



# GROUNDWORK



**THE (UN)JUST TRANSITION**  
**Calls for a shared vision**  
**for a different future**

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A family tries to rebuild their home which was washed away by the floods in Durban in 2022. Credit: Phill Magakoe



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*groundWork is a non-profit environmental justice organization working primarily in South Africa, but increasingly in Southern Africa. groundWork seeks to improve the quality of life of vulnerable people in Southern Africa through assisting civil society to have a greater impact on environmental governance. groundWork places particular emphasis on assisting vulnerable and previously disadvantaged people who are most affected by environmental injustices. groundWork's current campaign areas are: Climate Justice and Energy, Coal, Waste and Environmental Health. These campaigns are supported by the Media, Information and Publications Campaign and the*

*Environmental Justice Education Campaign. groundWork is constituted as a trust. The Chairperson of the Board of Trustees is Judy Bell. The other trustees are: Farid Esack, Richard Lyster, Angela Conway and Johan Riekert.*

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*groundWork is affiliated to the following international organizations: Health Care Without Harm; International POPs Elimination Network; Basel Action Network; Oilwatch International; Global Anti-Incineration Alliance; groundWork is the South African member of Friends of the Earth International*

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groundWork

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# From the Smoke Stack

by groundWork director, Bobby Peek



**W**ow, what a start to 2023.

It has been intense, as always. Shelley Paterson (Finance Director) and Avena Jacklin (Operations Director) now work with me to manage this growing family that Gill Addison nurtured for 23 years. Transitions are never easy, but they can be exciting. And, indeed, this one has been just that. We have also brought on Yegeshini Moodley to take on the Climate and Energy Justice campaign on which Avena has worked over the last few years. Nqobile Ranela, who has been with us over the last year as an intern, is now full time, working with the coal team on the Highveld. Our admin team has also been strengthened with Mfano Mbata joining the groundWork team full time. In Durban we have doubled our office space to accommodate the increase in staff.

Yegeshni was thrown into the deep end as she has had to deal with groundWork and the South Durban Community Environmental Alliance (SDCEA), represented by the Centre for Environmental Rights (CER), challenging the Minister of Forestry, Fisheries and the Environment for their environmental authorisation of the proposed 2000 MW Phakwe gas power plant in Richards Bay. Welcome to groundWork, Yegeshni!

We kicked the year off with a reflection and planning meeting with all staff on 16 January and it was good to be around a table again, after the last few years of Covid-19. And it is good to have Bathoko Sibisi back in the office after her long leave. Soon after this we had the groundWork and community annual gathering. Both these events were intense but they were important to strengthen the groundWork team and build solidarity with our partners.

Now I am sitting in Accra, Ghana, where the morning starts at 30 degrees Celsius. This is indeed an experience. At the same time, back home in Durban the temperature is 39 degrees Celsius. The events we predicted are here. Sooner than we thought. This is 'The Moment'. And the soon-to-be-launched groundWork Report 2022: *Contested Transition: State and Capital against Community* describes this reality and calls on a just transition now, for if we fail to act now, the transition is going to be brutal and unjust.

I am not much of a classics reader, but thinking of where we are in South Africa now I cannot help but reflect on Dickens' lines from the opening of the Tale of Two Cities.

*"It was the best of times, it was the worst of times, it was the age of wisdom, it was the age of foolishness, it was the epoch of belief, it was the epoch of incredulity, it was the season of Light, it was the season of Darkness, it was the spring of hope, it was the winter of despair ..."*

And oh, how I feel we are in that 'moment' now.

On the one hand, the evidence abounds that we have to move to renewable energy (RE) as soon as possible. The president thinks so too, as he makes it easier for industries such as Aspen Pharmacy and others to produce as much RE as possible and put their electricity through the grid. Big industries score big time. It is the best of times for them. But at the same time it is the worst of times for people dependent on Eskom as the utility is weakened rather than strengthened by the state. We must always remember that big business (with their political cronies) wanted Medupi and Kusile and now these plants are crumbling even as they leave the starting blocks. Kusile's flue



duct crumbled in October, resulting in three of its six units being forced to stop working. Now Kusile wants to bypass the pollution reduction equipment and pump their pollution into the already over polluted Highveld air. And government is probably going to say yes to their request.

Big business, watching this circus, is abandoning ship and society has to pay for the design flaws, the corruption and the delays, about which we warned more than a decade ago. Now we have to entertain the foolishness of Karpowership, and the incredulity of Minister Gwede Mantashe, and the upcoming darkness and winter of despair when people do not have energy to keep warm – save for the elite who can afford decent housing, solar and batteries. We need to recognise that there is no free get out of jail card on the electricity crisis.

‘Democracy dies in darkness’ is the subheading below the Washington Post banner. And this is something we need to consider when, in the State of the Nation Address, our president declares a ‘state of disaster’ to deal with the electricity crisis. “Extraordinary circumstances call for extraordinary measures. The energy crisis is an existential threat to our economy and social fabric,” is his warning.

The big question is, will this mean that government will act undemocratically and push us into further darkness and tie the country into dirty fossil fuels and private big business RE? As I indicated to the president in January, it is time for one house, one solar panel. Make our rooftops Eskom. The president must be the revolutionary to push this. We cannot do any

more fossil fuel. We cannot allow only big business to control RE – we must take control of our own energy. Social ownership of renewable energy, as we have been calling for with unions for more than a decade, means government must facilitate the roll-out of grid-connected solar from each roof. Make our roofs the solar farms of the future.

At Thor Chemicals in Cato Ridge, just outside Durban, a government-appointed team has undertaken a health investigation of the ex-workers who are still alive. After three decades, the imported toxic waste is at last leaving our shores. A victory for environmental justice. But worker justice is still sought. Workers are concerned that the health test will not bring any justice, but they also recognise that this is a process that they must go through to strengthen their struggle and organising. The next challenge now is seeking worker justice from the Department of Labour and our democratic government that have abandoned them.

Finally, I cannot close off without asking, What next for Eskom, now that Andre de Ruyter has gone viral? The response from the Central Energy Fund, the ANC and the Eskom Board has been as expected. One wonders if there is any hope for Eskom, energy for the country and indeed democracy. He does raise the important question of resisting the ‘commencement of the transition’.

Only time will tell where this all goes.

A Luta Continua





# Contested Transition: State and Capital against Community

by David Hallows and Victor Munnik

**A** just transition has been at issue in the groundWork Reports for two decades. The groundWork Report 2022 is the third in a sequence of reports that address it directly: 2019 *Down to Zero* on the politics of the (un)just transition; and 2020 *The Elites Don't Care: reporting from people on the frontlines of Covid, climate and coal*.

The series is framed by groundWork's view that to be just the transition must be about system change – the wholesale transformation of relations of power and the way the world works. And it is given concrete form in the 'open agenda' developed with coal affected communities. This is not, however, produced on a blank slate outside history. On the one hand is the uneven and messy decline of political and economic institutions that were themselves produced through a history full of brutality and deceit. On the other, the environmental/climate crisis is growing ever more intense and will exact rising costs. In the end, it will likely blow what's left of the institutional house down. We open this report with an account of escalating climate impacts arriving faster and harder than predicted. This opens the question of whether we are being led across thresholds – or tipping points – with no turning back. Bad weather is accompanied by a chronicle of bad politics at all scales and criminal deceit – the purposeful campaign of misinformation run by Big Oil.

Since 2019, the just transition debate has moved fast. This process has been driven by on-the-ground

environmental justice activism and through formal 'stakeholder' dialogues. The Presidential Climate Commission (PCC) pushed the debate at fast pace and at high level but was also challenged to engage communities and workers. In this report, we track the process over the first two years of the PCC, report on research conducted by activists on the coal fields to give an account of community responses to it, and give

## Contested Transition

State and Capital against Community



**Contested Transition**

The groundWork Report 2022



a critical reading of the commission's 'Just Transition Framework'.

The PCC was mandated to build a national consensus for a just transition. The question is whose consensus and transition to what. The major business forums led by the National Business Initiative (NBI) moved fast to establish the elite answer: an expanded power system based on privatised renewables, electric vehicles in place of petrol and diesel, and 'green' hydrogen. This agenda brings in the major Minerals Energy Complex (MEC) corporations including Anglo, Sasol and Eskom. The basic vision is ecological modernisation: remaking the MEC around renewables and associated minerals while reproducing existing relations of power. For the most part, justice is left to trickle down.

At the climate negotiations in Glasgow, South Africa and the Northern powers announced the Just Energy Transition Partnership (JETP), with the latter promising \$8.5 billion (R130 billion) to fund the transition. President Cyril Ramaphosa then established the Presidential Climate Finance Task Team (PCFTT) to negotiate the deal for South Africa. The task team produced an overall Just Energy Transition Investment Plan (JET IP) for the next five years, looking at who should pay for what and estimating the cost at R1.5 trillion. The JETP contribution was negotiated within this frame while its value shrank on scrutiny. We look at the IP and locate the JETP deal in the broader context of the failure of climate finance.

The uneven transition and climate finance are enrolled in the crises of global capital and its search for the next 'fix'. In South Africa, the MEC, powered by coal, is falling apart. Eskom is in a death spiral, big industry is looking for cheaper alternatives and the big coal miners have sold out, leaving behind their environmental liabilities. In their place is a new trio of national coal corporations. With coal prices on a record high following Russia's invasion of Ukraine, they are making record profits and finance houses that looked to their climate credentials a year ago are now all in for the money. Global and local capital are meanwhile looking for new spaces, resources and 'asset classes' for expansion and finding it in the renewable economy and in making nature pay.

The actual transition hit the ground at Komati, the first power station to formally shut down. The World Bank is the main funder for this project and says it will provide a demonstration of how the just transition will work. The chapter opens with a view of the coal value chain and the way it is framed to suggest that the end of coal can be managed within the existing capitalist order. In Komati, it finds people unprepared for the end of coal and confronted by a set of plans for 'repowering' and 'repurposing' Komati to which they have had no input.

In south Durban, meanwhile, communities are calling for a just transition as the two big oil refineries, Sapref and Engen, have chosen to shut down rather than invest in meeting new 'clean fuel' standards. Struggles around oil and gas are intensifying, locally, regionally and globally. African energy ministers echo the call of big oil to 'drill baby drill' and justify it in the name of climate justice while branding resistance as the work of neo-colonial interests. Nevertheless, in South Africa, an extraordinary mobilisation against offshore exploration has stopped two seismic surveys. Onshore, government is winding up the rhetoric in favour of fracking for shale gas while minor companies are betting big on coal bed methane.

Government is clearly central to the transition. The fight for open democracy is thus part of the community just transition agenda. Democratic decision making is a precondition for creating an egalitarian society and implies that present power relations are overturned. Government, however, is deeply compromised: subservient to capital, mired in corruption and paralysed by the energy and economic crises, even as the crisis of the biosphere exacts exponentially increasing costs.

Thus, the prospects for a just transition are scarcely propitious. Communities – the common people – are fighting for their lives as they fight for justice. The fight is both to challenge the common sense of capitalist society and for specific objectives such as political accountability, functional services or technology transitions. And people need to fight through the unfolding situation rather than subordinate strategies to engraved positions which end in paralysis or defeat. 🌀



# We are 'Bazooka', we are Thulani Maseko, we are MaFikile Ntshangase

by Robby Mokgalaka



**C**ivic space is steadily decreasing as human rights defenders (HRDs) are threatened and intimidated and, in extreme cases, killed in the line of duty. The incidents inspire fear in the hearts of the defenders, compromising them in doing their work diligently. Unfortunately, the South African government is doing nothing to protect them. There have been many incidents where human rights defenders were killed, and the government said nothing to discourage the killings. The government's behaviour somehow stems from the perception that HRDs are anti development. It is very sad that the government fails to understand that the defenders are doing the very job that government should be doing, which is protecting its citizens. The government is constitutionally duty-bound to protect the rights of its people against any form of violation. This constitutional duty should not be selective, based on who you are or what you do, as that amounts to discrimination.

In 2016, Bazooka Radebe was killed in his own house while opposing the proposed titanium mine in the Eastern Cape. The killers are still at large. The government did nothing to discourage the killing or arrest the killers.

In 2021, MaFikile Ntshangase was also gunned down in her own house while opposing the expansion of the Tendele coal mine. The government still did nothing to discourage the killers nor arrest them.

Abahlali BaseMjondolo is another organisation that has its members killed every year. Out of 22 people who were killed, only two cases saw perpetrators arrested and jailed.

The killing of human rights defenders is not an uncommon phenomenon around the world. On 21 January this year, a well-renowned human rights lawyer Thulani Maseko, based in Eswatini, was gunned down in his own home. Thulani was known for uncompromisingly and outspokenly challenging

everything he perceived to be unjust. I personally met Thulani in Zambia last year in December, during the Southern Defenders Annual Summit.

The Southern African Human Rights Defenders Network (SAHRDN) held its annual summit in December last year. The aim of the gathering was to share new information and develop strategies to create an almost safe space for the human rights defenders who are facing threats. Different delegates from various Southern African countries were present in numbers, with the Minister of Justice from the Namibian government and other officials from the embassies gracing the conference.

Amongst other safety mechanisms, the SAHRDN erects fences for families facing threats and intimidation, to upgrade security. Relocation of the HRDs under threat is one of the preferred mechanisms. The Frontline Defenders also complement the mechanism with the installation of cameras around the yards of those families.

During the conference, it was acknowledged that the current mechanisms are not effective and are unsustainable. It was outlined that relocation is only on a temporary basis, while the threat may exist for longer. The relocated families find themselves having to return home to face the very same threat they ran away from.

It was suggested that proactive rather than responsive strategies need to be developed in order to ensure that the programmes are working for the people on the ground. It is important that collective protection is provided for communities in struggle, for it is impossible to protect every individual.

As groundWork often calls for collective justice, we need to find mechanisms of collective protection, starting with community members seeing the threats of violence, harassment and other forms of undemocratic practices by the powerful corporates – and in many





cases the state – as a collective injustice that needs a response that is collective and unified.

The delegates were also in agreement that the threats and killings are increasing and that there is an urgent need to beef up security for the HRDs. Society needs to come on board urgently by taking the HRDs security very seriously or else the environmental justice activism on the ground will diminish as HRDs become increasingly afraid for their lives.

We are ‘Bazooka’, we are Thulani Maseko, we are MaFikile Ntshangase. 🌞



**N**ovember 2022 and CoP27 was my first time ever at a CoP – a Conference of the Parties to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC). That is not the focus of this article, but then I expected health to feature as a theme at CoP27 because of the momentum started by the CoP26 Health Programme. At CoP26, the world's health ministries committed to health sector climate actions, such as low-carbon and climate-resilient health systems, and the protection of people's health. At CoP27, the World Health Organisation (WHO) played a key role in highlighting the health-environment connection and to ensure the inclusion of health content in the negotiations.

The WHO, in collaboration with the Wellcome Trust and partners, hosted the Health Pavilion, which had more than 50 side events related to climate change and health, covering topics ranging through climate education, accelerating electricity access in healthcare facilities, cleaner transport, disaster management and the development of early warning systems. We represented the Public Health Association of South Africa (PHASA), as part of the Special Interest Group on Climate, Energy and Health, at the side event on *Urgent action to strengthen climate change education for all health professionals*. Our groundWork Environmental Health campaigner, Mafoko Phomane, was on the panel at the *Responding to Climate Disasters – Perspectives from Emergency Medicine*, at a side event with a focus on climate resilience. Health reached other pavilions, such as the SDG pavilion, where we participated in a panel on a healthy Just Energy Transition hosted by the Health and Climate Network (HCN), a community of experts co-creating policy recommendations to influence global decision making on climate change and health.

A Futures Lab Event – *Healthy People, Healthy Planet: Transforming the Health Care Sector* – highlighted the momentum and vision for net zero resilient health care, and a just and healthy transition away from fossil fuels. This session was organised by UNFCCC High Level Climate Champions and Health



*The HCWH Delegation at CoP27 with Dr Maria Neira (centre), Director, Public Health and the Environment Department, World Health Organisation, at the WHO Pavilion. Left to right: Azeeza Rangunwala, Josh Karliner, Arvind Kumar, Maria Neira, Diana Picon Manyari, Poornima Prabhakaran, Manjit Sohal.*

Care Without Harm (HCWH), in partnership with the World Health Organisation, Climate and Health Alliance (Australia); the Lung Care Foundation/Doctors for Clean Air (India); the Global Climate and Health Alliance; groundWork (South Africa); the Health and Climate Network; Médecins Sans Frontières; and the Public Health Foundation of India. A Futures Lab event explores concepts and deep dives into several ways of solution searching.

A high-level panel on the Alliance for Transformative Action for Climate and Health (ATACH) included commitments from the leadership of organisations such as The Global Fund and the World Bank to align their procurement requirements for medical supplies with science-based targets for climate smart, sustainable health systems. Together with our Sustainable Health in Procurement Project (SHiPP), we recognise that the majority of health system greenhouse gas emissions are indirect and are associated with the procurement of food, pharmaceuticals and other medical supplies. This must be challenged and changed, and this is what we call for with our vision for a healthcare system that is just and is working towards zero emissions.





In terms of implementation, we are proud to announce the winners of the 2022 Health Care Climate Challenge awards for Africa. These health care institutions, all Global Green Healthy Hospitals (GGHH) members, have continued advocating and implementing sustainable, climate smart solutions and programmes while facing the polycrisis of related global risks with compounding effects. Private health sector GGHH member Netcare won four gold awards for: Greenhouse Gas Reduction (Energy); Renewable Energy; Climate Resilience; and Climate Leadership. The Western Cape Department of Health won three awards: gold for Climate Leadership, and silvers for Greenhouse Gas Reduction (Energy) and Climate Resilience.

When asked about their sustainability journey, the Western Cape Department of Health said:

“By focusing on the fundamentals, the benefits of decarbonising will have far-reaching effects for the sustainability of the environment and the general population, and impact positively, in no order of priority, on life expectancy, poverty, health, disease, hunger, and sustainable cities and communities.” *Chief Directorate: Facilities & Infrastructure Management, at the Western Cape Department of Health.*

One of the projects included retrofitting lighting systems to move towards energy efficiency and away from toxic chemicals. The installation of LED lighting at the Lentegour Laundry has resulted in energy saving estimated at 70% of its total former usage.



*Retrofitting; Energy efficient LED lighting at the Lentegour Laundry, Western Cape Department of Health*

Bongani Regional Hospital won silver for Climate Resilience and won two awards at the Centre for Public Service Innovation Awards for GGHH implementation. groundWork has spent years working with these institutions and these changes and successes need to be replicated throughout South Africa and Africa.



*Tshepo Mokhadi, Environmental Health Practitioner at Bongani Regional Hospital, accepting an award at the Public Sector Innovation Awards Ceremony, November 2022*

The Egypt Healthcare Authority won gold for Climate Leadership. One of the healthcare facilities from the Egypt Healthcare Authority is based in the Sharm El Sheikh International Hospital, in the host city for CoP27, where nine of the ten GGHH goals have been implemented. The challenge now is to deliver on this past the CoP.

Health Care Climate Challenge (an initiative of Health Care Without Harm) engages and equips institutions to commit to effective climate action while building collective impact. The awards are category-based and members earn awards for their achievements and progress. All awards are objective and directly related to information submitted through climate data forms for each institution.

It is clear from my participation in CoP27 and the work in the region that the health community must prioritise decarbonisation and climate resilience, and the climate community needs to centre healthcare and health-informed mitigation as a matter of urgency. 🌞



# Eskom's pollution is killing thousands while our minister is kicking the can down the road



by Rico Euripidou

**R**esearch on air pollution caused by Eskom's ailing and failing fleet of power stations is unequivocal: if allowed to continue, it will cost thousands more lives.

The Minister of Forestry, Fisheries and Environment continues to delay meaningful action on air pollution from Eskom's coal power stations, and is now relying on an appointed "National Environmental Consultative Advisory Forum" to advise her on pending appeals by Eskom (and by civil society groups in opposition) regarding Eskom's applications for postponement and suspension of compliance with air pollution standards.

We are calling on the forum in a legal submission to consider the horrific impacts that Eskom's air pollution has on people's health and lives on a daily basis when making its recommendations and are calling on the forum to ensure that Eskom is not allowed further to postpone its compliance with minimum emission standards (MES) on air quality, particularly in the Mpumalanga Highveld region – an area identified as an air pollution hotspot.

Research on the health effects of air pollution caused by emissions from Eskom's fleet of power stations shows that, if Eskom is allowed to continue as is, emissions from power plants will cost thousands of lives. This is evidenced by recent modelling by the Centre for Research on Energy and Clean Air (CREA) which shows that:

- Under Eskom's planned retirement schedule and emission control retrofits, emissions from the company's power plants would be responsible for a projected **79 500 air pollution-related deaths from 2025 until end-of-life**. On a cumulative basis until the end-of-life of the power plants, **compliance**

would avoid a projected 34 400 deaths from air pollution and economic costs of R620 billion (USD 41.7 billion).

- In addition, full compliance with the MES at all plants that are scheduled to operate beyond 2030 would **avoid a projected 2 300 deaths per year from air pollution and economic costs of R42 billion (USD 2.9 billion) per year**.
- Other avoided health impacts would include **140 000 asthma emergency room visits, 5 900 new cases of asthma in children, 57 000 pre-term births, 35.0 million days of work absence, and 50 000 years lived with disability**.
- Requiring the application of best available control technology at all plants, instead of the current MES, by 2030, would **avoid 57 000 deaths from air pollution and economic costs of R1 000 billion (USD 68 billion) compared to the Eskom plan, ERP 2022**.

This follows the 2021 decisions by the National Air Quality Officer to refuse a number of Eskom's applications for further postponements from compliance with air pollution standards. Eskom has said that for the majority of its stations it does not plan to retrofit its power stations by the deadline to meet the standards – due to costs and capacity constraints.

However, Eskom has known about these pollution standards for over 10 years. It has consistently sought to avoid compliance and has deferred the necessary steps to reduce dangerous air pollutant emissions. Now Eskom says that it cannot comply with these standards and that compliance would mean further harmful loadshedding. Eskom is asking people to



choose between their and their families' health and keeping the lights on. This is unacceptable!

Our legal submission relies on external health-based modelling and evidence, as well as government's own reports on health impacts and costs of air pollution in industrial areas like the Highveld, where the majority of Eskom stations are based.

We demand the following in our submission:

- There are cleaner energy options and various sulphur dioxide emission reduction strategies available to Eskom, and Eskom should use them.
- The magnitude of the health impacts of non-compliance and the associated costs necessitate compliance with the standards by Eskom.
- Eskom must urgently redress its poor track record of compliance (even with its existing weak licence standards which are weaker than in most other countries).
- Between April 2021 and March 2022 Eskom exceeded its licence limits 2 309 times. By the requirements set under SA's air quality laws, Eskom should not even have licence to operate, let alone be granted lenience for compliance with standards. These poorly operating power stations should be scheduled for decommissioning.
- The law is clear on what is required, and there is no limited flexibility available to the minister on decisions that can be made in regard to these appeals.

The Forum was also tasked with conducting an extensive consultative process with key interested and affected parties to assess and present all significant relevant research and analysis in a public forum in February for review and interrogation, and to report to the minister on the outcome.

The Forum is expected to submit a comprehensive report to the minister on the outcome of the consultative process in July 2023. 🙏



# Warwick Zero Waste Project kicks off year three



by Asiphile Khanyile

**I**t was January – yes, one of the hottest months we have in Southern Africa – and we were gearing into the swing of the New Year and off the holiday season. While getting into work mode, I realised that January was also International Zero Waste month and hence it is only fair that I share what was happening in Durban, South Africa. The Warwick Zero Waste (WZW) Project, as a partnership between groundWork, Urban Futures Centre from the Durban University of Technology and Asiye eTafuleni, held its Strategic Planning Workshops on 24 and 25 January 2023, at the 1860 Heritage Centre, and these are some of the key plans that came out from the workshops.

- 1) The scale up and handover of the organic waste diversion pilot with our partners, namely eThekweni Municipality's Durban Botanic Gardens (Parks), Business Support Unit and Durban University of Technology – Horticulture Department. Whilst on organic waste, we will be working with the street food cooks from the Early Morning Market for a bokashi pilot to research alternative waste disposal methods.
- 2) Waste pickers are fundamental in our zero-waste journey. Thus, the WZW Project, in partnership with the South African Waste





Pickers Association (SAWPA), will have both local (KwaZulu-Natal) and national (across province) exchanges for waste pickers in/ around Durban to raise awareness about the importance of separation at source, waste, climate, organising and extended producer responsibility. In addition to this, WZW Project will support the ongoing South African Waste Pickers National Registration System for Durban. Furthermore, we will support the revival from the Palmer Street Recycling Facility and Manor House Pilot. The Manor House Pilot is in Glenwood, and it aims to demonstrate how the Manor House complex residents and waste pickers can work together in order to ensure that separation at source of recyclable waste materials is safer and easier. The anticipated outcome for the pilot is for replication in other complexes as well. Finally, waste pickers will be part of the ongoing work of the Africa Zero Waste Hub with themes such as integration at local municipalities and increasingly taking part in the social forum's activities planned in the year.

3) In order to boost mobilising and networking for informal workers, we will have joint workshops at which informal traders, street traders and waste pickers gather in one space to discuss, collaborate and organise themselves, especially on the issues that they commonly face on the ground and most importantly to build awareness on climate, waste and zero waste.

4) We have planned to do research on polystyrene and street cooks, as well as on behaviour change. Moreover, we will again integrate the creative component to tell the stories of waste pickers and street traders through theatre pieces. Other means to disseminate information will be the ongoing publications, documentaries, newsletters and website. Finally, we will work with the zero waste champions to build awareness on waste and climate change in the Markets.



**WZW Project team during the Strategic Planning Workshops. Credit: WZW Project**



Well, to save the best for last, some of the project team members, one informal trader and a waste picker have been invited to travel to Accra, Ghana, for the UMI Life Cycle Zero Waste Gathering from 18 to 26 February 2023. Here we will get to meet and connect with our fellow UMI Fund organisers as well as partners to share our forever interesting zero waste journeys. For now I will say, “Let us get to work!” 🌀

# Waste pickers challenge Pmb mayor for their livelihoods



by Musa Chamane

More than 1 000 jobs lost as waste pickers are evicted from dumpsite

**D**rugs, alcohol, guns and lawlessness have become the order of the day at the Pietermaritzburg dumpsite. The place has changed. The waste pickers' committee has had meetings with city officials and they agreed that the landfill has to be closed for couple of months so that those who are using the landfill for criminal activities and not for recycling will leave.

On the morning of 24 August 2022, waste pickers, who are scraping a living at the Pietermaritzburg landfill, watched a movie-like scene. More than 10 private security guards and police cars stormed the site and a helicopter was hovering above the frightened, confused waste pickers, including the so-called "illegitimate" waste pickers who have recently settled at the landfill. The helicopter was there to make sure no one escaped the landfill, where pickers salvage different kinds of waste materials and sell them to make ends meet. Waste pickers have been recycling at the current site for more than 30 years now.

When the police raid came, it was believed by the waste picker committee that the raid had all good intentions. When the waste pickers asked the municipality officials, they were told that they should forget about going back to the landfill and no alternative was provided.

Waste pickers operating at the Pietermaritzburg landfill site and who were evicted decided to protest on Thursday 1 December 2022. Their protest action was directed at the municipality, including the mayor.

Pietermaritzburg, which is run by the uMsunduzi Local Municipality, has in the past won awards for being the cleanest town in KwaZulu-Natal. The city has had its fair share of administrative challenges, including a constantly burning landfill site, which led to litigation by the South African Human Rights Commission. The litigation sought to address issues around the poor management of the site that resulted

in fires that produce toxic smoke, impacting the health of nearby residents. It also addressed contraventions of the licence conditions, which resulted in a number of waste pickers losing their lives and some being critically injured due to poor operations at the site.

The council had previously been advised by the likes of groundWork and the district municipality, as well as waste pickers themselves, about the need for access control at the site. The access control and operations had to be agreed with waste pickers. Due to the failure to take this advice, criminals and drug dealers flocked onto the site and illegal shacks were erected around the landfill. This resulted in a number of deadly challenges. In the last five years more than six people have died due to poor operations at the site. People have been run over by trucks and violent crimes have become the order of the day.

groundWork used to have meetings at the landfill with waste pickers and municipality officials but it became more and more dangerous as gangs and criminals took over the site. The number of waste pickers continued to swell and waste pickers who'd worked there for years started competing for the materials due to an overpopulated and unmanaged landfill. Besides the problem of overcrowding, criminals are now known to use the landfill as a hiding place because it is neglected and has become a place of lawlessness.

Enforcement officers cannot locate the criminals because they are mostly in balaclavas and waste pickers don't know each other. Women are more vulnerable to abuse since they don't see the faces of the men and their real identity remains a mystery. Some have attempted to rape women in the bushes on the outskirts of the landfill. Some people have been killed but the real culprits cannot really be identified.

At the national level, the Waste Act 2008 and the Waste Picker Integration guidelines have been passed,





but municipalities at the local level are undoing these policies. Correcting the incidents at the landfill is what is needed. The way the council is doing things leaves much to be desired. The recycling data that is sent to environmental affairs will show that only a small amount is being recycled subsequent to the eviction of the real waste pickers from the landfill.

Grassroots and civil society organisations are often ignored when they forward warnings of what is happening. The influx of the bad people even corrupted some municipal officials to be involved in illegal activities. Waste pickers are still looking forward to the reopening of the landfill.

It is time for the municipality to go back and start the negotiations with waste pickers so that they can reach a win-win decision. The municipality complains that it is under pressure from the high court case, as well as from local communities, and this closing of the landfill is part of their efforts to make sure that the landfill is run professionally. However, the eviction of the unemployed hundreds, who are mostly women, will deepen poverty as their livelihoods are taken away. ☀



*Pietermaritzburg waste pickers protesting outside the Pietermaritzburg city hall.  
Credit: Lunga Bhengu*



# Who is Yegeshni Moodley?



**Y**egeshni Moodley joins groundWork as the Senior Manager for the Climate and Energy Justice Campaign. She will be directly involved in the work on energy, food and water sovereignty, as well as the climate action groupings groundWork relates to. In addition, she will give direction to the campaigner involved in oil and gas resistance, helping to mobilise and educate communities. Policy action also forms part of her

portfolio, by representing community concerns in high-level policy and regulatory debates through constructive inputs, participation and broadening the policy-making agenda.

Coming from a non-activist background, Yegeshni has several years of prior experience in air quality management planning and impact assessments. She worked on the development of the priority area air quality management plans for two areas – Highveld and Waterberg-Bojanala – as well as contributing as an intern to the National Framework for Air Quality Management Planning in South Africa. She has worked across South Africa, and dipped her feet into the climate change agenda and greenhouse gas emission inventories, including the emission inventory and reduction strategy for the South African transport sector. More recently, she has been part of several impact assessments for the oil and gas industry, which gives her unique insights and information to pivot groundWork’s actions in this rapidly expanding sector.

Her academic background includes a Master of Science in Environmental Sciences, specifically focused on air quality management in South Africa. 🌍

“Joining the groundWork team comes at a time when I am looking for a deeper sense of purpose and I find the work fulfilling, both personally and professionally. Reaching out to communities to debunk the technology myths and technicalities they are facing, sharing knowledge and building a democratic and just future together are ideologies I can be passionate about.”



# Who is Siya Sithole?



**S**iyabonga Sithole joined the groundWork family in November 2022. He joined the finance team to fulfil the duties of an accountant. He is passionate about analysing and working with figures. He is sensitive to vulnerable people. Joining the groundWork team is in line with his passion for assisting civil society and contributing towards the realisation of justice for vulnerable communities.

He holds a Bachelor of Accounting Science, obtained from the University of South Africa (UNISA). Prior to joining groundWork, he worked for various successful organisations in the field of auditing, accounting and finance. His last position was as an accountant for the Africa Aid Trust.

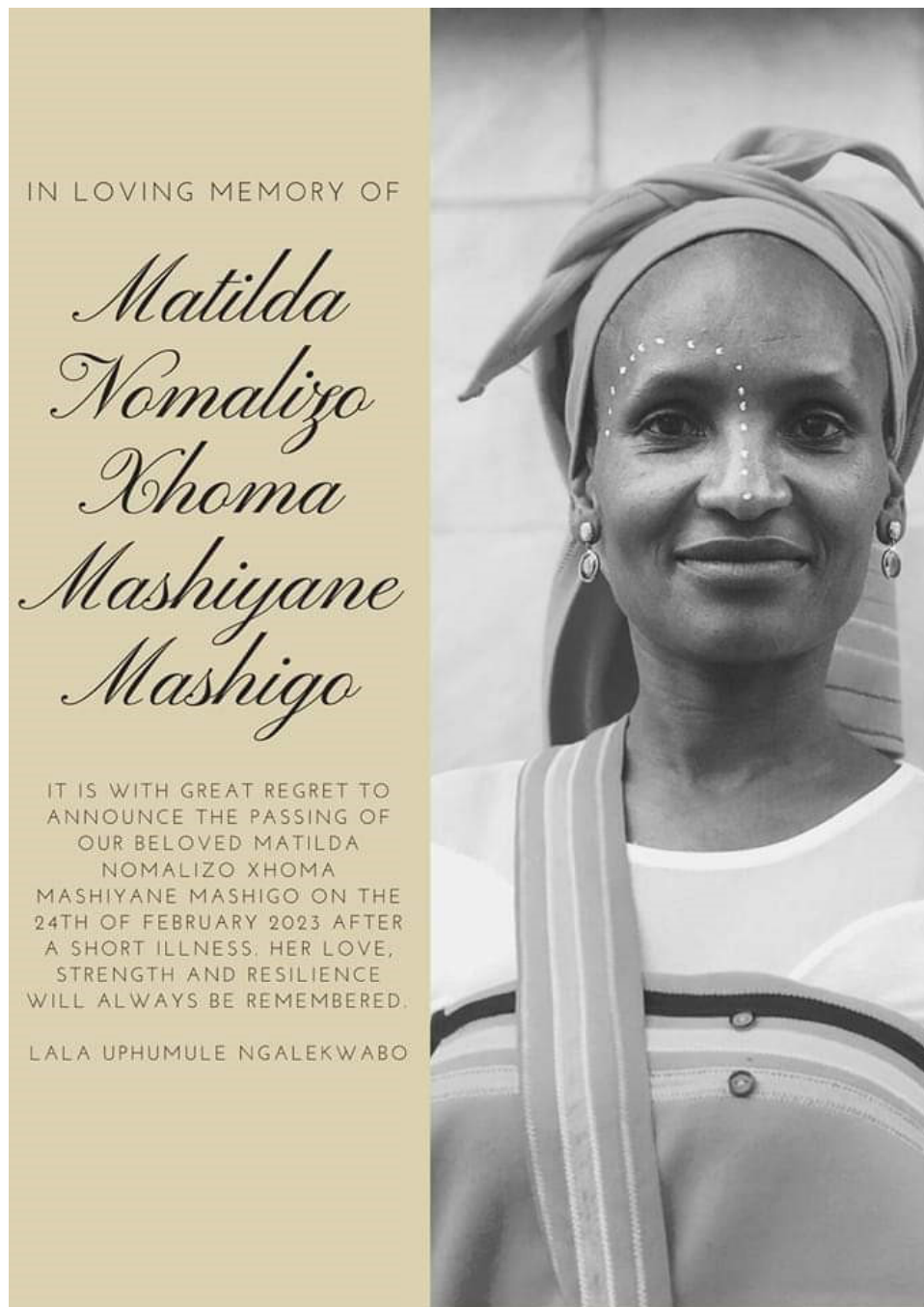
Siya feels that the redistribution of decision-making power back to vulnerable communities is true environmental justice. He acknowledges that groundWork has a great opportunity to elevate the voices of impacted communities and use the power of resistance to push back against any injustices. He is excited to work with a team that will hold public representatives accountable to the communities who suffer from environmental injustices.

Siya is a jazz cat who enjoys music and uses music to connect with his core and as a form of meditation. He has been fortunate to finish a few marathons, including the Comrades Marathon. As part of his goals, he hopes to one day cross the finish line at IronManSA and count it as one of his major achievements.

He is looking forward to supporting and assisting communities through his work at groundWork so that they can access their most basic needs: clean water, food, pure air and safe housing. He is excited about the journey ahead and is excited to learn and grow within the environmental justice space.



# In memory of Noma Xhoma



**N**omalizo Xhoma joined ELA in 2009 as an activist from a community based organisation in Alexander township in Joburg. She was drawn in to conduct popular education on climate change in preparation for UNFCCC CoP 11 held in Durban 2011.

She was then recruited to work for ELA full time. She worked in all Earthlife Africa campaigns – access to electricity, where she was part of the

group that conducted audits in their households as a way of advocating for an increase of Free Basic Electricity. She worked in the Eastern Cape on the nuclear campaign and facilitated the Women Energy and Climate Change Forum.

Noma was a ball of energy and this was evident in all the activities she was invoked in.

We will miss her sharp voice and energy!







# Gas push spells disaster for the poor



by Yegeshni Moodley

**S**outhern Africa is under attack from oil and gas majors, seeking to pursue the extractionist agenda and further deepen the energy poverty that grips the African continent. South Africa is viewed as the gateway and approved gas developments locally pave the way for large-scale expansion regionally.

groundWork is responding to new applications and appeals for authorisations for gas exploration and production at an unprecedented pace. We are working with communities in KwaZulu-Natal, Mpumalanga, Free State, and Gauteng to share knowledge on the impacts of these developments and help communities organise resistance to defend our environmental, social and economic rights and challenge for environmental justice.

In January, a request for leave to appeal the decision for the Eskom 3000MW gas-fired power station in Richard's Bay was denied by the regional court. groundWork, together with our partners Centre for Environmental Rights (CER) and Earthlife Africa, will now have to petition the Supreme Court for leave to appeal.

The appeal focuses on the judge's finding regarding a flawed public participation process and the limited scope of the climate change impact assessment. Despite the significant concerns, no leave was granted and therefore groundWork and partners have been compelled to appeal to the higher court. Karpowership continues their unrelenting drive to enter South African waters by appealing the minister's decision to reject the environmental authorisation request. The proposed development has been dogged by allegations of vested government interests, flawed studies, and subjugation of appointed consultants. Economic feasibility of the floating powerships on lease to the South African government, with a purported now R218 billion price tag, have come under public scrutiny time and again. groundWork is monitoring the appeal process,

together with our partners, to determine the next steps in fighting the gas powership paradigm.

**Richard's Bay is attracting the wrong kind of attention as the Phakwe Gas to Power 2000MW plant authorisation was also appealed by groundWork and SDCEA collectively.**

Some excerpts from the Phakwe appeal papers include:

- On climate change:
  - Intentionally excludes 36.7% of plant emissions in significance assessment
  - Underestimates the global warming potential of methane
  - Underestimates severe weather risks related to climate change impacts
  - Does not consider the combined impacts of the wastewater thermal plume and climate change impacts on local fishing communities
- The need and desirability for a large-scale gas-fired power plant was not demonstrated successfully
- No alternatives were considered
- **Cumulative impacts are not assessed in the climate change, biodiversity and air quality assessments**
- On biodiversity:
  - Seasonality of flora and fauna were not assessed, with a single-season survey
  - Impacts on aquatic fauna were not assessed
- On air quality:
  - Large gaps in monitoring data underestimate current impacts
  - Chemical transformations leading to increased PM<sub>2.5</sub> were not assessed
  - Mitigation measures are inadequate





Fundamentally, gas as a source of large-scale electricity provision is beset by the double woes of cost and availability. Local gas infrastructure is restricted and regional gas fields have not proved reliable. Add ballooning prices following the Russian invasion of Ukraine and you get a picture of rising and volatile electricity pricing. In the face of the current proposed rate hike of 18.65%, a scenario with highly fluctuating gas prices is disastrous. According to the Meridian Economics and CSIR *A Vital Economy* study, when compared to rapid advances in solar, wind and storage technologies, large-scale gas is expected to become obsolete by the mid-2030s.

Renewable energy is the sea-change our country needs to step away from a fossil fuel legacy and embrace cleaner power – that can be democratic and people-centred, and not centralised and exclusive



*A solar-powered household in an informal settlement.*  
Credit: mrnovel

as fossil fuel energy developments are – for our communities. Decisive action from our government now can herald a move that will define South Africa's energy, economic, social and environmental future. 🌞

*Activists protest in Sandton, Johannesburg against the push for dirty gas as an alternative source of energy.*  
Credit: groundWork





# Negotiations, world cup glory and industry agendas

by Merrisa Naidoo



*A reflection on the first intergovernmental negotiating committee (INC-1) to end plastic pollution*

**A**fter more than thirty hours of flying, and four connecting flights later, I was finally able to join more than 2 335 delegates and over 1 000 representatives from civil society, industry and IGOs at the first intergovernmental committee meeting (INC-1) for an internationally legally binding instrument on plastic pollution. This was convened by the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) in Punta del Este, Uruguay, from 28 November to 2 December 2022. The magnitude of participants clearly represented the world coming together to craft one of the most significant multilateral environmental agreements in history.

My purpose was clear: to support and strengthen the voices of our African membership in a way that was meaningful to their direct advocacy efforts within their respective countries and for the African continent as a whole. We did that within the first two days of the INC-1. Voices of members from Nigeria, Ghana, Tanzania, South Africa, Mauritius, Cameroon, Kenya, the Gambia and Tunisia came together in camaraderie

and good spirits, and motivated to ensure that their country delegates were well informed and equipped going into the first round of negotiations. Together, we very quickly became a formidable force to be reckoned with in developing key relationships with our fellow African country representatives and laying our demands on the table.

- 1) Raise the stakes on ambition
- 2) Produce a clear target for future negotiations
- 3) Reserve the right to vote
- 4) Reduce plastic production and
- 5) Stay clear of industry agendas & false solutions.

It gave us great pride to see the African Group (AG) taking ownership of this process, especially since Africa continues to shoulder the burden of toxic and non-recyclable plastic waste exports despite not being net producers of the plastic crisis. Their interventions





were strong, reflective of all voices and developed with the realities of the region in mind.

Amidst the high-level interventions, world cup fever soon set in and what better way than sport to bring nations together and realise their patronage to the well-being of their people and countries. The global plastics treaty should therefore seek to pay heed to the interconnectedness of people within their natural environment and include the protection of livelihoods and communities vulnerable to the present environmental catastrophes. This is in line with the United Nations General Assembly declaration that everyone on the planet earth has a right to a healthy environment.

**Civil society, waste pickers, fenceline and frontline communities, indigenous and traditional communities, and women are to be at the centre of the negotiations. They should be at the table and not simply on the menu!**

Unfortunately, giving industries and top polluting companies – whose agendas prioritise profit over people – a seat at the table will prove to stifle the effectiveness of what the treaty can achieve.

In this regard, during the INC-1 it was rather concerning to learn of the pronounced presence of polluting industries. This was especially felt during the convening of a multi-stakeholder forum, which was a roundtable discussion organised a day before the

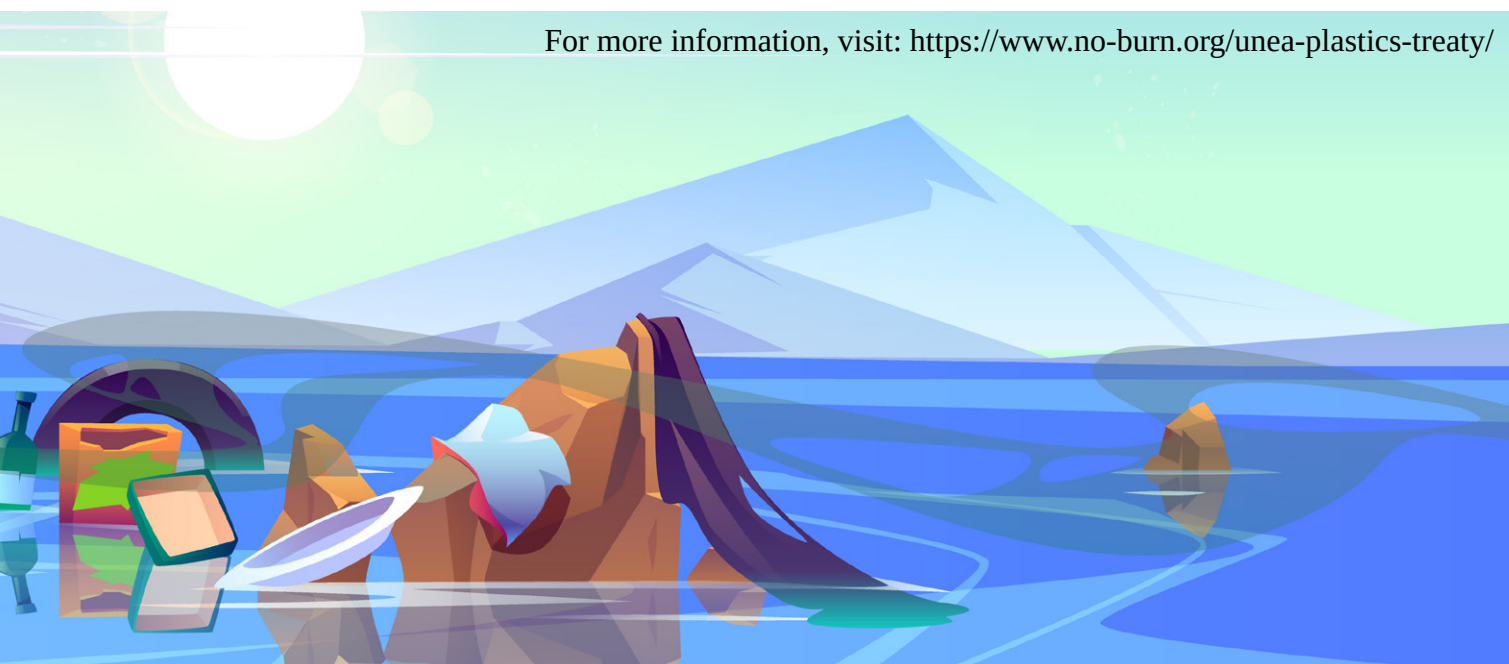
start of the negotiations to deliver a report to the INC. Despite the fact that it is not included in the mandate to develop the treaty, the entire set-up appeared to be industry-driven and an effort to divert and prevent the voices of civil society and rights holders from direct and more meaningful forms of participation in the treaty development process.

As we move ahead and prepare for INC-2 in May 2023, our efforts need not be undermined by industry greenwashing and tactics based on false solutions and voluntary commitments. As the GAIA/BFFP Africa team, we will continue to support and uphold the tireless efforts of our members to ensure their voices reach their country's focal points in a just and equitable way that is meaningful and works towards the development of a strong treaty.

To kick-start this, be sure to look out for the INC-1 member pack and the newly formed Africa Plastics Working Group in 2023, which will aim to create a platform that brings together GAIA and BFFP Africa members with an interest in various aspects of the plastics crisis to 1) Share their experiences & work within their respective countries; 2) Build capacity on plastic policy and legislation on the continent; 3) Strategise on positions and work geared towards the plastics treaty with a regional perspective; 4) Collaborate on joint projects and campaigns of interest; and 5) Forster support for one another.

Let's End the Age of Plastics! 🌍

For more information, visit: <https://www.no-burn.org/unea-plastics-treaty/>





# Backline of war

by greenfly



**I**t's a victory parade of sorts on the backline of Bad Vlad's war. Some 500 coal trucks lined up along the N2, onto the John Ross Highway into Richards Bay and into the port to the coal terminal. Russia invaded Ukraine on 24 February last year and the price of coal almost doubled overnight.

The coal miners brayed in triumph, "Europe has capitulated to the coal imperative. There, you see, you can't live without it. Renewable energy has failed." Europe's imports from South Africa rose by six times but still amounted to only 14 million tonnes (Mt). India and Pakistan import three times as much. The coal miners posted record profits, but lamented that they didn't get what they should have got. On the frontline of the war for the coal line to Richards Bay, the bandits are taking it away, the coal trains are coming off the rails, the locomotives are stalled as manufacturer China Rail won't return the Gupta kickbacks, and Transnet's profits fall while its debts rise as it follows Eskom down the slides. Only 50 Mt was exported in 2022, down from 76 Mt in 2017.

So it's a double victory parade for the coal truckers. Freight shifts from rail to road, the bosses drive the drivers to make more trips, the roads crumble, the debris of crashed trucks litters the way, and grief hangs in the air. In September, a coal truck sped down the wrong side of the road and wiped out a van, killing 13 kids and their driver. On the frontline of Russia's war on Ukraine, the dead number in the tens of thousands.

In Richards Bay and Durban, the South African navy hosted the Russian and Chinese navies for a 'joint maritime exercise' from 17 to 27 February. They were at sea together to celebrate the anniversary of the invasion. This in no way compromises South Africa's neutral stance on the war, said foreign minister Naledi Pandor. It's just natural for friends to play war games together. We do it all the time. With the US, with the UK, with France. Not so much non-aligned as in bed with everyone.

But not yet, it seems, with Ukraine. After all, that's not a country, says Vlad the Bad. Just a mistake. Never mind that its borders were 'assured' by Russia, the US and the UK, in exchange for giving up the nuclear

weapons it inherited from the Soviet Union in a treaty signed at Budapest in 1994.

Following the invasion last year, Ma'am Pandor called on Russia to withdraw and to respect Ukraine's territorial integrity. Vlad was not pleased. Cyril the Decisive rebuked her because, apparently, this contradicted South Africa's preference for peaceful solutions. Three days later, on 27 February, Tandi Modise, Minister of Defence, got the tone right when she celebrated with Russia's ambassador on the day Russia struts its weapons through Red Square.

So now, after meeting Sergey Lavrov, Moscow's morose master of the unbelievable, Ma'am Pandor said she did not repeat that call because she didn't want to look stupid. One year on, lots of things have happened, she said. Like a "massive transfer of arms" to Ukraine. Which is obviously contrary to the cause of peace.

The aggressor always wants peace, said Clausewitz, the philosopher of war, some 200 years ago. That's because he wants to march in unopposed with martial music and flags flying to the cheers of the liberated populace. Peace loving Vlad perhaps thought it'd all be over in three days in time for the Red Square celebrations. Peace loving Cyril perhaps thought. Ma'am Pandor perhaps felt foolish.

The Naval exercise ended on 27 February. The tanks will rumble in Red Square. Off South Africa's east coast, Russia's newest frigate, the Admiral Gorshkov let loose its newest, flashiest, unstoppably fast and nuclear capable missile. They are not saying if it carried nuclear weapons into port at Richards Bay and Durban. Would they have told the South Africans if it had? Would Ma'am Pandor have felt too foolish to ask?

South Africa is there to benchmark the SA Navy's capabilities against best practice mass slaughter. It managed to muster a survey ship to go along with the Russians and Chinese. But perhaps it should not feel too down at heel. Half the Russian kit sent to Ukraine doesn't work because things got bartered away under the counter or over the boardroom table. Benchmark that. 🌀





# Sasol AGM protest: confronting the giant polluter

by Tsepang Molefe



**O**n Friday 2 December, Sasol Limited hosted its 43<sup>rd</sup> Annual General Meeting (AGM) of shareholders. Frontline communities, activist shareholders and civil society groups confronted Sasol on a number of issues, including Sasol's ongoing non-compliance with pollution laws.

At the company's headquarters in Sandton, inside the AGM venue shareholder activists posed gruelling questions to the extent that Sasol chair Sipho Nkosi had to postpone lunch twice in order to address and respond to these questions. The gripe from shareholders activists mainly centred around the company's climate change targets and the lack of clarity on its mitigation and emissions reduction plans; Sasol's air and water pollution; pending criminal charges against Sasol; Sasol's continued push for fossil gas; and Sasol's involvement in securing gas from Mozambique.

There was more action and heat (in every sense of the word) outside as protesting activists, community members and civil society organisations defied the oppressive sun and took it to the streets. One could not help but observe the social class contrast as protesters momentarily brought traffic to a standstill in posh Sandton and on what is said to be the richest square mile in Africa. Capitalism versus ordinary communities.

Both actions were a collaboration of efforts from the Vaal Environmental Justice Alliance (VEJA), the Centre for Environmental Rights (CER), Earthlife Africa, Just Share, groundWork, Greenpeace Africa, Justica Ambiental (JA!), 350Africa.org and the South Durban Community Environmental Alliance (SDCEA).

Outside Sasol's skyscraper building security personnel stood behind a barricade set up to keep the protesters at bay. Representatives from the different environmental justice organisations and affected community members took turns to address the Sasol executives, accusing the energy and chemicals company of failing to address issues around harmful impacts affecting communities in the areas where they operate. The protesters handed a memorandum of demands to Sasol executives. The demands, speeches, slogans and songs directly confronted Sasol's toxic activities, including the prospecting for gas in South Africa and Mozambique, clarity on their plans around GHG emission reduction, environmental compliance and taking into consideration the health and wellbeing of people, and failing to stop violating a basic human right to breathe clean air.

The right air that is safe to breathe was the challenge just six months before when, in June 2022, an awful smell took over the air in Johannesburg. At first there was some confusion about the source and identity of the smell, but further investigations revealed that the smell was actually toxic hydrogen sulphide emanating from nearby Sasol operations. Sasol's Secunda operation is said to be the single largest source of GHG in the world. In South Africa it is the second biggest GHG emitter, second only to Eskom's combined emissions. The company is now pushing for gas, another fossil fuel, punting it as a solution and a gateway to decarbonisation. It is like Bush bombing Iraq in the name of peace. ☀







Activists from Gauteng, Mpumalanga, and KwaZulu-Natal protesting outside Sasol head office in Sandton, Johannesburg.  
Credit: groundWork









# Contested Transition: the latest groundWork Report

**W**ith the world at 1.2 degrees hotter than the pre-industrial average, the climate impacts are escalating ahead of schedule. The intensity of the heatwaves, floods and droughts in the last two years are forcing scientists to recalibrate their models as the real world data flies off the charts of their projections. The real world casualties escalate too, as extreme bad weather is accompanied by bad politics and criminal deceit.

The groundWork Report 2022 follows the 2019 and 2020 reports in its focus on the just (or unjust) transition. Since 2019, the debate has moved fast with the appointment of the Presidential Climate Commission in December 2020 and the announcement of the Just Energy Transition Partnership between South Africa and the Northern powers at the Glasgow climate negotiations in November 2021. It is also impelled by the ongoing collapse of Eskom and the uneven decline of the minerals energy complex centred on coal, as well as the shutdown of major crude oil refineries.

Corporate South Africa looks for a just transition to bail it out of dirty, dead end businesses and fix capital in bright new 'green' megaprojects, but without disturbing the underlying logic of the system. Against that, communities want to see a just transition for all, one that upends unequal relations of power to transform the lives of ordinary people and make for a society founded on justice. This is the political fight for the future – indeed, for any future. 🌞

## Contested Transition

State and Capital against Community



### Contested Transition

The groundWork Report 2022

