

# SA YOUTH ON COP29



## The COP29 South African Youth Statement

28 October 2024

This statement was created by a group of motivated young people throughout South Africa, with a process that was convened by Youth@SAIIA.

# SA YOUTH ON COP29



*The COP29 South African Youth Statement highlights the voices of the youth from across the country who see the future of a cleaner, greener South Africa and the world.*

We, as young people throughout South Africa, consistently encouraged by the justice bearers of those democratically elected to power and entrusting that those very same individuals will uphold their duties in securing an intersectional climate just and prosperous society throughout South Africa proudly present this year's youth-focused demands on what a climate just South Africa ought to be in the near future, as so clearly stipulated in the South African Constitution, of 1996.

With less than 15 days away from this year's UN Framework Convention on Climate Change (COP29), whilst also recognising the global emergency of Climate Change – as outlined in the Paris Agreement, this statement to come argues that through prioritising the role that human rights, our respective state's financial positionalities, the statues of our world's current climate inequality, the role that international law and order plays in times of crisis and how the youth are forced to adopt in saving mother earth through urgent radical redress we are hopeful that what is to come will serve as the basis of an immediate action plan on our most urgent needs. Moreover, we are also hopeful that we will be able to secure adequate funding for global climate action, whilst eagerly anticipating a nationally-specific focus on Article 6 of the Paris Agreement that will improve South Africa's role in the

# SA YOUTH ON COP29



world's carbon markets, in efforts to stabilize our greenhouse gas concentrations.

Our collective cries, listed below, are organised into 5 main mandates, we call upon our leaders in government to not only hear our cries but act on them decisively and urgently. As a small, but ever so charged, group of young people throughout South Africa, we are ready to take on our collective battle to ensure that our country prioritises a cleaner, greener and ultimately more equitable nation; in doing so we proudly present the following top demands of what we, the Youth of South Africa, would like to see be achieved by the South African Party Delegation to COP29, at COP29 – we present to you this year's COP29 South African Youth Statement, in alignment with the Climate Change Act of South Africa and the South African Youth Climate Action Plan:

# SA YOUTH ON COP29



## **Demand 1: Centralising the consistent roles of human rights throughout securing a climate just South Africa**

In recognising that climate justice is social justice; we urgently call for the following:

### **1. Water and Sanitation**

- We are deeply disturbed by the lack of water, sanitation and waste management systems which presents itself as a systemic issue throughout South Africa; specifically in the Free State, Eastern Cape and Hammanskraal area in the Tshwane region. Moreover, noting with deep concern the cases of cholera within the community of Hammanskraal, we demand for initiatives and accountability structures that shield community members who bear the brunt of bad governance and climate variability. We draw your attention to the various cases of raw sewage or semi treated water in the Eastern Cape, Hammanskraal and the Mogale City municipality which presents itself as a form of environmental injustice and the proliferation of corrupt institutions,
- Keeping in mind that a lack of access to water in a warmer climate has severe health impacts, we call for action to empower these communities through an actionable implementation within the next year that will form part of the amendments to the Climate Change Act,

# SA YOUTH ON COP29



- Taking into consideration the recurring and lengthy water outages in the City of Johannesburg and other parts of the country, we recommend the demonetisation of water resources such as boreholes and jojo tanks.
  - We express our hope for immediate action in this regard seeing that South Africans who do not have access to clean water and experience frequent water outages are compelled to spend much of their earnings on buying water in supermarkets and/or other water resources.
- We further urge the government to address the mismanagement of state funds in the Hammanskraal region and prioritise national access to water, seeing that it forms a crucial part of the Bill of Rights and improves human decency in a rapidly changing climate.

# SA YOUTH ON COP29



## 2. The intersectionality of climate justice and gender justice

- Noting with regret the vulnerability of women and gender non-conforming individuals, we affirm the need for upskilling, adaptation and information sharing that serves as preparation for climate change. In doing so:
  - We draw your attention to South African women who contribute approximately 60-80 per cent to the agricultural workforce. In the face of climate change, these women experience challenges related to water shortages and extreme weather events such as floods and droughts.
  - Having examined the impact of crop failures on the livelihoods of black South African women who have emerged as smallholder farmers, we urge the government to acknowledge the gender disparities within climate change to centralise the point as part of climate adaptation.
  - Noting with regret that the 2022 Durban floods damaged 84 clinics, we are deeply disturbed that women did not have access to urgent Sexual Health and Reproductive Rights such as HIV testing/screening, STI screenings, pregnancy prevention, rape kits, and antenatal and postnatal or abortion services.

# SA YOUTH ON COP29



- Given that a staggering 94% of beach litter in South Africa consists of plastic, we urgently advocate for a ban on single-use plastics, accompanied by a comprehensive implementation plan promoting reusable packaging alternatives for grocery items,
- We demand skills building for renewable energy and sustainable agriculture centered around improving women's livelihoods, particularly in a male-dominated energy sector,
- We are fully alarmed that South African women in rural areas and underserved municipalities bear the societal responsibility of collecting water and call for radical redress of this,
- Having considered the disproportionate impact of climate change on women, we call for climate change literacy that is widely disseminated through television, radio and other forms of media while being inclusive of women in systematically marginalized communities,
- We further demand a reform within the education system that decentralises climate change from science, thereby localising the issue into various forms of climate injustice and including the roles and vulnerabilities of women in rural and systemically marginalized communities,
- With that, we call upon the government to prioritize the training of climate science to female educators with a keen interest in climate mitigation and adaptation practices such as food gardens, recycling

# SA YOUTH ON COP29



programs, and water testing. In doing so, this information would be passed on to learners, and

- We further demand for the government to formally acknowledge the increased frequency and severity of Gender-Based Violence cases that are exacerbated by the frustration of climate variability and global warming.

### 3. Waste and Pollution

- Bearing in mind what informal workers, settlers and poor communities have faced in the brunt of floods in Durban, we demand for actionable policies that educate people in low-lying areas, centered on an effective early warning system and to ensure the safety and security of marginalized communities that are prone to floods,
- We are deeply concerned about the spread of wildfires which in turn leads to severe health impacts among women and children who inhale the fumes:
  - With that, we call upon the government to further empower and capacite the nation's fire departments to be on standby for uncontained wildfires;
  - We recommend that wildfires are mitigated through nationwide awareness campaigns that can be understood by all South



# SA YOUTH ON COP29



Africans, irrespective of diverse educational and socio-economical backgrounds.

- Noting with deep concern the thousands of cases of chronic bronchitis among children and adults in Mpumalanga, where most of South Africa's coal mines are located, we call for accountability and compensation for the health costs incurred by these families,
- We commend the Mine Health and Safety Council for adopting measures that decreased the incidence of Tuberculosis (TB) within the mining industry:
  - However, we call upon the government to ensure health impacts are continuously mitigated and prevented in mining affected areas.
- We draw your attention to the systemic nature of waste management, particularly in the context of apartheid South Africa which strategically located polluting industries and waste dumps within black neighbourhoods:
  - With that, we demand standardised and frequent refuse removal across all municipalities followed by the nationwide distribution of waste bins as well as recycling bins. We call upon the government to include this as part of the amended Climate Change Act.

# SA YOUTH ON COP29



- In the journey towards climate mitigation, we encourage the government to formally take note of racism that presents itself as environmental injustice, particularly in regions where community members have been systemically prohibited from exercising their constitutional right to a clean and healthy environment.

Improved waste management promotes policies for protection of outdoor workers during weather extremes, indoor pollution and direct inhalation of fire fumes for women and children. We are deeply concerned about the increased rate of TB cases, with residents near power stations. We call for accountability and compensation with health costs. Being aware of the environmental racism we call for urgent equality measures to be implemented for waste management.

# SA YOUTH ON COP29



## 4. The intersections of Climate and Peace

With the rise of global military emissions and the rise of the global climate emergency, we are forced to question the intersectional relationship between globalised peace and the climate crisis. As reported by the Institute of Policy Studies, it is evident that the impacts of climate change will dramatically increase instability around the globe, thus further harming our globalised peace and security architecture. We recognise and vehemently call those who are explicitly responsible for globalised instability; that too often at times comes at the cost of our environment. By doing so, we therefore call on the Presidency of COP29 to:

- Prioritise the economic over-investment in the states and territories' military structures of which too often at times comes at the expense of climate justice. For instance, it was reported, by the National Priorities Project, in 2020 that the United States spent an estimated \$6.4 trillion on war in the past two decades, whereby the cost of shifting the U.S. power grid to 100% renewable energy over the next 10 years is an estimated \$4.5 trillion. Couldn't that money have been better spent at fighting the climate crisis, from a world leader?
- Prioritise the state of cross-border migration which is also rising due to global warming. It will rise. In November 2023, the Migration Policy Institute reported that from 2019 to 2022 it was recorded that more than 20 million displacements were due to natural

# SA YOUTH ON COP29



disasters, thereby showcasing the interconnectedness of both climate change and human displacement. We also call on the COP29 Presidency to officially recognize the term *climate refugees* throughout International Law to help regulate the fight against climate-forced displacement, and

- Recognise the intersectional nature of the environmental warfare, of which has allowed the capitalistic extractive fossil fuel economy and the militarised economy to have been built on racial oppression, and
- We call for the swift implementation of both the South African Youth Climate Action Plan (SA YCAP) and the South African Youth Gender Action Plan (SA YGAP) from a governmental level. The implementation of both Action Plans ought both to be in a responsive and preemptive measure.

# SA YOUTH ON COP29



## **Demand 2: What we expect from this 'finance COP'**

Given that the main theme for COP29 is projected to be climate finance, we commend the establishment of the Loss and Damage fund during COP28 and the commitment to mobilising the finance framework during COP 29. Importantly we support South Africa's recent passage of the Climate Change Act, which formalises fiscal provisions for addressing Climate Change.

Acknowledging the carbon credits and the carbon market remain central to the discussion on mitigating climate change and financing mitigation and adaptation efforts, we are deeply concerned by the recent finding indicating a decline in the Earth's carbon sinks, with nearly a zero net absorption in certain regions. This prompts a re-evaluation of carbon markets as they rely on the earth's carbon capture patterns.

Finally we affirm the insights shared in the 11th Technical Expert Dialogue under the ad hoc programme that facilitates deliberations on the New Collective Quantified Goals (NCQGs) Framework. We therefore advocate for:

- A shift away from debt-dependent solutions through finance mechanisms that prioritise public finance and grants rather than loans, to alleviate the debt load of the Global South,
- A clearly defined scope of duties and financial pathway for funds from developed countries to developing countries to repay the debt owed to the Global South, in alignment with Article 9 of the Paris Agreement,

# SA YOUTH ON COP29



- The consideration of debt cancellation as a legitimate strategy to expand the fiscal capacity in developing countries to implement climate adaptation and mitigation policies,
- A defined timeframe for the review of the effectiveness of the NCQGs to ensure accountability and progress,
- The simplification of accessibility modalities of the Loss and Damage fund to efficiently provide financial aid to countries in immediate need that cannot navigate complex bureaucratic systems, and
- Transparency in the application and disbursement process of the loss and damage fund to ensure accessible, and equitable support.

## **Sustainable and affordable public transportation**

Prioritising sustainable transportation will reduce carbon emissions, alleviate congestion, and foster economic growth by providing efficient, affordable mobility for all South Africans. Therefore, we:

- Call upon the government to expand affordable and sustainable transportation networks to serve all Central Business Districts (CBDs) across South Africa by 2030. This initiative must ensure equitable access to eco-friendly public transit options, such as the Gautrain, Blue Metro rail trains, and Rea Vaya buses, connecting urban centres with surrounding communities.

# SA YOUTH ON COP29



## **Demand 3: The consistent need for an educated fight**

In a crazy heightened world, with the role of misinformation and disinformation, the role of evidence-based knowledge is ever so paramount. Thus, we implore the COP29 Presidency to regulate the sole utilisation of evidence-focused climate information throughout the international system of states. For this reason, we call for increased strides in effective evidence-based climate action which should:

- Centre the roles of young people throughout the processes of collecting evidence, packaging it and delivering it to our communities,
- Lead with the provision of practical and viable climate-focused targets throughout the fight against climate change,
- Priorities the various educational needs within the South African Basic Education System – be it linguistically focused, economically focused and/or community-specific,
- Capacitate young people with key negotiation skills such as ones needed to fully participate throughout the UNFCCC process,
- Noting with deep concern the lack of climate change education in Geography we propose the expansion of climate change education within the South African school curriculum,
- Economic empowerment of climate-focused employment opportunities throughout South Africa,

# SA YOUTH ON COP29



- We also call for the prioritisation of state-sponsored competitions and events (like the orthodox science expo) that capacitate the youth on STEM subjects, improving literacy and intersectional sociological concepts,
- Revising the school curriculum on climate education to incorporate an intersectional climate lens, and
- Call for the effective disempowerment and/or delegitimation of those that spread climate-specific misinformation and disinformation throughout our Nation.



# SA YOUTH ON COP29



## **Demand 4: Social Justice is Climate Justice**

### **1. The need to safely prioritise the role of Artificial Intelligence in securing a climate just South Africa by 2030:**

In Support of Dr Al Jabar's statements during the Energy Week in 2024, and Sustainable Development Goal 9 (industry, innovation, and infrastructure), we underscore the transformative potential of artificial intelligence and digital technologies in mitigating climate change through carbon capture technologies. In recognition of both the positive contributions and risks we:

- Advocate for the robust regulation of AI-generated content to counter the dissemination of misinformation,
- Call for the investment in renewable energy sources for data server centres to reduce the carbon footprint,
- Call for the investment into gender-responsive data collection and algorithm development to address the existing biases within AI models, and
- Champion the acceleration in AI-capacity building projects within the Global South to ensure that the benefits of AI are harnessed equitably.

# SA YOUTH ON COP29



## **2. The roles of community-based organisations in securing a climate just South Africa:**

Community-based organisations (CBOs) and grassroots organisations play a critical role in amplifying the primary lived experiences of vulnerable communities. These organisations reconcile the gap between policy frameworks, the discourse on climate change, and the tangible impacts on the daily lives of individuals. Given that CBOs and grassroots organisations engage in ongoing consultations with communities, they have emerged as significant non-state actors in informed policy development and implementation. We, therefore call for:

- The mainstreaming of bottom-up climate finance approaches that prioritise grassroots and community-based organisations,
- A transition from conditional grants that are designed to enhance the professionalism of CBOs and grassroots organisations to grants that focus on strengthening the relationships between CBOs and the communities they serve,
- The distribution of decision-making power to community-led organisations to increase their influence in addressing climate change within their communities, and

# SA YOUTH ON COP29



- Propose the establishment of an inventory base of CBOs, and grassroots organisations to enhance their visibility to both international donors and young people.

### 3. Urban development

We commend South Africa's commitment to sustainable urban growth as seen in the Lanseria smart city initiative that aims to develop integrated, low-carbon, and resilient urban settlements. The COP29 declaration on the Multisectoral Action Pathways (MAP) for resilient and healthy cities concurs with the objective of addressing climate change in cities. However, we are concerned about the rapid growth of urban poverty, and poor quality of service in South African cities. We, therefore:

- Urge for investment investment in the provision of quality service for marginalised communities to promote a circular economy and reduce pollution,
- Recommend support for projects that serve as carbon and waste sinks,
- Urge for formal integration of waste reclaimers in national waste management systems to ensure fair compensation and improved waste services,

# SA YOUTH ON COP29



- Call for the reinstatement of the Reconstruction and Development Program (RDP) for state housing to provide resilient, durable housing to the South African public, and
- Urge for the strengthening and capacitation of data collection institutions to produce reliable data that accurately models resource flows in urban settlements thereby informing urban metabolism studies that aim to make cities sustainable.

#### **4. Just energy transition**

The just energy transition is an imperative that recognizes how inextricable addressing socio-economic inequality is in combating climate change. As noted in the South African Renewable Energy Masterplan (SAREM) and the Just Energy Transition Framework, there is an urgent need to integrate renewable energy sources into the larger grid as a vital component of climate adaptation. However, as highlighted by the existing deficiencies in the public policy framework, there is a need to increase grid capacity, provide training for workers in extractive industries to facilitate their integration into the green economy, and capacitate youth in climate-specific careers. We:

- Call for the investment in modernising and increasing the capacity of the grid to accommodate various renewable energy sources,

# SA YOUTH ON COP29



- Urge for the establishment of state-owned solar PV, battery production, and verification institutions to lower the cost of solar power,
- Call for the ethical regulation of Independent Power Providers (IPPs) to promote transparency and equity,
- Advocate for the capacitation of youth through initiatives like state-sponsored bursaries and increasing the capacity of government internships in environment-related fields to empower youth to participate in a sustainable future while integrating them into the green jobs market,
- Recommend direct engagement with extractive industry workers and organisations to inform data-driven strategies that enhance workforce readiness for the renewable energy sector.

## 5. Agri-food systems

The rising tide of mass production and consumption poses a significant challenge as it exacerbates waste production and resource depletion. The material paradox exposes the urgent need for a fundamental shift in consumer habits towards sustainable livelihoods. We advocate for the empowerment of communities to reclaim their agency over food consumption and production by prioritising food sovereignty and regulation of the food system. The challenges of equitable food production, food security, and transparency have

# SA YOUTH ON COP29



been reflected in concerns raised in the 2021 United Nations Food Systems Summit (UNFSS).

While organisations like the Alliance for Green Revolution in Africa (AGRA) and the Scaling-Up Nutrition (SUN) have emerged as programs that aim to address nutrition and equitable food production, the discrepancies in their objectives versus the impact on communities they serve, reflect our concerns as the youth on the future of food systems. We want adequate interrogation of the food consumption patterns of the population compounded with an evaluation of the effectiveness of international programs aimed at addressing nutrition and equality in food production as well as the agri-food businesses. Therefore, we:

- Advocate for incentives such as tax breaks for companies that engage in eco-friendly practices such as sustainable waste management and reduced plastic packaging,
- Champion Food sovereignty through initiatives like state-sponsored community gardens and transparent food labelling that conveys the environmental impact of the production costs,,
- Call for robust regulation of the private food sector to monitor the cost of food as well as the quality,
- Command a shift away from corporate-driven solutions for agri-food systems towards agroecological practices that empower small-scale

# SA YOUTH ON COP29



farmers, reduce reliance on industrial agriculture, and champion local sustainable food systems,

- We promote sustainable farming for all communities, especially rural areas, thus we call for research development support by providing funding for agroforestry research and technology development. Technology such as efficient water irrigation and fertility management tools are examples of innovations that governments should support and allocate funds for,
- We call for adequate tax deductions and credits for farmers using agroforestry as a method of farming.-There should be subsidies for compliance and incentives for farmers using sustainable methods of farming,
- We call for the government to run programs, and workshops that focus on training farmers on different farming methods such as aquaponics which uses less land,more nutrient-rich water to yield plants. These methods save land space, water, reduce greenhouse emissions and increase crop yield by up to 30% compared to traditional farming methods. Understanding that the systems are costly to set up , these should be set up for poorer communities,
- We further emphasise the importance of governments working with funding non-profit organisations that work towards this common goal, and

# SA YOUTH ON COP29



- Whilst, noting existing funding we propose an increase in funding for community based, small scale farming especially on areas that are farming intensive;
  - Encourage seed sharing and keeping to give communities the power over their food systems.
  - We urge the Government to invest in climate smart agriculture, reduce synthetic fertilisers and foster more community initiatives.

## 6. Urgent law reform

We call for better and effective implementation of existing policies and laws. We request for acknowledgement and transparency for the impact of consumerism and its effects on climate change impacts. By doing so, we call for:

- The international regulation of the “fast-fashion” industry and their impact on the waste management sector,
- Taxes for corporations to finance climate change and mitigation. We call for funding for climate adaptation. We endorse compensation for people adversely affected by climate change. Rehabilitation and surveillance of land and land use,



# SA YOUTH ON COP29



- The regulation of the blue economy. We promote conservation and the preservation of biodiversity. We also call for the acknowledgement of the illicit economy and its contribution to climate change, and
- Funding and support for the implementation and monitoring of adaptation of plans.

## **Demand 5: The roles that the youth, children and other marginalised groups should be playing in securing a climate just South Africa**

We recognise South Africa's strides in promoting inclusive climate action, evidenced by the passing of the climate change bill. We commend the translation of the Youth Climate Action Plan into 5 of South Africa's 11 eleven official languages. Accessible language plays a foundational role in meaningful youth engagement. It is therefore paramount to ensure that climate policies are accessible and comprehensive to all members of society. In acknowledgment of this, we call for the following to be implemented by 2029:

- A wide-scale international and governmental contribution to making key climate change policy frameworks available in multiple translations and for the continued improvement of user-friendly communication formats,
- Deliberate investment in climate policy communications that are palatable to the general public,

# SA YOUTH ON COP29



- We propose the establishment of youth councils on Climate policies at local, national and international level ensuring that young voices shape climate solutions,
- The establishment of a nationally-specific Youth Advisory board on Climate Change policies within the DFFE,
- Acknowledging the small presence of Youth in policy making and leadership we propose the expansion of Youth leadership programs in climate change resolution to increase diverse new and updated perspectives and insights on Climate Change,
- Accessible deliberative forums that enhance youth engagement with public policy, and
- Taking into consideration the high unemployment rate we call upon prioritising investment in climate-related science projects and research led and made by South African youth. These initiatives must be actively implemented to drive sustainable solutions and empower the next generation in the fight against climate change.

# SA YOUTH ON COP29



This statement was created by a group of motivated young people throughout South Africa:

Ms Dimakatso Monama, Ms Phophi Tshivhase, Ms Savannalee Hodgkinson, Ms Thembelihle Mdluli, Ms Sarah Kubu, Ms Angela Khumalo, Mr Meluleki Nxumalo, Ms Tshegofatso Nxumalo, Ms Siyasanga Nyangiwe, Ms Kaylee Van Der Bergh, Ms Khensani Moagaesi, Ms Moretsiemang Lobelo, Ms Jamela Baloyi, Ms Venessa Machika, Mr Siyabonga Mahlangu, Mr Kopano Malesela, Ms Wanga Tosca Nemadevhele, Ms Tumisho Phoshoko, Mr Matoti Buthelezi, Mr Thabelo Nkaliseng, Nkaliseng Thabelo, Mr Thabo Hlalele, Ms Maphuti Mathabatha, Ms Olwethu Diladal, Boitshepo Motsumi, Karabo Nthlane, Elinor Bogale, Ms Mpho Nyamathe, Ms Charlotte Yakhani Mjiyakho, and Ms Alwande Khumalo. This process was convened by Youth@SAIIA. The statement will be presented at the National Stakeholder Consultation to Minister Dion George of the Department of Forestry and Fisheries and Environmental Affairs and the South African Party Delegation to COP29 on 28 October 2024 in Johannesburg. For any queries, please send your email to [youth@saiia.org.za](mailto:youth@saiia.org.za).

*The views expressed in this publication/statement are those of the author/s and do not necessarily reflect the views of the South African Institute of International Affairs (SAIIA).*

# The COP29 South African Youth Statement

28 October 2024

This statement was created by a group of motivated young people throughout South Africa, with a process that was convened by Youth@SAIIA.

