



# **Towards A Climate Emergency Social Contract (CESC) for South Africa's Government of National Unity**

## **1. INTRODUCTION**

- 1.1 All of South Africa's political parties that contested the 2024 national elections do not have a serious grasp of the risks, impacts and urgency of the worsening climate crisis. The climate emergency was not an issue in this election and is a glaring omission in the Statement of Intent of the Government of National Unity (GNU). This reflects the crisis of leadership in South Africa and the failure of the Presidential Climate Commission.
- 1.2 South Africa is part of a region heating at twice the global average. When the world overshoots 1.5C between 2028- 2034 (based on different scientific studies), the country will face devastating climate consequences, for which it is not prepared. As part of increasing global warming the country has been impacted by the worst drought in its history (2014-2021), flash floods, coastal storm surges (Durban rain bomb in April 2022), heavy rains, extreme winds, heatwaves, indirect cyclonic impacts and most recently devastating tornadoes. Lives are being lost as our leaders ignore this worsening crisis. According to a recent IPSOS poll<sup>1</sup> 63% of South African's acknowledge climate change has had an impact in the area in which they live. Moreover, South Africans like

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.ipsos.com/en/seven-in-ten-people-anticipate-climate-change-will-have-severe-effect-their-area-within-next-ten-years>

others in the world anticipate severe climate effects within the next ten years. Yet there is a disconnect between these concerns and South Africa's political leadership.

1.3 Moreover, the costs of such climate shocks are increasing and with South Africa's ballooning public debt, failure to place South Africa on a climate emergency footing could mean climate insolvency also becomes a serious challenge for the country. Also the European Union's Carbon Border Adjustment Mechanism, meant to kick in by 2026, is also going to squeeze South Africa's coal addicted economy. Yet there is no just transition macro-plan to guide communities, workplaces, sectors and the state.

1.4 This document makes the case for a Climate Emergency Social Contract (CESC) to be the overarching framework for South Africa's Government of National Unity working in partnership with civil society; driven by the people and the workers. Such an idea is from the Climate Justice Charter (CJC) and Climate Justice Charter Movement's (CJCM) call for a Climate Justice Deal to address South Africa's polycrisis of unemployment, hunger, inequality, weakening criminalised market democracy, ecological crisis and increasing climate shocks. This document elaborates on the case for such a CESC.<sup>2</sup>

## **2. A Post-Apartheid Social Contract ?**

2.1 Post apartheid South Africa had a social contract in its formative years. This was underpinned by the following but which was undermined by corrupt, pro-market and failed leadership:

- A Reconstruction and Development Program which was meant to be people and worker led. Instead it was pushed aside by the ANC government which chose deep globalisation, transactional BEE and market adjustment of the South African economy with negative impacts on the manufacturing base of the economy, employment rates and inequality.
- A transformative constitution with an implicit agreement among the people to create a new society based on universal suffrage, equality, inclusivity, and democracy, intended to benefit everyone. Instead a weak and criminalised market democracy was constructed, with elements of constitutionalism validated.

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<sup>2</sup> Also see CJCM strategic perspectives document available here:  
<https://cjcm.org.za/download/8161c42e-f6d1-424e-a792-e43f48f2c5d0>

- A commitment to reconciliation based on disclosure about harms, non-racialism and inclusive nation building. Instead of a non-racial state harnessing the skills of the most talented, an Africanised state was constructed, controlled through cadre deployment and as result several state institutions have been destroyed. The land question was ignored and racialised patterns of development were reinforced by exclusionary markets.

2.2 Three decades of majoritarian and corrupt ANC rule undermined the promise of a post-apartheid social contract. Instead South Africa is deeply polarised, precarious and at a dangerous conjuncture with exclusionary nationalism and anti-democratic forces on the rise. The future of our youth was stolen as well. Post apartheid South Africa missed the opportunity to build a new society. We now have a second chance as part of the transition from one party dominance. However, this means uniting on the most dangerous challenge we face as a country and species: the worsening climate crisis.

2.3 From a Climate Justice Charter Movement perspective addressing the climate crisis together as a society means we address the legacies of apartheid, the current polycrisis and in solidarity secure a livable, just and democratic future. We work with a plurivision as contained in the CJC and we ensure the climate crisis, as a post normal problem, is owned by all in society including its systemic solutions. We confront our most dangerous challenge, which could wipe us all out, in a manner that recognises its interconnections, complexity and feedbacks. Simply, an unequal and hungry society will merely register greater climate harm and injustice. We have to address all injustices as part of our commitment to realise climate justice and accelerate the deep just transition.

### **3. Government of National Unity Plans for an “all-inclusive national dialogue”**

3.1 A Government of National Unity (GNU) will not work if it does not address the root causes of desperation in South Africa and which is feeding into the rise of a new extreme right wing. A GNU will also not work if it merely consolidates an elite consensus and ensures South Africa is governed merely to meet narrow economic interests and market stability. As Thuli Madonsela has argued, the markets have not voted parties into power but rather our voting population has given them a mandate to

work in the interests of our society and democracy. A new GNU has to ensure stability through meeting the needs of a desperate society first and foremost.

3.2 The CJCM has been calling for a national dialogue, a CODESA 2, for a long time to build a national consensus to tackle the worsening climate crisis in a united and transformative manner. Asking parliament to adopt the world's first CJC (endorsed by over 286 organisations), in 2020, was part of trying to enlist the support of parliament to work with civil society on this dangerous and complex challenge. The CJCM's commitment to mainstream the climate crisis through a Climate Emergency Social Contract (or Climate Justice Deal), underpinned by a people and worker driven climate emergency state is a crucial strategic priority. We demand the GNU takes this seriously, listens and puts in place a Climate Emergency Social Contract, driven from below, now, before it is too late.

3.3 The CJCM does not agree with Thabo Mbeki's approach to a Convention for Democratic Renewal. It fails to recognise the polycrisis and the interconnections of systemic crises (inequality, hunger, biodiversity loss, high structural unemployment, a criminalised market democracy and worsening climate shocks) that we have to address simultaneously as part of accelerating the deep just transition. It is too narrow in its understanding of the poly crisis of socio-ecological reproduction. Moreover, he is dishonest and selective about how he understands the 'organised counter-revolution' in South Africa. He takes no responsibility for the arms deal that happened when he was in a powerful position, the full blown neoliberal adjustment of South Africa through GEAR (which he was a key advocate for) and its negative consequences for workers and the limits of transactional BEE. Finally his proposed agenda for a National Pact smacks of more modernisation, market led development and green wash. It is more elitist policy think.

3.4 The CJCM supports an inclusive national dialogue approach as suggested by parties that make up the incipient GNU. However, such a dialogue has to break new ground. It cannot be led by the parties in the GNU but should be enabled by parliament to achieve a Climate Emergency Social Contract Convention (CESCC), driven from below by people and workers. It should not be an orchestrated elite space with a top down rationality. Such a dialogue process should entail the following:

- Process and participation: an inclusive convening committee ( GNU parties, and parties in parliament willing to support such a process as well as civil society representatives and representatives of communities impacted by climate shocks

and injustices ( such as mining and coastal communities), at least 60) be established to convene the process, supported and funded by parliament. This committee will also finalise inclusive participation in the convention from across society.

- Mass communication: The media needs to be a partner in this process and will have full access to deliberations and share information constantly with the public. The public, including communities and workplaces, must be invited to make submissions to the convening committee on the Convention agenda and contents of a Climate Emergency Social Contract. Moreover, the Convention must be televised and a social media platform created to share information and solicit input from the public throughout the proceedings.
- Panel of experts on polycrisis: leading climate scientists, ecologists, social development experts and heterodox economists must be invited to make submissions on the polycrisis facing South Africa and how to address it
- Agenda setting: based on submissions from the public, experts as well as inputs from parties and civil society, will define the agenda to achieve a Climate Emergency Social Contract.
- Public dialogue on outcome document: A draft framework of the Climate Emergency Social Contract must be circulated to the public through road shows, the media, community, workplace and sectoral meetings to get further input. All submissions on the draft to be sent to the convening committee to finalise the document
- National referendum: the final Climate Emergency Social Contract must be subject to a national referendum
- Co-management of consensus: Going forward Parliament and Convention for a Climate Emergency Social Contract should meet twice yearly to assess progress.

3.5 The convention process to develop a Climate Emergency Social Contract will be limited to three months. The GNU will be guided by the framework developed and such a CESC must provide a firm consensus for democratic rule for the next few decades.

#### **4. CJCM Approach to the CESC**

4.1 Guided by the CJC call to break with ‘business as usual’ thinking on the economy, given its role in accelerating the crisis, and exacerbating poly crisis risk, the CJCM believes the following premises are crucial for a CESC:

- The main objectives must be to prepare the country for a 1.5c global overshoot and 3C warming scenario that will come with that. This means the primary objective is to accelerate the deep just transition in communities, workplaces, sectors and the state through transformative decarbonisation, adaptation and regeneration capabilities. Second, to ensure climate justice systemic transformation is the means to address other systemic polycrisis dynamics such as inequality, unemployment, hunger, the general ecological crisis and a failing criminalised market democracy. A clear agenda of democratic systemic reforms must anchor this process from below.
- Current macro-economic thinking based on deep globalisation, resource extraction (including extending the minerals-energy complex to the oceans, fracking and more nuclear), de-industrialisation, transactional BEE and the growth of the services sector has not worked and has engendered a criminalised rent seeking politics and contributed to the worsening polycrisis. This is ‘business as usual’ thinking and affirms an unjust transition. South Africa has used coal for over 100 years, is the highest greenhouse gas emitter in Africa and owes the world a climate debt as the 14<sup>th</sup> highest emitter in the world;
- We need new conceptual ideas that are life and ecocentric to reorganise the economy. Currently in its broadest sense, it is a regime of socio-ecological reproduction with intensive metabolic processes that wastes scarce resources, and is over dependent on fossil fuels while destroying the ecological basis for human and non-human life; it is eco-cidal. We must recognise that there are resource, ecosystem and planetary limits on the economy. We also need to recentre our economy, ways of living and country within these limits.
- Democratic planning of life enabling commons systems including our living natural commons (water, land, biodiversity, renewable energy, creative labour and the earth system), public commons infrastructure and culture, our real wealth, has to also be foregrounded and societal use has to be planned bottom up to ensure just, resilient, restorative and regenerative stewardship. Deep just transition plans in communities, workplaces, sectors and the state need to be

enabled and supported as part of a targeted and transformative democratic planning process.

- Systemic alternatives, that achieve transformative decarbonisation, adaptation and regeneration, need to be advanced as democratic systemic reforms that clinch just partnerships at the macro-scale, in communities, workplaces, sectors and the state. The CJCM is working on 14 climate emergency policies but here are four examples the CJCM will champion and which it has developed policy positions on to accelerate socio-ecological systems transformation:

- Food sovereignty policies to end hunger and prevent climate famine through promoting a democratically planned triple transition of commercial, small scale (including household) and coastal food systems into a food sovereignty commons system. Fiscal incentives, food sovereignty fund resources (through a wealth tax), a food commons – public partnership (based on a People's Food Sovereignty Act) and support need to be provided for the country to build up food buffer stocks, treat the food sector as a strategic sector and also utilise conditional subsidies to ensure commercial farmers restore the land through regenerative agriculture, decarbonise, dialogue on land reform and plan to deconcentrate big farms. Such an approach ensures land justice, ends hunger and ensures all have a place in the food sovereignty commons food system. It also can create millions of climate jobs;
- Eco-mobility policies which promote pedestrianisation, mass clean energy public transport systems and cycling need to be democratically planned to decarbonise transport systems and bring in taxi owners to own shares within the mass public transport systems either as cooperatives or democratic public utilities and have jobs. Such a transition must also provide tax credits and fiscal support (through cutting subsidies to the motor industry ) and be guided by eco-centric and zero waste active industrial and planned labour market policies for this deep eco-mobility transition. South Africa must manufacture its own clean energy rail, bus, boats and bicycles to create more climate jobs;
- A universal basic income grant , non means tested, calibrated to be non-debt financed and a compliment to the existing grant system and which

can be gradually consolidated into a single grant system as it is increased through greater wealth and corporate tax increases. Such a UBIG will provide a crucial cushion for the deep just transition, resource human development choices, push up wages and provide immediate relief for communities impacted by climate shocks. Complimenting this can be a 4 day working week, 8 hours per day, without loss of pay, given that pilot projects confirm that productivity actually is not lost but might even improve. These social policies will provide time for greater leisure, well being and generally a happier society.

- Carbon, eco, wealth and inheritance taxes. Research on carbon emissions show that the wealthy and big corporations have the heaviest carbon footprints, resource footprints, the most intensive consumption patterns and pollution impacts including in South Africa. Big energy corporate users need to be taxed more heavily through a carbon tax, rich households need to be taxed for air travel, cars with high emissions including fancy electrical vehicles (to cross subsidise clean energy public transport) should be taxed appropriately, taxing fossil fuel powered yachts, wealth taxes (assets less liabilities), inheritance taxes and high fashion taxes. Pollution laws need to be strictly enforced with high penalties and mining companies need to be held accountable for unused and abandoned mines and mining operations. Ecological restoration has to be a priority to rebuild commons ecosystems on land, rivers and even the ocean to absorb carbon. Again creating many climate jobs.

This is a living document, continually shaped and refined through engagement with endorsing organizations, CJCM members, and all of civil society.

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