and electric cars; a progressive carbon tax targeting polluting corporations not phasing out carbon fast enough; and climate justice tariffs on carbon criminal corporations and governments. Workers need to leverage pension and provident funds, through worker control, to ensure the deep just transition meets their needs and support the creation of a national cooperative bank to assist workplaces, communities and households with the socially owned renewable energy transition and the realisation of deep just transition plans. Public finance also needs to be harnessed from eco-taxes, penalties for pollution, withdrawing subsidies to fossil fuels, and other progressive taxation sources.

**4.11 Knowledge is Crucial for Survival:** There is a big knowledge gap in society regarding the worsening climate crisis. We have to draw on different knowledge systems to raise public awareness and survive. Indigenous knowledge has powerful resources to assist us and it has to be retrieved, learned and respected. Earth system science, including climate science, is essential to inform the public about the climate crisis and its challenges. Climate science as people's science has to be complimented by lived experience based on observing and learning from ecosystems. Given the complexity of climate change, research and innovation to ensure systemic transformation and to advance the public interest must be supported. Universities and schools must take these knowledge challenges on board.

**4.12 Emergency, Holistic and Preventative Healthcare:** Inequality in healthcare means climate harms will bring injustice, such as during the Covid-19 pandemic. We need workable, accessible and responsive public healthcare systems to meet people's needs and address the health challenges that

come with climate heating. Such healthcare systems must be capable of dealing with emergencies, psychological trauma, diseases and new epidemics. Holistic care and a preventative orientation at the grassroots have to be strengthened.

**4.13 Rights of Nature and Natural Climate Solutions:** Our oceans have been polluted, forests destroyed, land stolen and biodiversity loss increased, all due to the pursuit of profit. If we are to survive, all living creatures need to be respected. All life and all ecosystems on our planet are deeply intertwined and need to exist, persist and regenerate their vital cycles. The rights of nature approach recognises the intrinsic value of all non-human life forms. Moreover, nature has its own solutions to climate change from which we can learn. Such solutions include conservation, restoration and land management activities that increase carbon storage across forests, wetlands, grasslands, coastal ecosystems and agro-ecological farm lands. Community-led biodiversity registers are crucial to protect and advance natural climate solutions.

**4.14 Climate Conscious Media:** The media is not informing the public adequately about climate change. It needs to take the science of climate change more seriously and inform the public about the climate crisis, policy issues and the systemic alternatives required. Climate news has to be mainstreamed in radio, television and print media.

## **5. Towards a People Driven Climate Justice State**

The South African state has to become a climate justice state that recognises the climate emergency, whilst strengthening our democracy. It has to be guided by the vision, goals, principles and people-led systemic alternatives contained in this Charter and all its climate policies must be aligned to realise this Charter. More specifically, a climate justice state will also:

- 5.1 Enable participatory planning for deep just transitions from below.
- 5.2 Develop public finance mechanisms such as a public climate insurance fund and green bonds, provide a climate crisis mandate to the Reserve Bank, re-orientate all public and private finance institutions to support the deep just transition and advance the tax proposals in this charter.
- 5.3 Ensure progressive regulations that will curtail the destructive logic of capital, place limits on corporations, and importantly, place a ban on any future fossil fuel extraction.
- 5.4 Decarbonise all state practices and achieve a zero-carbon footprint in all its activities;
- 5.5 Administratively and constitutionally redesign state structures as parts of the country become unliveable.
- 5.6 Prepare the country for rising sea levels and take appropriate measures as part of participatory planning.
- 5.7 Strengthen local government to have enhanced powers and democratic planning competencies to deal with the climate crisis.
- 5.8 Develop institutional capacity through a people-led climate disaster management system, which includes a national fire service, fully functional public hospitals, rapid response emergency teams, increased capacity for the weather services and disaster management infrastructure.
- 5.9 Promote research and innovation to deepen systemic transformation for deep just transitions from below, actively raise public awareness and ensure all public institutions are climate justice leaders.
- 5.10 Reduce all wasteful spending, end corruption and professionalise the state bureaucracy by appointing the best people in the country to serve in government. A truly non-racial and women led bureaucracy must be created.

5.11 Advance a climate justice orientation in its international relations, including renewing radical Pan-Africanism, through promoting: a climate justice position amongst African governments to demand climate debt reparations from the global north as part of a Climate Justice Deal; climate justice sanctions against carbon criminal states; solidarity towards refugees and migrants; research; systemic alternatives; renewable energy pooling; climate disaster response capabilities; and call for an ‘End To Fossil Fuel Treaty’ in the UN system that benefits African governments.

## **6. People’s Power for Commoning and a Climate Justice Deal for South Africa**

A climate justice future can only be achieved through the power of a united people. We have learned this through the struggle against colonialism, apartheid and neoliberalism.

Power lies in different parts of society, in the systems we build, the organisations and movements that we are part of, and in the street politics we do. People’s power has to be at the forefront of defending the living commons which sustains us and future generations.

Human beings are an adaptable and flexible species. We understand the causes of the climate crisis and we have democratic, transformative and just solutions to prevent our extinction. This Climate Justice Charter is a signpost; a trumpet call, to move all of us in the direction of system change now and for a Climate Justice Deal that ends the suffering of the most vulnerable and oppressed. Such a people led initiative will ensure that we address the multiple crises confronting the country while affirming the hope of the many expressed in this Charter. Let’s take a stand for a caring society and unite, in South Africa and through international solidarity, before it is too late.

**Forward to the Climate Justice Charter and Deep Just Transition to Sustain Life!**

