



# GROUNDWORK

## Human Rights Defenders



Calling for the protection of human  
rights defenders and whistleblowers

## IN THIS ISSUE:

- |    |  |    |                                    |
|----|--|----|------------------------------------|
| 3  | From the Smoke Stack                               | 17 | ACN fights gas extraction in Ghana |
| 5  | #Defend our defenders                              | 18 | Meet the new staff                 |
| 7  | Suffocating under fossil fuels                     | 20 | Amandla Abantu, eMalahleni         |
| 8  | Our burning planet – toxic shock                   | 21 | The horse has bolted               |
| 12 | UMI Zero Waste                                     | 23 | GAIA Africa Regional Meeting       |
| 14 | Fate of Thor ex-workers awaits<br>Cabinet decision | 24 | PetroCoP28                         |
| 16 | ACN takes fossil fuels on in East Africa           | 26 | EJ School Graduation               |
|    |  | 28 | End Childhood Lead Poisoning!      |



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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*

### groundWork's STAFF ARE:

*Director: Bobby Peek \* Operations Director: Avena Jacklin \* Logistics and Administration Manager: Bathoko Sibisi \* Office Administration Assitant: Mfano Mbatha \* Campaign Strategy Coordinator: Rico Euripidou \* Waste Campaign Manager: Musa Chamane \* Just Transition and Coal Campaign Manager: Michelle Cruywagen \* Coal Campaigner - KwaZulu Natal: Robby Mokgalaka \* Coal Campaigner – Mpumalanga: Thomas Mnguni \* Coal Campaign Administrator: Nqobile Ranela \* Senior Climate and Energy Justice Campaign Manager: Yegeshni Moodley \* Energy Democracy Campaigner: Siphesihle Mvundla \* Head of Communications: Dorothy Brislin \* Media and Communications Campaign Manager: Tsepang Molefe \* Researcher: David Hallows \* Environmental Health Campaign Manager: Mafoko Phomane \* Health Care Without Harm - Africa Regional Coordinator: Azeeza Rangunwala \* Bookkeeper: Gill Waterworth \* Africa Coal Network Coordinator: Marina Agortimevor \* Assistant Coordinator for Africa Coal Network: Ciza Mukabaha \* Africa Coal Network Administrator: Nontobeko Makhaye \* Friends of the Earth Africa Regional Facilitator: Nerisha Baldevu \* GAIA Africa Coordinator: Niven Reddy \* GAIA Communications Coordinator: Carissa Marncce \* GAIA/BFFP Africa Plastics Campaigner: Merrisa Naidoo \* GAIA Africa Operations Manager: Neebha Budhoo \* UMI Waste Project Campaigner: Asiphile Khanyile \* Environmental Justice Education Campaigner: Tsholofelo Sepotokele \* Environmental Justice Education Coordinator: Jeanne Prinsloo \* groundWork Research Associate: Victor Munnik \* Executive Assistant to Director: Joan Cameron \* groundWork Accountant: Siyabonga Sithole \**

*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.*

### AFFILIATIONS:

*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*

### HOW TO CONTACT US:

8 Gough Road  
Pietermaritzburg  
P O Box 2375, Pietermaritzburg,  
3200  
Tel: 033-342-5662  
Fax: 033-342-5665



e-mail: [avena@groundWork.org.za](mailto:avena@groundWork.org.za)  
Web: [www.groundWork.org.za](http://www.groundWork.org.za)



**groundWork**

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Cover artwork: Sindiso Nyoni



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# From the Smoke Stack

by groundWork director, Bobby Peek



## Dear Friends

As I sit down to write this, the year is coming to an end. A year that was full of everything. After the oppressive summer heat of the last few days, we have a small gap of coolness today, and indeed we cannot wait for that gap of coolness in work as we work towards our summer break.

groundWork spent this year on consolidation and growth. As there are more demands on us, we need more people committed to environmental justice to work with the groundWork team. We're excited to welcome Nontobeko Makhaye (Nonto), a local from Pietermaritzburg, and Ciza Mukabaha, who is also resident in Pietermaritzburg but hails from the DRC. They both join the Africa Coal Network. Dorothy Brislin, who hails from various cities and places including Maputo, Mozambique, joined groundWork as our Senior Communications Campaigner. A few more new faces will join us in 2024, but that is for then.

As always, Minister Gwede Mantashe just will not have a more thoughtful response to the energy challenges he chooses not to resolve. As with the coal industry, he has not mustered the courage to make a decisive shift to an energy system that is for the people rather than corporates. One could say that the apartheid government checkmated him. Got him to believe in coal and fossil fuels. It is always good to blame apartheid. But what is more alarming is how he is seeking to silence his critics – as the apartheid regime tried to do – by saying “foreign-funded NGOs are being used to weaponise environmental preservation to block development in developing nations”.

Minister Mantashe, extracting oil, gas and coal is not development; it is an extractive economy for the elite. Do not blame NGOs for your failure to deliver. As Professor Kidd says: “NGOs are intended by our environmental law to be involved in these processes

and to step in if the law is not being followed. The real obstacle is that the DMRE is not complying with the law, and Mantashe knows this full well.”

But Minister Mantashe is emboldened by a global political system that sings from the same hymn sheet of global security. Government has proposed the “General Intelligence Laws Amendment Bill”, which threatens the functioning of civil society organisations. This in response to South Africa being grey listed by the Financial Action Task Force.

Cold comfort are the words of the Minister in the Presidency responsible for the State Security Agency, Khumbudzo Ntshavheni, who has indicated that “only those posing a threat to *national security interests*” will be under scrutiny. Minister Mantashe thinks we are all a threat to national security interests no doubt. Under these conditions a just transition has no hope in hell – in the sweltering heat of climate change. And workers and communities will be told what is happening rather than being allowed to shape their future. If we challenged Minister Mantashe, the outcome would be a situation like in Vietnam where friends are imprisoned because they are climate activists.

In 2018 I visited Hendrina, a small town in the coal belt of South Africa, which hosts the Hendrina coal-fired power station, a crumbling 50-year-old system. Here I spoke to workers who were sitting under the trees, as they were on “short time” because units were being repaired or had been put in “cold storage”.

We alerted the President in December 2018, that the “transition from coal is already happening in a variety of unplanned ways that is resulting in workers and community people being betrayed and robbed of an equitable and just future”. I remember speaking with workers and asking them to reach out to our president to let him know what they want in a post coal scenario. I am not sure if they ever did this.



Fast forward to 2023. Eskom went big on its Komati closure and decommissioning. When presented with Eskom's plan for Komati's just transition in 2022, the community response was rightfully negative, stating that the "big bosses and capitalists have already made decisions". This was not consultation. For more on this, please read *Contested Transition*, the 2023 groundWork Report.

This year, the Presidential Climate Commission focused on understanding the Eskom decommissioning of Komati and concluded that the "engagements around the decommissioning process at Komati fell short of the inclusive and participatory engagements required to embody procedural justice" and that "community members and workers affected by the Komati transition want a say in their future and to be integral to the decision-making process". Furthermore, the Commission states that "an inter-governmental and multi-stakeholder approach is required to design and oversee effective transitional projects". Important conclusions considering groundWork's research and engagement with government and the Presidency, and our continuous attempts to reach out to Eskom as they were putting together their Komati plan, all of which were rebuffed.

The Global Energy Monitor has warned in recent research that "nearly half a million workers (414 200) operate mines that may reach their end of operation before 2035, affecting on average 100 workers per day", and by 2050 nearly 1 million coal mine jobs (990 200) will no longer exist at operating mines given the coal industry's foreseeable closures, potentially laying off over one-third (37%) of the existing workforce – even without climate pledges or policies to phase out coal. Closure is coming and South Africa is vulnerable.

In this crisis, we need to be careful that mining companies do not rewrite what is legally required. They have made super profits from people's lives and the environment and they cannot now take their social labour plans and rehabilitation funds – which they are angling for – and rewrite them as just transition support. The plans and the funds are legal requirements. They need to ensure that in addition there are just transition funds placed in areas where community people became dependent on mines and were affected by them.

I cannot sign off the year without reflecting on the big push on green hydrogen. I have penned some thoughts about this in this newsletter. But on a related note we need to speak about transition minerals and here Amani Abou-Zeid, Commissioner for Energy and Infrastructure at the African Union Commission, surprised me when, on the sidelines of the International Vienna Energy and Climate Forum, he indicated that, "the world is failing to pay sufficient attention to the energy-intensive practice of mineral extraction, which takes place under questionable human rights and working conditions in many low- and middle-income countries" and questioned where the green part in this is. Good to see some hard, true words from African representatives in global spaces.

Finally, the year ends with the violence of war. Something we do not pay enough attention to. The ongoing violence against Palestine was responded to in just as violent a manner on 7 October by Hamas. And then by Israel. The rest is history, and I am not going to dwell on or analyse this. It is too painful and personal.

I want to reflect on an article – *The Palestine Double Standard* – penned by Hala Alyan in *The New York Times* (25 October 2023) that concluded with: "But in the end, I am undone not by silence or erasure but by empathy. By the simple naming of my people. By increasing recognition that liberation is linked. By spaces of Palestinian-Jewish solidarity. By what has become controversial: the simple speaking aloud of Palestinian suffering."

I spent two weeks in the US in November and often felt I had to be careful about speaking about Palestinian suffering. I spent time with friends, Jewish and Palestinian, and we shed tears of pain. For me, solidarity between the people of the region, the strengthened agency of progressive Jews globally to challenge Zionism and the Israeli State, and urgent demilitarisation is the only way we will get peace and coexistence.

On this sad note, I say farewell to 2023, and I hope we all have the strength in the period of our summer holiday to continue to push for peace and justice in Palestine. 🌞





# #Defend our defenders

by Robby Mokgalaka and Michelle Cruywagen

**I**n October 2023, more than 1 500 people from different provinces gathered in Pretoria at the SAPS head office to hand over a memorandum to President Cyril Ramaphosa, the Minister of Police and the Minister of Justice about the killings and intimidation of human rights defenders. The affected communities demanded that the government develop legislation that recognises and protects human rights defenders. It demanded that the government develop a campaign to discourage the intimidation and killing of the human rights defenders, and to urgently arrest the killers.

The gathering took place on Africa Human Rights Day, 21 October. This coincided with the commemoration of the assassination of Mam Fikile Ntshangase, who was gunned down in her own home in October 2020, in front of her 11-year-old nephew.

According to the Global Witness's 2022 report, 177 human rights defenders were murdered for bravely defending human rights.

Human rights defenders in South Africa are facing increased levels of intimidation, which leads to killings. It must be noted that human rights defenders play a significant role as they risk their lives to defend the rights of vulnerable groups in our society. They are helping the government to fulfil its constitutional obligation to protect the rights of its own citizens.

The increasing scourge of intimidation and assassination is in violation of our constitutional right to freedom of expression, and to defend the rights of affected communities. The situation in communities remains dangerous and threatening, as the killers are not arrested. Many human rights defenders are living in fear, and some are in hiding, fearing for their lives. Unfortunately, the current legal system does not seem to understand the seriousness of the situation as the police sometimes refuse to allow people to open criminal charges when they have been threatened.

In November 2022, the Human Rights Council in the United Nations conducted a review on the current South African human rights situation through its Universal Periodic Review (UPR). Different

UN member states made recommendations that South Africa should develop model laws to protect human rights defenders. South Africa, in a gesture of respecting the articles contained in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR), and also as a former founding member of the Human rights Council in 2006, adopted the recommendations in March 2023. Its acceptance of the recommendations also demonstrated respect for the provisions of the Africa's Charter on Human Rights and People's Rights, and the Bill of Rights in our Constitution.

The gathering was an initiative to assist the government to implement the adopted recommendations passed by the member States at the UN.

Unfortunately, the president and the Ministry of Justice did not honour our invitation to come and receive the memorandum at the gathering. Either they refuse to acknowledge the urgency of the situation or just don't take these life-threatening circumstances that vulnerable communities experience seriously. Only the Ministry of Police came to receive the memorandum, which we appreciated; but next time we expect the Minister of Police, the President and the Minister of Justice to come and make a public address that condemns the killings.

We recognise that this campaign is a long journey, and that it may take years to see its fruition, and so we plan to make this gathering an annual event to remind the government of its commitment on the human rights defenders' crisis.

We plan to visit the national parliament to afford the affected communities an opportunity to share their frustrations with the law makers. We also plan to formally participate in the UN's UPR midterm review process done on South Africa, which is aimed at monitoring the implementation of the recommendations.

We wait with patience for a response to the Memorandum. At the time of writing, four weeks after, government has failed to respond. 🙄





# Suffocating under fossil fuels

by Mafoko Phomane and Azeeza Rangunwala



## Guidance Climate Health Impacts for SA Health Professionals

**T**he continued extraction and use of fossil fuels, including coal, oil and gas, must stop. Communities around the world and here at home already face the devastating impacts of a changing climate. South Africa is a significant contributor to global heating from its high consumption of fossil fuels, and we are extremely vulnerable to adverse climate-health impacts due to already existing high levels of ill-health, malnutrition, water scarcity, and deep-rooted inequality and poverty.

The health sector itself is responsible for roughly 5% of global greenhouse gas emissions. As trusted leaders, healthcare professionals play a critical role in all our lives and need to understand that their actions could have significant climate and health benefits. To this end, groundWork, in partnership with Health Care Without Harm, felt it important to develop “*A Guidance document on Climate Change & Health Impacts for Health Professionals in South Africa*”.

The guidance document provides valuable information on the background of the climate crisis and its impacts on human health, and makes suggestions for mitigation and adaptation as collective action that needs to confront the climate crisis to protect human health and the environment. As mentioned in the guidance document, the health sector’s climate action rests on a three-pronged approach: Mitigation, Resilience and Leadership. The latter is increasingly important for health professionals in South Africa.

Clean air, a stable climate, safe water, sanitation and hygiene, safe use of chemicals, good agricultural practices, healthy cities, biodiversity and universal access to good health services are all prerequisites for good health. The Environmental Health Campaign works to connect health workers with communities

affected by environmental injustices on the ground. Communities yearn for health professionals to provide evidence that demonstrates the connections between pollution and its health impacts.

To be in solidarity with communities, to speak with authority and to act at local and national levels, health professionals themselves need to understand the various ways in which climate change impacts health. They need to participate in mitigating the health sector’s contribution to climate change, which in turn affects their patients. More importantly, they must have purpose-driven health delivery plans that capacitate healthcare workers to care for patients with the numerous ill-health effects of climate change and offer care in emergency situations that arise from extreme weather events.

This guidance document comes at an opportune time; for the first time, at CoP28 there will be a dedicated Health Day on the 3<sup>rd</sup> of December, a health ministerial meeting, and a Health Programme. The importance of health in the climate space cannot be emphasised enough and the health community hopes that health messaging, and the centring of health can span other themes and considerations at CoP28 in Dubai this year.

Key priorities are adaptation for the health sector, which includes access to adaptation finance and integrating health meaningfully into climate policies. It is important to protect and promote health during a climate crisis, as expanding health inequality and displacement is already affecting too many. It also affects the most vulnerable communities disproportionately. But this will all be in vain if the CoP once again fails to deliver on urgent and needed shifting away from the fossil fuel economy. 🌍



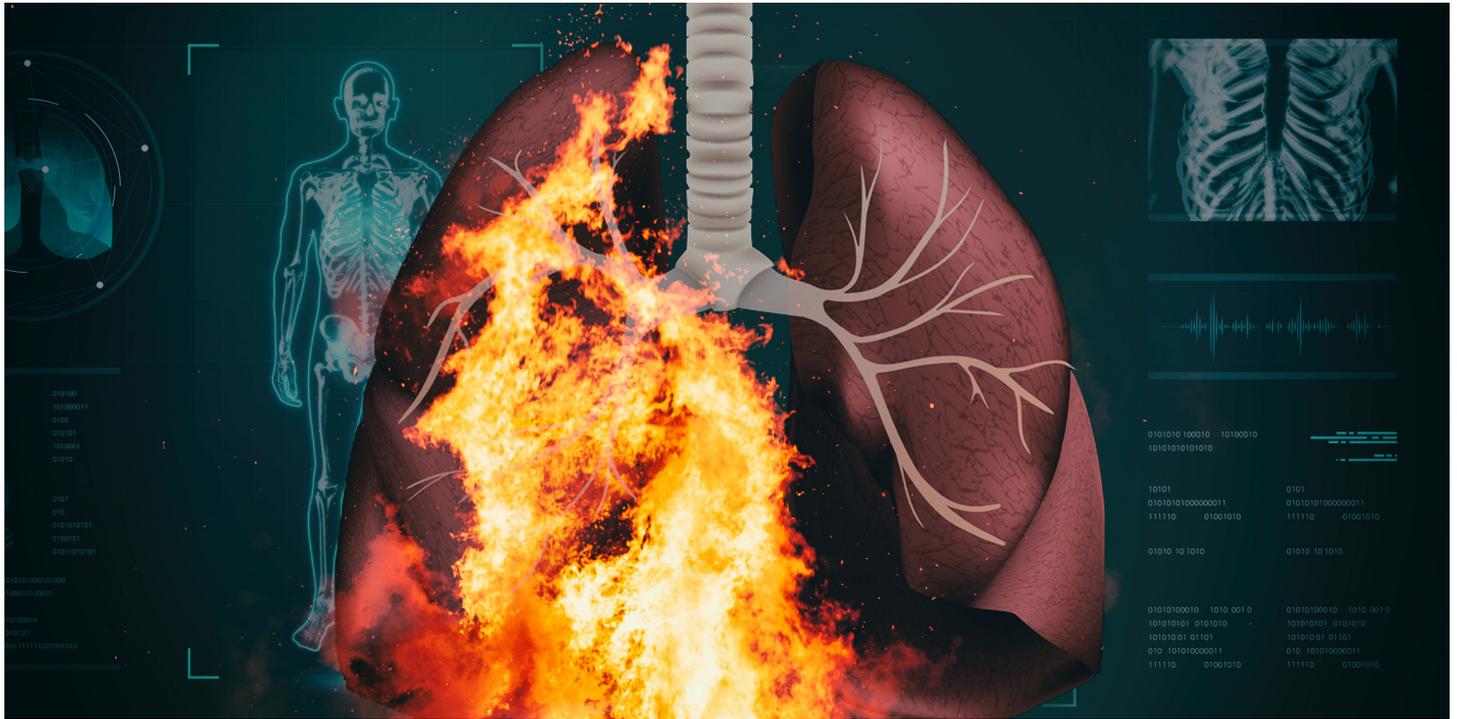


# Our burning planet – toxic shock



by Tony Carnie

UPL chemical inferno “more than doubles” risk for heart disease and lung cancer in parts of Durban



*A new health study in the aftermath of the UPL Cornubia chemical fire has flagged increased heart and lung disease risks for exposed communities closest to the old chemical warehouse. Credit: Leila Dougan*

**T**housands of people living in the immediate vicinity of the former UPL chemicals warehouse in Durban face twice to three times higher risks of developing heart and lung diseases (including lung cancer) after breathing in a cocktail of poisonous chemical fumes during the July riots more than two years ago.

This is just one of the alarming conclusions of a human health risk assessment that has come to light recently after the warehouse was set alight on 12 July 2021, and then burned or smouldered for at least nine days before it was finally extinguished.

The study – conducted by toxicology and epidemiology experts at the Witwatersrand and North West universities and the Durban-based Apex Environmental Occupational Health Consultancy – also recommends that the Mumbai-based UPL agrochemicals giant should commission a series of

comprehensive human sampling checks and long-term health studies.

The new health surveillance scheme – including biological samples, urine and other pesticide-marker tests – should investigate whether the worst-exposed communities face a range of other potential health risks ranging from respiratory and skin problems to heart, kidney, liver or eye damage.

The authors acknowledge that their study was weakened by the lack of comprehensive air sampling in the immediate aftermath of the July riots, but they have nevertheless red-flagged a number of residential areas in the immediate vicinity of the gutted Cornubia warehouse. These include several “fence-line” residents of the Prestondale/Woodlands/Izinga area of Umhlanga and the informal settlement of Blackburn village.

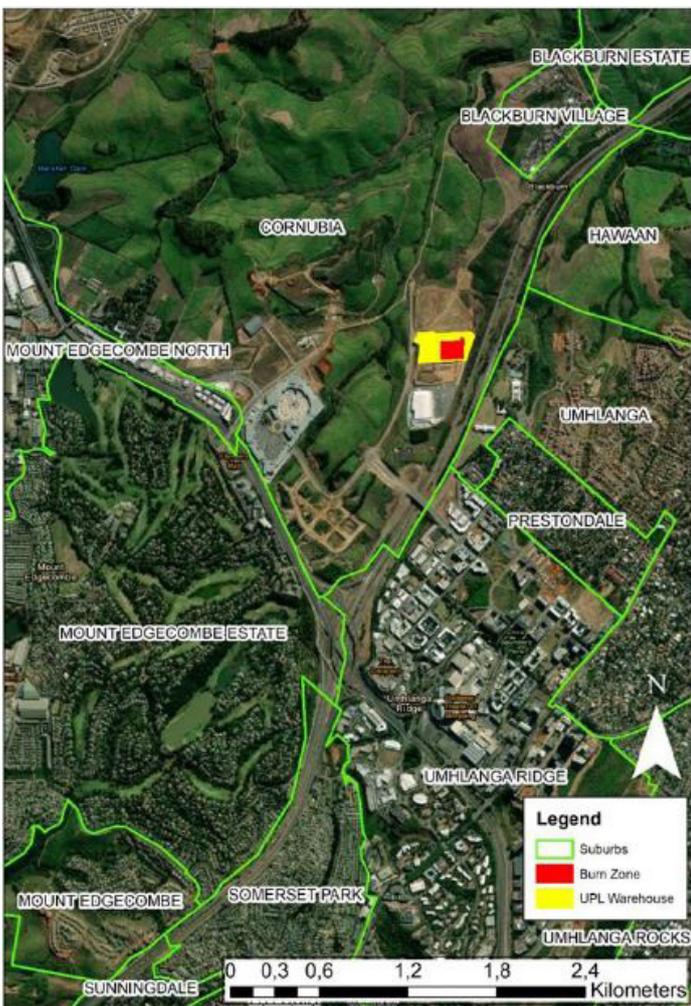




Homes and schools in the Prestondale/Izinga area clustered around the old UPL facility. Credit: Steve McCurrach, *The Bateleurs Flying for the Environment*

The exact number of residents living in these areas is not stated in the study, but Blackburn village alone has more than 3 500 residents, while the 2011 population census estimated that there are more than 24 000 people in the greater Umhlanga area.

The study also notes that toxic fumes from the fire and smouldering phase may have affected a much larger area of the city – possibly beyond a 10-kilometre radius of the warehouse – and that this could have



caused or aggravated respiratory problems and other acute health impacts.

In some cases, the calculated hazard quotients suggest potential (but much lower) risks for other forms of non-cancer health impact stretching as far as Verulam, La Lucia, Umdloti and Mt Edgecombe.

An exacerbating feature was the fact that many residents were confined to their homes during the July riots or were out patrolling smoke-polluted residential streets as part of neighbourhood watch schemes.

“This led to many people of both sexes, young and old, being exposed to the emissions from the fire.”

Remarkably, the latest health risk study was completed eight months ago, but only published on July 12 on an electronic platform seldom accessed by ordinary members of the public.

It was produced by UPL consultants Apex Environmental, based on specialist advice from North West University toxicologist Prof Mary Gulumian, Wits University epidemiologist Prof Gill Nelson and inputs from a number of air quality consultancy groups.

The report suggests that the “relative risks for cardio-pulmonary and lung cancer mortality were increased by a factor of two to three” for residents in the immediate vicinity of Reddam House private school in Umhlanga and in Blackburn village.

Relative risks are defined as the ratio of probability of adverse health events in an exposed group compared to a group not exposed to high air pollution levels.

Any relative risk exceeding 1 is considered as an increased risk factor, yet the calculated risks are close to 2 in the vicinity of Blackburn and Reddam for cardiopulmonary death, and between 2.4 and 3 for lung cancer mortality.

From the assessments and monitoring undertaken by the various specialists, short-term acute exposure to atmospheric emissions from the UPL Cornubia warehouse fire, through inhalation, could have been experienced by individuals in communities located within a 10 km radius of the warehouse, and possibly beyond. Based on the predicted concentrations presented in the Airshed PP AI report, and the calculations of the internal dose of deposited fractions of PM<sub>2.5</sub>, it is likely that residents within the Prestondale suburb and immediate surrounds (e.g. Reddam House School, Gateway Montessori and Learning Centre, and Akeso Umhlanga Psychiatric Hospital), and the Blackburn community, which includes ML Sultan Blackburn Primary School, experienced moderate to severe acute exposure.

While PM concentrations measured months after the fire do not appear to pose any risk for non-cancer adverse health effects, relative risks for cardio-pulmonary and lung cancer mortality were increased by a factor of two to three. In addition, particle-bound elements showed substantial risks for non-cancer adverse health effects. The elements of concern are aluminium, calcium, manganese and phosphorus.

*Extract from Apex report conclusions*



Notably, these calculations are based on estimated levels of tiny specks of particulate matter (PM<sub>2.5</sub>) in the air following the fire – not on a more comprehensive assessment of the toxic properties of a much wider variety of nearly 5 000 tonnes of pesticides, herbicides and other agrochemical products stored at UPL.

Gulumian and Apex state that, due to the widespread civil unrest at the time – and official ignorance about the exact nature of the chemicals stored at UPL until many days afterwards – it had not been possible to measure the exact levels of individual toxic substances or cocktails thereof.

Therefore, based on the limited data available, the study focused mainly on predicted levels of PM<sub>2.5</sub> as a metric. “This is not to say that all components of PM<sub>2.5</sub> have the same toxicity, but rather that there is not, at present, evidence to quantify the effects of different components separately.”

Gulumian states that a hazard quotient (HQ) below 1 indicates that no adverse health effects were expected as a result of exposure – whereas more than half of the 101 locations included in the study had hazard quotients exceeding 1 (indicating that adverse health effects in people in these locations could be expected as a result of exposure – although this did not necessarily mean that adverse effects would definitely occur).

The areas flagged with the highest hazard quotients include Blackburn Estate (HQ of over 300), Reddam (HQ of 117), the Gateway Montessori and Learning Centre, ML Sultan Blackburn Primary School, Akeso Umhlanga Hospital, Woodlands and Prestondale.

Durban-based epidemiology expert Prof Rajen Naidoo – who was not involved in the study – said he was pleased with the “high level of scientific input” in the report. However, he has expressed concern around some of the methodologies used to predict health risks and has called for independent peer review of the report.

Naidoo, who heads the Occupational and Environmental Health discipline at the University of KwaZulu-Natal and also conducted studies on health risks to Durban residents living next to the old Engen and Sapref petroleum refineries, said he was “uncomfortable” that the UPL health risks study focused on particulate matter, whereas health risks

varied significantly, depending on the toxicity of individual pesticides and mixtures thereof.

“PM<sub>2.5</sub> is important as a carrier of pollutants, but the effects are going to be very different (if the study had been able to quantify UPL specific chemical pollution levels).”

He also noted that new and complex chemical mixtures would have been generated during the UPL inferno – although the relative risks predicted in the Apex/Gulumian studies were nevertheless “extremely high”.

Gulumian states in her report that the hazard quotients for more than half of the more than 100 residential sites in the study had indicated “high to exceptionally high risk” for developing non-cancer adverse health effects.

“Exposure to atmospheric emissions generated from the UPL fire is considered to have been episodic and acute. The significance of the acute exposure would have been greater in some areas than others and, therefore, the likelihood of long-term health effects occurring within the communities of concern is considered possible.”

As a result, the authors have recommended a series of new steps to monitor and investigate the possible long-term health effects for communities based on different ages and sexes, genetic predispositions or pre-existing health conditions.

Further investigations and monitoring were needed to ascertain the likelihood of “internal exposure” of individuals. This would include lung function tests, eye and skin examinations.

In the immediate vicinity of Blackburn and Reddam, there should be biological monitoring tests to study liver and kidney function based on possible exposure to toxic pesticides, metals and organophosphates and urine tests to determine exposure to polycyclic aromatic hydrocarbons (PAHs).

Additionally, the following actions are recommended:

- \* Establish a comprehensive medical surveillance programme (including biological monitoring) in consultation with the relevant authorities and



specialists (toxicologists, epidemiologists, and medical professionals).

- \*. Review the biological monitoring results to determine whether a sentinel surveillance programme is required for long-term tracking and monitoring of exposed residents.
- \* Develop an effective risk communication plan that includes all interested and affected parties.

“The potential for long-term health effects associated with exposure to atmospheric emissions cannot be ruled out. It is recommended that a retrospective cohort study be conducted to assess the prevalence of long-term health effects, to include:

1. All individuals living in the exposed communities at the time of the fire, including children and the elderly
2. The fire fighters and others involved in extinguishing the fire.”

It says that a retrospective cohort study includes two groups (one exposed and one not exposed), whose health status is then compared to identify risk factors for “cardiopulmonary disease, lung cancer, asthma, chronic obstructive airways disease, etc.”

Prof Naidoo, who is also part the Cornubia Fire Multi Stakeholder Forum appointed by government to represent interested and affected communities, has suggested that the new studies should be completely independent of UPL. He noted that an initial health surveillance project established by UPL was not set up in consultation with the community.

Considering the potential for long-term health damage, the government and UPL should also consider establishing a special trust fund, as there were currently no legal mechanisms to compel companies to deal with the long-term aftermath of major pollution events.

“How are we going to respond to a problem that may occur several years from now? Who will take responsibility? What is the point of these studies unless the polluter provides resources to look after people’s health over the long-term? If someone were to develop throat cancer, for example, can you establish that it was a result of exposure two years ago? These are just some of the challenges and more philosophical questions regarding where we go from here.”

Naidoo was also critical about UPL’s failure to properly inform the public.

“We completely missed the boat two years ago. There has been almost zero effective communication from the very outset.”

According to UPL consultants, the company’s official health reporting scheme has recorded just 160 formal public complaints across the city as of January 2022.

Last week, Daily Maverick contacted UPL, inviting the company to respond to the conclusions of the study and to provide details of any action plans and future communication protocols.

In response, UPL said: “In the two years since the arson attack on the Cornubia warehouse during the riots of July 2021, UPL has consistently provided regular reports and information to the authorities, which they then publish on their website.

“The HHRA Inhalation Risk to Atmospheric Emissions Report was commissioned by UPL and, upon finalisation was submitted to the authorities in November 2022. The authorities responded to and accepted the report on 31 March 2023. A subsequent report outlining an action plan is currently under peer-review and will be finalised in due course.”



*The explosion and smoke shortly after the warehouse was set on fire on July 12, 2021 – Images: Apex report*





# UMI Zero Waste

by Tamlynn Fleetwood

**W**orking with, and understanding, social and political processes linked to waste streams in the city is fundamental if we are to restructure integrated waste management in ways that are socially and environmentally just. This year was the third year of our Warwick Zero Waste Project (WZW) project, run in partnership with the Urban Futures Centre at the Durban University of Technology and Asiye eTafuleni.

The project worked with informal workers – waste pickers and street traders – to support their livelihoods and generate new, innovative, sustainable and inclusive zero-waste practices. Rather than only looking for high tech and capital-intensive solutions to climate change, we believe that, by working with informal workers, we can provide responsive, sustainable, low cost and environmentally sound structures and processes that support and include the majority of workers in our city.

Working with informal workers towards just zero-waste systems offers a triple-win of creating jobs, reducing greenhouse gas emissions (GHG) and impacting positively on city budgets. The Warwick Zero Waste team has demonstrated just how powerful working at a local city scale can be. Over the last three years, the WZW team has used participatory action research to inform several pilots that demonstrate viable models to reduce waste going to landfill.

One of the greatest successes of the project has been the implementation and incremental scale-up of our organic waste to compost pilot. Organic waste in landfills is a major contributor to methane gas emissions. While there are various ways in which we can divert organic waste from landfills, composting offers important economic (jobs and capacity building) and environmental (nutrient rich soil and local farming) co-benefits. Composting also presents one of the most feasible low-cost, low-tech options for diverting organic waste. This is particularly viable for resource-constrained municipalities.

View videos about our pilot project on composting fruit and veg waste from the Early Morning Market in Warwick at the Botanical Gardens at this link: [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JK080Td\\_GYc](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JK080Td_GYc).

The WZW team has also done a full cost benefit analysis which shows how small, closed loop organic waste-to-compost models generate a municipal savings model for the city. In addition, the WZW team has worked closely with SAWPA (the South African Waste Pickers Association) to register waste pickers in the city, and to push for waste picker integration.

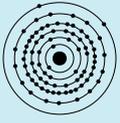
The project has seen much success in grounding waste picker integration in a local neighbourhood. Residents in the suburb of Glenwood have been stepping up to work with waste pickers from Mayville to ensure that waste picker livelihoods are supported,

rather than sending recyclables to landfill. Starting small and doing the slow careful work of bringing people together around environmental justice has turned out to be the start of something big for the city of Durban! 🌱

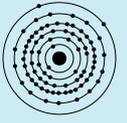
*Left and right: Zero waste in action.  
Credit: Lunga Bhengu*







# Fate of Thor ex-workers awaits Cabinet decision



by Musa Chamane

**F**or the more than 25 years since the plant was forced to shut down, following the mercury poisoning of the workers, 111 ex-workers from Thor Chemicals have been involved in a struggle for justice. Half of these ex-workers have already died mysteriously, and their families are convinced that their deaths are related to their poisoning by mercury at the Thor Chemicals plant in South Durban in the 90s.

Health assessments have been done for each ex-worker and many of them still test positive for mercury, even after so many years. The medical files of these workers, those who died and those who have survived,

along the way without any clear explanation to the ex-workers for their reasons.

The current committee decided to take the political route by liaising with the national Parliamentary Environmental Portfolio Committee, which led to a meeting with President Cyril Ramaphosa. After meeting the President, they met with the Minister of Forestry, Fisheries and the Environment and the Minister of Employment and Labour.

This is a new and different approach, not normally taken by civil society organisations and communities.

President Ramaphosa was informed in March 2023 about the plight of the Thor ex-workers and he



*President Cyril Ramaphosa – Minister Barbara Creecy – Minister Thulas Nxesi*

are not accessible. A committee elected by the ex-workers agreed that they should move up the ladder and address government with the aim of securing just compensation for the mercury poisonings. The plant had been authorised by the South African government to operate in South Africa. Our legislation was very weak in the 1970s, when the plant started operations in South Africa.

The committee has done exceptionally well in strategising how to go about resolving the issue of the poisoned workers and their families. After two successful legal actions in the UK by Leigh Day, various legal firms tried to assist, but they stopped

promised to work on the issue. Minister Creecy raised some money, after pressure for Thor Chemicals in the UK to commit money for the clean up at Thor. This funding, however, did not involve compensation of the ex-workers, but was mainly for the removal of mercury in the Cato Ridge area.

After pressure on her department, when ex-workers threatened to stop the Cato Ridge site clean up of mercury, the Minister of Employment and Labour then met, on 31 August, with the representatives of the ex-workers, together with groundWork, and he committed to take the matter to Cabinet for a political solution to be approved.





*Rogers Khanyile, Vincent Mkhize and Enoch Nkosi, representatives of Thor former workers, with Musa Chamane from groundWork, standing outside Thor Chemicals. Credit: groundWork*

The ex-workers are holding thumbs that the political solution that they have proposed will be accepted by the Cabinet. They demand that all ex-workers and their families – more than 60 workers have died over the years – are compensated from the Department of Employment and Labour. Due to the long passage of time and the inability to access individual medical records, they propose that the Minister and the Cabinet should grant them compensation that is equally divided among all the affected individuals and their families.

They argue that, instead of government spending millions on medical assessments, they should consider taking the money provided for redress and distribute it according to the number of affected workers, providing a flat rate for each individual ex-worker. This will save a lot of bureaucracy, time and legal procedure in a situation where the government has a weak case because it failed to monitor and regulate the operations at Thor Chemicals back in the 70s.

While this is happening, the mercury stockpile is being cleared and shipped to Switzerland. This after

many years of work by groundWork connecting with the Department.

Shipping it back to Europe has not been an easy decision because service providers such as A Thermal in Johannesburg wanted to profit from the process of treating it locally, with contested technologies and failed systems in the past that resulted in Thor waste going up in flames.

Civil society organisations, including groundWork, are opposed to the incineration of toxic waste. Thus, the process of sending it back to Europe – the global North, from where the waste came and by which the process of toxic export to the global South was facilitated – is a monumental environmental justice achievement for South Africa. We have managed to mop up the largest toxic mercury deposit in the world.

But there can never be an environmental justice victory without a worker justice victory. One without the other is meaningless.

A luta continua. 🌀





# ACN takes fossil fuels on in East Africa



by Michelle Cruywagen

**T**he Foundation for Environmental Management and Campaign Against Poverty (FEMAPO) hosted a country meeting in Dar es Salaam from 17-18 August, supported by the African Coal Network. Participants from the southern, south-eastern and central regions of Tanzania participated in the inaugural country meeting. The meeting sought to identify communities requiring support and explore the possibility of collaboration and solidarity in organising towards enabling a Just Transition in Tanzania.

It provided a platform for Tanzanian CSOs to discuss a Just Transition Agenda. It emerged that CSO's were not fully aware of the climate impacts of fossil fuels. Participant meeting opportunities were identified to adopt renewable energy and align policies and facilitate community engagement and advocacy towards a regenerative economy.

The meeting highlighted the fact that Tanzanian CSOs are ready to engage in the fight against fossil

fuels, including gas, oil and coal. Rukwa, Mbeya, and Ruvuma regions were identified as hot spots for coal mining. Communities in these regions suffer the impacts of coal mining and there is a need for campaigning and advocacy efforts in these areas to fight back expanding coal mining activity.

Lindi and Mtwara regions are recognised hot spots for gas mining and export. In these areas, communities are not aware of the impacts of gas and oil and the meeting showed the need to empower CSOs and communities in these regions to fight back.

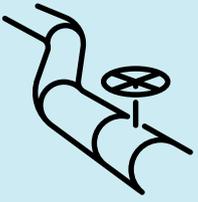
Furthermore, cement industries located in the Mtwara region use coal that is mined in Tanzania, from Liganga and Mchuchuma coal and iron ore mining in the Mbeya region.

The newly established Tanzania Just Transition Forum aims to reach out to CSOs and communities to create awareness on the impacts of fossil fuels, and advocate for renewable energy. ☀️

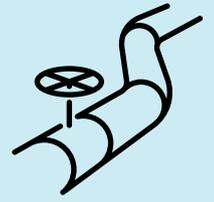


Participants at the Africa Coal Network country meeting in Tanzania. Credit: groundWork





# ACN fights gas extraction in Ghana



by Marina Agortimevor

ACN takes up the struggle against loss of land and livelihoods to gas extraction in Ghana



ACN Ghana Chapter members with the chief and elders of Noalekyi community in Atuabo, Ghana. Credit: ACN Ghana

**T**he **Atuabo Gas processing plant**, located in the coastal community of Anokyi in the Ellembelle district of western Ghana, is the recipient of gas from the offshore fields of Jubilee and TEN. The gas project has made Anokyi's traditional farming and fishing-based livelihoods more vulnerable, leading to higher rates of poverty in the area.

On 12 and 14 October 2023, the Africa Coal Network (ACN) Ghana Chapter travelled to Anokyi and Noalekyi, two Atuabo Gas Communities, with the goal of organising affected community members and grassroots organisations to stand up for their land rights and oppose the expansion of the Atuabo Gas Processing Plant.

Ten members of the ACN Ghana Chapter, including the Strategic Youth Network for Development (SYND), ACEES, The STEMInist Foundation Ghana, AERC and 350 Ghana Reducing our Carbon embarked

on this journey. To learn more about the impacts of the gas plants and raise community awareness, they distributed questionnaires to residents. The concerns and demands of community members were recorded through a series of interviews and focus groups.

The interviews revealed that farmlands had been destroyed and there are no more fish; this has resulted in increased migration due to unemployment and a lack of job opportunities. People also lost their lands in the process of the plant development. Community residents close to the sea now experience extreme heat, to the point that people leave the comfort of their homes and sleep by the sea at night. This exposes them to sicknesses like malaria, and it places girls and women at risk of gender-based violence.

The Ghana Chapter of ACN is preparing a report on the visit and plans to help these communities by educating and supporting them to demand their rights and fight against the injustice they experience. ☀️





# Meet the new staff



**Ciza Mukabaha**  
*Africa Coal Network Assistant Coordinator*



**C**iza Mukabaha joined the groundWork team as the Assistant Coordinator for the Africa Coal Network (ACN). His role is to work closely with and assist the ACN Coordinator, particularly for francophone members in the region. Ciza is fluent in English, French and Swahili. His role involves coordination, support and linking of the different struggles around coal and other fossil fuel resistance (including gas) on the continent. The aim is to build cohesion between different regional campaigns, seeking to halt coal and other dirty energy projects or their expansion, and securing justice for impacted communities and workers.

KwaZulu-Natal. “Before joining groundWork, my work involved Research and Development, and Education for several organisations including the South African Medical Research Council (SAMRC), the Human Sciences Research Council (HSRC) and the Department of Education.

“I am very pleased to join groundwork as an organisation that supports the most oppressed communities and contributes to fighting injustice in all forms – climate, energy, food, air, water and so on,” he said.

**Nontobeko Makhaye**  
*Africa Coal Network Administrator*



**N**ontobeko Makhaye joined groundWork as the Africa Coal Network (ACN) Administrator and will work directly with the ACN team to organise and schedule meetings, events and help with finances. Nontobeko has worked across South Africa for local and international organisations, focusing on environmental education and entrepreneurship, natural resources management and rehabilitation, event coordination, monitoring and evaluation and community engagement. Nontobeko has over eight years of experience as an administrator in the field. She is an expert at managing office operations, maintaining records and organising events for programme participants and delegates. She is a team player and has excellent communication skills, with a proven track record of managing projects and delivering results on time.

“I thank groundWork for this opportunity to serve the community directly and indirectly. I will apply myself to coordinate and support community activists and their organisations that pledge support to the just transition and the fight against coal expansion within southern Africa, sub-Saharan Africa and the whole continent. The well-being of people has always been among my main concerns; social justice, human rights and environmental justice are no different. So, I am excited to join the groundWork team and the Africa Coal Network,” Ciza said.

Ciza’s qualifications include a bachelor’s degree, a postgraduate certificate in education and a master’s degree in population studies from the University of



Nontobeko holds an honours degree in Geography and Environmental Management from the University of KwaZulu-Natal and a Program Monitoring and Evaluation qualification from the University of Cape Town. She has previously worked with marginalised communities, youth and women in programmes that aim to bringing about a positive change in their lives and well-being. She has a great passion for environmental and gender justice and feels that joining groundWork aligns perfectly with her passion for serving vulnerable communities in struggle, to support their voices regarding access to clean air and water and renewable energy.

Nontobeko says, “I am so excited about joining groundWork and working with a great regional network to ensure Africa’s just energy transition. Being part of ACN is important as it enables me to engage with different people across the African continent and globally.”

**Dorothy Brislin**  
Senior  
Communications  
Campaign  
Manager



**D**orothy has served as a communications specialist for over 20 years, working in the human rights space to achieve environmental, economic and social justice. As a feminist activist, she is deeply committed to contributing to a just, liveable world for all, in which future generations can thrive.

Dorothy is thrilled to have joined the formidable team of campaigners at groundWork. She has led campaigns and supported social movements in struggles on natural resources, mining and extractives, food sovereignty, women’s rights, land, agriculture, built environment, migration, sexual and reproductive

health, education, arts, media, freedom of speech and the rights of LGBTIQ+ and indigenous peoples.

Her core aim is to support people from all walks of life to find the power and agency in their voices to tell their stories by whatever means is most compelling – and to ensure that they are heard. She works across a variety of media and platforms, including film, publications, events and exhibitions in digital, print and live formats. In her work, Dorothy champions the use of arts and creative expression for social change and serves on the boards of the Africa Institute for Arts, Culture and Heritage and Spaza Art Gallery.

She previously headed communications and campaigns for an international NPO, providing integrated strategic communications support and services to 17 programmes across 16 SADC member states working in three regional languages. She has worked with teams in various contexts internationally, regionally, nationally and at local or community level, applying a variety of participatory methodologies to produce content and material for campaigns, advocacy, education, organisations and movements.

Dorothy lived and worked in Mozambique from 2000 to 2006 as the Executive Producer of a regional environmental TV series entitled *Recursos e Vida* (Life and Resources), which was about how indigenous communities across the region use natural resources. She also led a national multi-media HIV and AIDS IEC campaign entitled *Tudo Pela Vida* (All for Life) for Graça Machel’s Foundation for Community Development (FDC) and piloted the regional Schools Arts Festival, *Podér na Voz* (Power in the Voice).

She has lived in Johannesburg, Maputo and Cape Town and looks forward to adding eThekweni as a home base in her journey with groundWork. She holds a BA Dramatic Arts, majoring in Film and Theories of Communication from Wits University and is currently completing an MA in Creative Writing, also at Wits. [dorothy@groundwork.org.za](mailto:dorothy@groundwork.org.za) X: @DorothyDJB 🌟





**T**he Urban Movement Incubator (UMI) Energy Democracy project, now in its second year, has made significant strides since our last check-in here. All three-community partners – Vukani Environmental Movement; South Durban Community Environmental Alliance as well as Abahlali Base-Mjondolo – have convened a series of engagement opportunities with their respective communities, the trade union movement and government. In these meetings, partners shared learnings on the Just (*Energy*) Transition, Climate Change and the endless possibilities that can arise from civil society-government collaborations on this project.

The Mpumalanga series engages voices from the communities of Vosman and Empumelelweni in Emalahleni; trade unions active in the local coal mining sector; and government – Emalahleni Local Municipality, Nkangala District Municipality and the Mpumalanga Provincial Government – to plan for socially owned and led renewable energy solutions. The activities undertaken also built on strategic relationships with individuals and institutions in the different tiers of government in the province.

The three-leg engagement process kicked off with a community workshop hosted at the VEM Resource Centre. The topics covered ranged from climate change and the just transition to the South African energy landscape. Previous activities and achievements of the project were showcased, drawing in community voices and experiences to shape the project going forward. VEM Coordinator Promise Mabilo and the Comrades at Vukani enthusiastically raised awareness on the energy democracy project, outlining learnings from the first year of the project cycle and its objectives. They emphasised the role of informed community voices in forging pathways for socially owned energy generation. The use of groundWork’s Open Agenda and Environmental Justice Education material on the topic brought the concept of the just transition to life for participants.

The community workshop was followed by an engagement with trade unions and other progressive formations, including the National Union of Mine-

workers and the Young Communist League amongst others with a footprint in the region at the NUMSA offices in eMalahleni. At this gathering, the project team was buttressed by insights brought by staff from the Centre for Sustainable Transitions from the University of Stellenbosch. Views from the floor emphasised the need for the just transition in South Africa to protect the rights of workers and their well-being. Participants also raised concerns about how “unjust” the transition was turning out to be. Examples cited included the Just Transition Investment Plan, which was presented on the eve of CoP26 without any consultation with formations in the country and the abrupt closure of Komati with no proof of a plan in place, which in turn has come to haunt the process in the country.

Ultimately, participants were in accord that fighting over terms will not resolve the challenges faced by the “workers” (those who do not own the means of production). Moreover, there were strategies that were discussed for what ought to happen for a people’s just transition, including reskilling and upskilling workers in the coal mining sector, the creation of green jobs, and developing legislation to ensure a people-driven process of fair-change.

The series of engagements driven by VEM culminated in a round table with officials from the Mpumalanga Provincial Government, Nkangala District and the eMalahleni Local Municipality. The officials represented various strategic departments relevant to the Energy Democracy Project. Officials noted the exceptional work that groundWork and VEM had done in the area, and, following an update on where the project is, asked how a service level agreement between the parties had not yet been formulated given the energy context in the country. A robust discussion flowed towards the formation of a ten-person working group that will sit on 24 November to ensure that the collaboration between the parties thrives. The working group will ensure progress towards the goals agreed upon in the meeting.

That said and done, ‘*sekusele Kancane ngampela*’ in Energy Democracy is nigh in the Highveld. ☀



# The horse has bolted

by Bobby Peek



*Bobby Peek to the PCC on Green Hydrogen*

**T**he mainlining of green hydrogen into South African veins today reminds me of a T-shirt I saw, worn by an African: “Get on board the Trump Train or get run over”. Today, I feel like this about green hydrogen.

THE HORSE HAS BOLTED! Civil society’s voice is nowhere. It’s a case of where the PCC and government is, versus where we as the people are. The just transition framework did not endorse this. Has the PCC heard from the public? Who are the public in their eyes and in the eyes of government?

I have had to think carefully about how I respond to this issue from the recent past – as recent as this week – and from the distant past, as far back as 20 years ago.

In a presentation to the Institute for the Advancement of Journalism in 2008, South Africa’s oldest and most trusted communications and journalism non-profit training institute, I engaged with them on people’s rights:

- Participation: access to decision making.
- Transparency and access to information
- Access to Justice – redress.

So little has changed. These are the demands that we still make and hope for. I want to revisit the debate of the past 20 years and speak about three issues.

- Are the PCC just transition principles met by the present roll-out of green hydrogen for extraction?
- What is the impact on society through the analysis of what groundWork calls the three Es – Externalisation, Enclosure and Exclusion?
- What must an Industrial Strategy for South Africa deliver? We presented an analysis of this to the Presidency in 2003 in a report called *Forging the Future: Industrial Strategy and the making of environmental justice in South Africa and the recent Just Transition Open Agenda*.

The PCC has developed a set of clear principles for the just transition, and I believe that the push for hydrogen in South Africa does not meet these principles, which are:

- Distributive justice: An equitable distribution of risks and responsibilities that addresses the direct impacts resulting from the transition. As noted above, a successful transition necessitates an **all-of-society approach**, so this distribution must cover all levels of government, corporates and citizens.
- Restorative justice: The redress of historical damages against individuals, communities and the environment, with the goal of rectifying or ameliorating the situations of harmed or disenfranchised communities.
- Procedural justice: Empowering (not only supporting) workers, communities and small businesses, with *them* defining their own development and livelihoods in the transition – and incorporating *their* definitions in the ways government, corporates and citizens respond.

Cabinet approved the Green Hydrogen Commercialisation Strategy (GHCS) for implementation, with the goal of positioning South Africa as a major producer and exporter of green hydrogen. This is a process that stands in contradiction with the Just Transition principles.

It is interesting how the Business Day editorial on 20 October reflects on this: “The self-congratulatory atmosphere at the African Energy Week in Cape Town was stifling. But, given that delegates were there to explain why Africa must and shall exploit its yet untapped fossil fuel reserves, climate change be damned, one must assume some suffocation by propaganda was right on theme. Nary a speaker could resist the temptation to remind the audience of eager investors that all of this is really for the poor...” It feels as if this could be an editorial about green hydrogen.

On the second issue of impact on society, it is our experience from a brutal past of the mineral and energy complex that delivered:



- **Externalisation:** Where people are polluted, their environments are degraded and labour is coerced to work for less than it costs to live. Corporations get a free ride by offloading costs onto communities, workers, the public purse and the environment.
- **Enclosure:** Where people are dispossessed and common or public goods are privatised. Capital eliminates or subordinates non-capitalist systems, so ensuring that all escape routes are closed and people cannot survive outside capitalism.
- **Exclusion:** Where people are excluded from the political and economic decisions that lead to their being polluted or dispossessed so they cannot dispute it.

This is what is happening on the **green hydrogen push**.

We must remember that power in the global economy is increasingly concentrated and, under neo-liberal orders since the 1980s, increasingly financialised, unequal and volatile.

Market concentration in South Africa is particularly marked within the dominant minerals-energy complex (MEC). Created by imperial capital in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, and combining state and private entities, it has shaped development for over a century. It requires cheap labour and land secured through dispossession and reproduced by authoritarian, patriarchal relations.

The “open democracy” agenda that was articulated through the anti-apartheid movement, but only partially realised in the Constitution of 1996, is what is urgently needed before a decision on green hydrogen is taken, which could lock us into imperial capital once again.

Green hydrogen is “market” driven (a fantasy market that does not yet exist), not society driven and so cannot work.

On the way forward, we need an industrialisation strategy that is for the local, for the province, for

the national and then, and only then, responds to the global. It works all together, but the object of delivery must be people and local first.

In 2004, groundWork, after dialogue with community people and workers, said an industrial strategy that was designed to shift the economy towards environmental justice would prioritise achieving a decent standard and quality of life for all. Some elements of this agenda are widely recognised as:

- People working for reasonable remuneration and, rather than dehumanising and exploitative work, labour in conditions that are safe, rewarding and secure.
- Communities having decent levels of affordable basic services and infrastructure to be enjoyed by all and not only those who can afford them.
- Individuals and families able to access at a minimum the basic goods of human life starting with nutrition and safe and comfortable accommodation.
- Clean and healthy environments – where people live and work – that is nurtured by the very way people in which people live.

Is green hydrogen going to deliver this or respond to the power of the global economy that is held by a few?

We must abandon the belief in, and subsidised support for, export-led economic growth in favour of servicing local basic needs as a basis of development.

In conclusion, there are many platforms and spaces where all of this is being questioned: Life After Coal, H2 Watch SA, Friends of the Earth International and many more. Those in power choose to listen elsewhere. ☀



# GAIA Africa Regional Meeting

by Niven Reddy

**T**he 2023 Africa regional meeting was the first in-person, Africa-wide gathering of GAIA and Break Free From Plastic members since the gathering in Cape Town in 2019. This time we hosted the meeting in sunny, humid Dar es Salaam with our member Nipe Fagio supporting the local organising around this.

The meeting was designed to be a space where we could consult and strategise for the next few years on existing and emerging priorities within the African region. We opted to shift the way we held these deep strategic sessions and moved away from the same old presentation and discussion format which, to be honest, never really succeeded in giving everyone a chance, especially in big groups. Instead, we went for a world cafe style approach, where session leads would pitch to the plenary for a grounding of the topic before having smaller groups rotate from topic to topic for the smaller group discussions.

We broke up the sessions into three key themes: Expanding our Impact, Current Global Moments and Health of the Movement.

In expanding our impact, we looked at streams of work that are emerging within the interest of the membership or upcoming global conversations that we need to have. This included youth engagement, resisting false solutions, working with waste pickers, working with governments, EV batteries and reuse revolution.

We then went into current global moments which were very much deep dive conversations on pressing topics facing our movement at the moment, including the global plastics treaty, organics and methane, as well as a session on a just transition.

We wrapped up the world cafe sessions by assessing the health of the movement and how to best support and enable a healthier alliance by discussing opportunities for capacity building, communications support, activist wellness and resource mobilisation.

Outside of the formal meeting sessions, we tried to create more spaces for member-to-member connections. We had a storytelling circle where we would hear victories from the movement to empower and celebrate the successes within the movement. We also had an evening for a member fair, an exhibition space where member organisations set up stalls showcasing their publications, pictures, banners and other materials. It very much gave me a Diwali fair vibe, minus the samoosas and bhangra music.

An epic cultural night was next up, featuring all 56 participants dressed in traditional attire and well representing the 17 countries from across the continent. A night full of dancing and fun was followed up by an early start to visit the Bonyokwa Material Recovery Facility, which demonstrates a full zero waste model and is a fantastic example for the rest of Africa.

Back to the meeting room for the following day, which was dedicated to strategy consultations with the Break Free from Plastic movement and having deep dive strategy conversations as sub-regions.

There were some very exciting outcomes from these, including the establishment of a member-led committee for the movement in East Africa.

We also introduced the new Regional Advisory Committee (RAC) of the movement consisting of:

- Asiphile Khanyile – South Africa
- Griffins Ochieng – Kenya
- Nirere Sadrach – Uganda
- Raissa Oureya – Togo
- Semia Gharbi – Tunisia
- Ubrei-Joe Maimoni – Nigeria

Overall, the Africa Regional Meeting was definitely one to remember. Our team pulled together in the most incredible way and it was a fantastic experience all round. We are already looking forward to the next one! 🌟





# PetroCoP28

by Greenfly

**P**etro CoP28 is in Dubai, just a short flight by private jet across the hot, dusty, oil and blood-soaked desert, from where PetroCoP27 was held in Sharm al Shaik. At Sharm, the venue was the Tonino Lamborghini, #conspicuouslygratuitousconsumption, overlooking the Red Sea and what's left of its corals.

On the other side of the Arabian Peninsula, Expo City Dubai (ECD) looks over a city of luxury hotels and extravagant highways to the Arabian Gulf. The desert is behind it. But at ECD you need never feel the heat.

ECD is The City of the Future. Or it was. Now that it's hosting CoP28, it is The Human-Centric City of the Future. A future to be brought into being perhaps by the United Arab Emirates Minister of Industry and Advanced Technology, Sultan al-Jaber.

It is a place of golden domes and meshed metal atriums. A Mobility Pavilion is "wrapped in highly reflective stainless steel metal cladding, inspired by chrome fenders and aircraft wings". It celebrates "a world of limitless connections", including on the inspiring wings of Emirates Airline where First Class brings you limitless luxury for a couple of hundred grand a trip.

There's less luxury for most of the 85 million travellers whose flights connect in Dubai. And still less luxury in an Emirates jail. Critics of the Autocrats of Arabia are liable to find their journey interrupted in Dubai as the political police make limitless connections. Better to be a fugitive from international justice, provided that the crime was to steal the wealth of an entire nation, enough for the Guptas to splash some luxury where it counts in the Emirates.

But never mind that. CoP President Sultan al-Jaber says this will be an inclusive CoP and will "elevate" women, indigenous peoples, youth and etc. Provided they are not enjoying the limited luxury of an Emirati jail. Do not expect limitless connections with Emirati

activists critical of the ruling Emirs. And the list of inclusiveness doesn't mention LGBTQI. Perhaps they come in the category "amongst others". More likely they are othered from the included. Business, of course, scarcely needs inclusion since it's there already, not just at the heart of affairs, but to define the mindset for climate action.

Next is "Terra – the Sustainability Pavilion", where nature is on digital display beneath a 130-metre-wide canopy powered by 18 handsome energy trees that produce enough electricity – wait for it – to power 900 000 cell phones. There's connectivity. And there is always more energy available as Sultan al-Jaber, CEO of the Abu Dhabi National Oil Company, presides over an expansion of oil and gas production in the Emirates. And sustainability will be manufactured through the advanced technologies of false solutions including carbon capture and storage and the advanced calculations of trading carbon not emitted.

Next is the Women's Pavilion, which tells of "the triumphs of women through history" and "the inspiring stories driving change". Could it be that patriarchy is on the line in the Emirates? The triumphs are perhaps not for migrant domestic workers held prisoner by the recruitment agencies.

The pavilions are designed by celebrity architects and built by underpaid migrant workers from Africa and South Asia. The construction workers have all the freedom of the women in domestic work. In September, with temperatures over 40°C, they were out in the midday sun preparing the venue for the arrival of the world's leaders and maybe 30 000 others flying in for CoP. Get ready for the Dubai Declaration on Climate and Health powered by the energy trees under the midday sun.

And once there, the dignitaries, delegates, oil lobbyists, bankers, carbon traders, timber merchants, climate scientists, climate activists, advisers and



consultants will be served by migrant workers. In a population a bit over 10 million, 9 million are migrant workers. They include petro engineers, bankers, businessmen on the make and assorted other scoundrels. But most are the workers who build and serve the luxury, without civil rights, labour rights, environmental rights, or any right whatever. Least luxury for them.

Two years ago, at PetroCoP26, the shitshow in Glasgow, the British hosts coined the slogan ‘Keep

1.5 Alive’. And it is alive! We’ll get there! We’ll be pumping past it shortly. With ‘Don’t say Boo to Two’ coming next. Count on it. 26: The Brits are “maxing out” the last drops of North Sea oil. 27: The Egyptians are dancing to the sound of drilling. 28: The UAE’s big oil expansion will fund a whole lot more of the luxury. Not Zero: Despite never hosting a CoP, the USA is leading the charge with more oil dollars per politician than anywhere else on earth. 🌞





# EJ School Graduation

by Tsholofelo Sepotokele



**O**n 1 September 2023, our seventh Environmental Justice School for activists (EJS) cohort celebrated their graduation at Centre for African Enterprises in Pietermaritzburg, KwaZulu-Natal.

This followed the EJS Return Week, where participants reflected on their project implementation and planned future actions, under the guidance of their groundWork mentors.

During this week, more sessions were run to capacitate the participants' efforts in their respective communities. One session covered gender as a system, with a focus on understanding masculinities, femininities and toxic masculinities in order to work towards gender justice.

The importance of managing organisations was emphasised in the "me and my organisation" session, where participants explored some critical aspects of organisations (purpose; people and culture; structure; processes; systems; leadership) and how they relate to each other.

The Admin and Environmental Justice Funding sessions complemented these discussions, highlighting the importance of supportive admin systems for their work, raising funds, proposal writing and funding opportunities available for activist work.

Continuing with the topic of "The Good Life" from the first three-week programme, participants explored the value and importance of self-care in restoring and maintaining their resilience as activists.

Joining an alumnus of over 100 EJS graduates, the 2023 cohort, through their projects and activist efforts, will continue to collaborate with groundWork to mobilise communities and raise awareness on environmental injustices to work towards, and fight for, a just transition. 🌍

The EJS 2023 graduates represented the following community-based organisations:

- African Health Research Institute (AHRI)
- Asiye eTafuleni (AeT)
- Mfolozi Community Environmental Justice Organisation (MCEJO)
- Vaal Environmental Justice Alliance (VEJA)
- Vukani Environmental Movement of Action (VEM)
- South African Waste Pickers Association (SAWPA)
- South Durban Community Environmental Alliance (SDCEA)
- Women's Leadership Training Programme (WLTP)
- Womxndla Community Development (WCD)



*Israel Nkosi receiving his Environmental Justice School certificate from Bobby Peek at the EJS Class of 2023 graduation. Credit Lunga Bhengu*





# End Childhood Lead Poisoning!



International Lead Poisoning Prevention Week 22-28 October 2023

**E**ach year, an estimated 1 million people, die from lead poisoning. Millions more, many of them children, are exposed to low levels of lead, which causes lifelong health and development problems.

The eleventh International Lead Poisoning Prevention Week took place on 22-28 October 2023. The focus of this year's campaign "**End Childhood Lead Poisoning**" reminds our government, civil society organisations, health practitioners, industry

and others of the unacceptable risks of lead exposure and the need for action to protect children's health.

There is no safe level of lead exposure. Lead is particularly harmful to children and pregnant women, affecting the developing brain and nervous system of children. Lead gets into the body mainly by eating and breathing in small particles and can be found in electronics, ammunition, fishing gear and paint – particularly old household paints to which children are exposed in their homes, schools and on playgrounds. 🌍

