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EARTHLIFE AFRICA NEWSLETTER

ENVIRONMENTAL JUSTICE NEWS



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Photo: Ulrich Steenkamp - Earthlife Africa Program Officer

Credit: Ruan Vorster

Foreword

Dear Earthlife Africa Community

With nearly half of 2023 already gone, much more must be done to equip South Africans at grassroots to be meaningfully involved in the decisions that affect them. This year has been particularly tough, with nearly every single day interrupted with varying stages of loadshedding (mostly in the higher stages), Coupled with deepening political and economic uncertainty, people's quality of life is steadily deteriorating in the process. When we first put out the Op-ed that 2023 Looks Bleak, we had no idea just how tough things would get, even with the expected annual price increases.

It is clear that South Africans can no longer sit back and wait for the government to act in their interest. Our country needs citizens to play an active role in holding the country's leadership accountable. Participating in the #JustTransition is one way for citizens to get involved, not only to address climate change but also the deep inequality that still exists in our country. And even though it may seem like government's Just Energy Transition Investment Plan (JET IP) is too little too late, groundWork's Contested JT Report points out that we still have time to act but we must be decisive, inclusive and swift.

That is why it remains important to oppose projects like the Musina-Makhado Special Economic Zone (MMSEZ), which is not aligned to a #JustTransition. The Biocultural Community Protocol - in partnership with Natural Justice - highlighted several reasons to protect and preserve people's heritage. And celebrating the 6th anniversary of the court victory that stopped the corrupt Nuclear deal with SAFCEI and others, we were reminded about the value of public involvement.

With just a few months before the frenzy around this year's Conference of the Parties (#COP28) begins, Earthlife Africa and FEMNET's post-COP27 reflections provides great insights to improve the representation of women in #ClimateAction. This is why we remain committed to promoting an inclusive just energy transition that is informed and steered from the grassroots (ground up).

This year, our Earthlife Africa team were also hit with the tremendous loss of Program Manager Nomalizo Xhoma. I want to take a moment to celebrate this dynamic and passionate environmental woman activist who passed, following a short illness, in February 2023. We continue to draw strength from all the courageous environmental defenders, like Noma, who are no longer with us. Hamba Kahle!

With love and respect,

Makoma Lekalakala
Director, Earthlife Africa Johannesburg



Photo: Makoma Lekalakala

Tribute to Nomalizo Xhoma

FAREWELL



Photo: Nomalizo Xhoma

It has been nearly 3 months since the loss of Nomalizo Matilda Xhoma Mashiyane Mashego (Noma) and the team at Earthlife Africa Johannesburg are still reeling. With decades of experience and highly valued in the environmental justice sector, Noma joined Earthlife Africa in 2011 as a volunteer. Soon after, she became a member of staff, as the Programs Lead, where she headed a number of campaigns, on issues of nuclear and coal.

A very vocal and passionate social and eco-justice activist, especially in matters of energy and climate change policies, in South Africa, Noma was instrumental in taking forward the work of the Women in Energy and Climate Change Forum (WECCF). This forum puts women front and centre in climate action, giving grassroots communities from Gauteng, Limpopo and Eastern Cape a voice on these issues. Noma also helped establish the Eastern Cape Environmental Forum (ECEF) which has grown massively since its inception.

"Leaders like Noma don't die; they will always live on in us through their words and actions." Sabina Taderera, Snr Finance Officer

"Aa, Nomalizo, I will always remember your work. You are a brave woman who spent her whole life saving other people. I will always remember your kind heart, your love, and your smile." VhoTshiwela Tshihuwa, Mulambwane Community Women

"The loss of Sis' Noma will always be felt within the environmental and energy justice sectors but we commit to keeping her memory alive in our work – bringing the same passion for people. I hope this message will bring peace and comfort to those who are still mourning this loss."

"Sis' Noma was an extremely blessed organizer that was down to earth and good at bringing people together, while possessing a great skill of being able to explain and simplify the most complicated of things. I learnt so much from Sis' Noma and her legacy will live on through all those she touched." Ulrich Steenkamp, Programs Officer



Photo: Nomalizo Xhoma

“ Aa. I will never forget the joy Noma brought to us...that joyful voice and laughter. She was full of love in her eyes...my dearest murathu.”

*Mphatheleni Makaulule,
Mulambwane Community*



Photo: Nomalizo Xhoma



Photo: Nomalizo Xhoma with the Earthlife Africa JHB Team.

2023 Looks Bleak, with South Africa's Struggle for Electricity at its Worst

OPINION: KETSHEPAONE
MODISE CLIMATE & ENERGY
OFFICER

Residents of South Africa will remember 2022 for a host of different reasons, but one memory they will share is of the almost unremitting burden of power cuts. This year has been the worst to date by far, with more loadshedding in September alone than in the whole of 2020.

In the first half of 2022, the average weekly availability of Eskom's fleet of power stations had slipped to under 60%, meaning that at any one time, some 40% of its fleet was not generating electricity. The figure falls to only 52% availability if only coal and nuclear power stations are assessed. The causes of this availability crises are now well known. They are the result of poor policy choices, both historically and continuing now, rampant corruption, catastrophic mismanagement and, to a certain extent, sabotage.

South Africans are right to be asking what 2023 will bring? The answer is, sadly, more of the same. It will be more of the same because the long-term consequences of this corruption and mismanagement have so weakened Eskom and its fleet that there are no quick fixes. But it will also be more of the same because of the continuation of poor policy choices by the government. Despite the rhetoric around a Just Transition from certain parts of government, the Department of Mineral Resources and Energy remains wedded to an archaic electricity future dominated by costly and polluting coal, gas, and nuclear power.

South Africa's electricity plan, known as the 2019 Integrated Resource Plan, is seriously out-of-date and commits South Africa to new coal, new nuclear (as well as the extension in the life of existing nuclear) and new gas plants. None of these options are economically viable, none are

environmentally viable within the context of both climate change and local pollution, nor can they be built timeously to alleviate the current electricity crisis.

Coal is polluting, expensive, and open to corruption. Eskom's entire coal fleet needs to be retired in an organised and just fashion and no new coal fired power stations must be built. As all serious research has shown, including that undertaken by the government-funded Council for Scientific and Industrial Research, there is no future for coal in electricity generation in South Africa. Nuclear power is amongst the most expensive to build and takes at the very least ten years to be added to the grid. Its construction is also plagued with corruption. Recent research has shown that there is also no economic case, let alone environmental case, for new polluting fossil gas power plants in South Africa.



Photo: Ketshepaone Modise

It will probably come as no surprise to learn that the solution to South Africa's electricity woes comes in the form of renewable energy. Both solar and wind generation are now by far the cheapest ways to generate electricity in South Africa – a country blessed with massive solar and wind resources. It is now cheaper to build new utility-scale renewable energy plants than keep existing fossil fuels plants operating. In addition, the cost of utility-scale renewable energy plants with storage are falling so rapidly that they are now cheaper to build than new coal plants and will only get cheaper as time passes. In the context of South Africa's ongoing energy problems, it should also be remembered that on average South Africa's utility-scale renewable energy plants have been built within two years and on budget, a far shorter period than is possible for any other energy source.

As a matter of urgency, therefore, the government should drop its plans for new coal, for new nuclear and for new gas, and instead focus on the speedy introduction of least-cost and least polluting renewable energy sources, including storage options. Such a programme could also explore the potential for green hydrogen - provided it is done in an inclusive and democratic manner.

This urgently required energy transition must be a just one for those currently working in the costly and polluting fossil and nuclear energy sectors. Research shows, however, that the benefits that will flow from a wholesale transition to renewable energy will seriously outweigh the costs.

While jobs will undoubtedly be lost in the coal sector in particular, experience from other countries and from modelling in South Africa, shows that more and better jobs will be created by a transition to renewable energy sources. It is therefore critical that reskilling and retraining are key components of this transition.

When the extensive infrastructural costs of this transition, such as grid upgrading, are considered, concern is expressed from some quarters about where the money will come from. But it is worth restating that renewable energy options are the cheapest options for South Africa. Without this transition, electricity costs will be higher for both industry and residential consumers, while pollution will be worse, negatively impacting health outcomes and threatening South Africa's international climate change commitments.

When naysayers mention costs, let us not forget the R14 trillion worth of illegal coal contracts entered into by Eskom during the period of state capture; the R500 billion likely to be spent to finish the R80 billion (sic) Medupi and Kusile coal fired power stations; the R220 billion that was to be spent on the allegedly corrupt gas Karpowerships deal; the estimated R500 billion cost to the South African economy of extending the life of Koeberg Nuclear Power Station, or the estimated R17 billion Eskom will spend this year on polluting diesel to try and keep the lights on.

South Africa can afford this critical Just transition to renewable energy, in fact South Africa cannot afford not to make this transition.



Photo: People at grassroots want a #JustTransition to renewable energy.

FEMNET and Earthlife Africa Share Post-Cop27 Reflections, and Plans for COP28

JUST TRANSITION

On 27-29 March 2023, Earthlife Africa Johannesburg and the African Women's Development and Communication Network (FEMNET) Women held a Post-COP Reflection event to bring together a selected number of women environmental defenders currently affected by climate change. As climate change continues to worsen and the threat to life and livelihoods increase, the women environmental defenders continue to seek sustainable action from government, while promoting meaningful public engagement about the country's #JustTransition plans.

Earthlife Africa's Climate Energy Officer Ketshepaone Modise says, "Reflecting on the outcomes of COP27, one of the bigger issues that were identified at the event was the representation (or rather lack) of women in attendance, which seemed to be a very deliberate systematic exclusion!"

According to some who attended COP27, women activists were limited in their ability to engage on issues that currently affect them, due to their access being restricted. Additionally, they were also unable to demonstrate if they had issues. Yet, it is through active participation in all spheres – without being gagged and excluded from critical discussion – and demonstrations that make activists feel visible. As a result of the restrictive nature of the event and the lack of opportunities for unpacking the economic consequences of #ClimateChange in Africa, the activists have developed a list of demands for loss and damages.

While fossil fuel lobbyists continue to dominate the event and the prioritization of business people over civil society still takes precedence, African countries are struggling to reach

agreements with the Northern countries because the terms and conditions are unsustainable for Africa. So far, terms look like yet another "deal" that Africa is set to lose. The negotiation table still has more representatives for the North than it does for Africa. Furthermore, it seems that African negotiators are quite unsure about the outcomes of the funds that the continent will receive. Who will benefit and in exchange for what? How will the funds be distributed to those who are vulnerable?

For the negotiation to be a success, representation is an absolute MUST because more women at grassroots level are bearing the brunt of this crisis (on top of so many others) and are continuously affected when there is displacement caused by floods or water scarcity and famine. These impacts must be understood within context.

Then there is the issue of climate finance; this is what the Northern countries call the finance for loss and damage (L&D). Africa really needs reparations and developed states should take historical responsibility for loss and damage in developing countries, particularly those in Africa. Financing for L&D should be grants that do not need to be repaid (not loans) and there should be no red tape in accessing the fund.

The language for accessing and learning about the L&D Fund should be understandable and free of jargon, especially since it is meant to assist developing countries (with well-known developmental challenges, including illiteracy). A piece of communication designed for developing countries must take this into account and recognise that gender justice is a priority on Africa's agenda.

Modise says, "So, whenever there are conferences that discuss the climate crisis, gender justice must be emphasized. We must remember that the African girl child or woman has only recently been emancipated and as we are part of those who are most affected by climate change, we need access to easily digestible information."

Biocultural Community Protocol process seeks to protect living natural heritage in Venda

COMMUNITY PARTNERS

In Venda, you measure distance by the sound of drums. This is what greets us every time we travel to Thohoyandou, the former capital of the Venda homeland in what is now Limpopo, South Africa. The city is snuggled against the vast forested hills, with the names of suburbs making reference to royalty and holiness, while around every corner, you can find small homesteads growing avocado, mango and banana trees. It is a province of both abundance and struggle.

Natural Justice, together with Earthlife Africa and local community-based organisation Dzomo La Mupo, are implementing a Biocultural Community Protocol process focusing on the biodiversity, heritage and cultural practices associated with the Zwifho. This will enable the community to affirm and defend their biocultural rights.



Photo: Mphatheleni Makaulule and her community want to protect their biodiversity, heritage and cultural practices.



Photo: Dzomo La Mupo (Voice of Nature) community conservation of natural sites and wetlands team conduct a tour of Mudzinga River.

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"You can erase ways of life, the essence of people, by removing them from the land."

Is the JET IP too little too late?

DR NEIL OVERY & ULRICH STEENKAMP EARTHLIFE AFRICA



Credit: Earthlife Africa

Photo: People at the grassroots must drive and inform the #JustTransition.

Will the Just Energy Transition Investment Plan (JET-IP), unveiled by President Cyril Ramaphosa in November 2022, be enough to accelerate an equitable and just transition in South Africa? Will it move the country closer to achieving its climate commitments while also taking the current energy crisis into account? And will our country, in its current state of chaos, be able to secure the funding required to bring the plan to life? As it stands, South Africa ranks very low (44th out of 59 countries) on the latest Climate Change Performance Index (CCPI), released in November 2022. And in 2021, the World Economic Forum ranked South Africa 110th out of 115 countries in terms of their preparedness for a Just Energy Transition.

The JET-IP emerged after talks between South Africa and the so-called International Partners Group (IPG) – made up of France, Germany, United Kingdom, United States, and the European Union – and estimates that it will cost

R1.5 trillion for the first phase of South Africa's Just Energy Transition plan, between now and 2027. While R150 billion (10%) has been secured in funding from the IPG, 96% of this funding is in the form of loans and guarantees. This places the financial risk of investing in the Just Energy Transition on ordinary South Africans. And where will the remaining 90% come from? More debt presumably.

In launching the JET-IP, the President stated that it had two primary objectives: to ensure that South Africa meets its international climate change commitments, and to protect workers and communities negatively impacted by the ongoing transition away from fossil fuels. While these are undoubtedly the right issues to focus on serious questions must be asked about whether the JET-IP is the right plan to ensure that South Africa meets its climate change commitments and delivers an equitable and just transition.

The JET-IP states that 'it takes its direction from South Africa's energy and climate policies'. This is the first significant problem. Current energy policies in South Africa, as determined by the Integrated Resource Plan (IRP) of 2019, are not consistent with South Africa's commitments to the United Nations Framework on Climate Change. As Climate Action Tracker observes, 'current policies and actions are insufficient ... if all countries were to follow South Africa's approach, warming would reach over 2°C and up to 3°C'.

The reason for this disjuncture is found in the IRP's failure to properly accelerate the transition away from fossil fuels to renewable energy sources, and because it commits the government to add 1500MW of additional coal capacity to South Africa's energy mix between now and 2030. These two factors mean that the hopelessly out-of-date IRP (the IRP is supposed to be a 'living plan' which is regularly updated) directly contradicts the claimed objectives of the JET-IP. Therefore, unless the IRP is updated to greatly accelerate the provision of renewable energy in South Africa's energy mix and plans for new coal are abandoned, the climate objectives of the JET-IP will not be met.

Whether the JET-IP will deliver a Just Energy Transition is also debatable for several other reasons. The first concern relates to the actual creation of the JET-IP. According to the JET-IP it draws its 'principles and priorities' from the national Just Transition Framework (JTF) published by the Presidential Climate Commission (PCC) last year. The JTF states that the principles of Distributive Justice (the transition burden must be fair), Restorative Justice (damages against individuals, communities, and the environment must be addressed), and Procedural Justice (impacted workers and communities must be empowered to define their own development and livelihoods) must inform all planning and decision-making throughout the Just Transition process in South Africa. People are not fully consulted on most issues regarding climate change and energy so tackling issues such as restorative justice will never be truly just if people do not have any opportunity to meaningfully engage with the JET-IP to address these matters.

To realise these three forms of justice, it is obvious that those most impacted by the transition must be at the centre of all decision-making processes. There is, however, very little evidence that workers or community members were consulted in the creation of the JET-IP. In fact, an annex to the report notes that just two days were dedicated to consultations with 'labour', 'youth' and 'civil society' and these took place in the absence of any representation from the IPG. This lack of meaningful consultation with those most impacted by the transition makes a mockery of the claim that the JET-IP was created following the 'principles and priorities' articulated in the JTF.

Current evidence is quite clear that the plan was drawn up in high-level negotiations between the Presidential Climate Finance Task Team (PCFTT), established to advise the President on how best to fund the transition, and the IPG. In fact, the IPG and the PCFTT created five working groups (finance, implementation, the electricity sector, green hydrogen, and transport) to facilitate the development of the JET-IP. There has been no civil society, let alone community, representation in these groups. The formulation of the JET-IP even sidestepped the views of the PCC, Crispian Olver, the Director of the PCC, lamented the government's 'secrecy about the deal'.

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"People must have a chance to meaningfully engage with the Just Energy Transition Investment Plan"

The fact that the JET-IP was driven by technocratic, exclusionary, and high-level discussions is revealed throughout the plan. For example, there is no substantive or actionable engagement with renewable energy ownership models outside of either Eskom-owned, or privately-owned models.

There is, therefore, no examination of how community-owned renewable energy systems, be they examples of small-scale embedded generation or utility-scale, can help realise a Just Energy Transition. Rather, it is assumed with no supporting evidence that the current model of privatisation, which has delivered very little substantive benefit to communities, will somehow deliver a Just Energy Transition. There is also no meaningful engagement with the issue of energy poverty, which is worsening in South Africa.

Lastly, there is no form of social security support

to be offered to workers and communities displaced by the transition, despite evidence demonstrating how the COVID-19 Social Relief of Distress grant provided critical assistance to the unemployed or underemployed.

Unless the JET-IP, or its successor after 2027, is significantly revised to reflect the genuine and pressing needs of labour, communities, and the climate crisis more generally, it will not deliver a transition away from fossil fuels that is just. A Just Energy Transition is a deeply ideological and political project and is, therefore, not merely a technocratic exercise that can be imposed and implemented by elites within government, the private sector, or from within civil society. Its realisation will be contested and complex and will only succeed if it is truly driven by the needs of those being directly impacted by the ongoing transition away from fossil fuels.



Photos: Many South Africans are clear that they want energy sources that do not harm them or the environment.

New groundWork Report Interrogates Just how Fair is South Africa's Just Transition?

PARTNER NEWS

On 24 March 2023, Earthlife Africa Johannesburg attended the launch of groundWork's report Contested Transition: State and Capital against Community.

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

This groundWork report incorporates the work and insights of the 2022 community activist researchers from different areas around the country. The report posits in detail the on-the-ground realities around burning topics like, climate finance, the end of coal, and a nationally determined consensus. Drawing from recent developments and events such as the KwaZulu-Natal floods of 2022, and the closure of Komati Power Station in Mpumalanga and its repurposing plans.

Contested Transition

State and Capital against Community



Contested Transition

The groundWork Report 2022

“**This report also highlights five big next steps for the environmental justice movement.**”

6th Anniversary of the Corrupt Nuclear Deal Court Victory

NUCLEAR FREE SA

Cape Town: On 26 April 2023, Earthlife Africa Johannesburg joined the Southern African Faith Communities' Environment Institute (SAFCEI), The Green Connection and other civil society partners, including faith communities – to commemorate the 6th anniversary of civil society's court victory that stopped government's R1-trillion nuclear deal. Ironically, the anniversary of the court victory coincides with the 37th anniversary of the Chernobyl disaster.

SAFCEI, along with Earthlife Africa Johannesburg and others are calling for an end to nuclear energy in South Africa and for the cessation of the weaponization of the Zaporizhzhia nuclear power plant in the Ukraine.

Eskom's plans to extend the lifespan of Koeberg Nuclear Power Station by another 20 years has also left many South Africans uneasy about the safety of the plant, especially with the ongoing troubles at the aging facility.

Earthlife Africa's Program Officer Ulrich Steenkamp shared some of the lessons Earthlife Africa learned from mobilising South Africans to act against the unlawful R1-trillion nuclear deal..

He says, "It is important for people to know that new nuclear energy plants will not solve our loadshedding issue. These power stations take between seven to ten years (sometimes, even longer) to build and costs could reach into the trillions. And with our country's poor track record for getting things done, the wait will likely be even longer for South Africans. No, this is not feasible for a country like South Africa, especially with more affordable, safer options available that are quicker (and easier) to install."

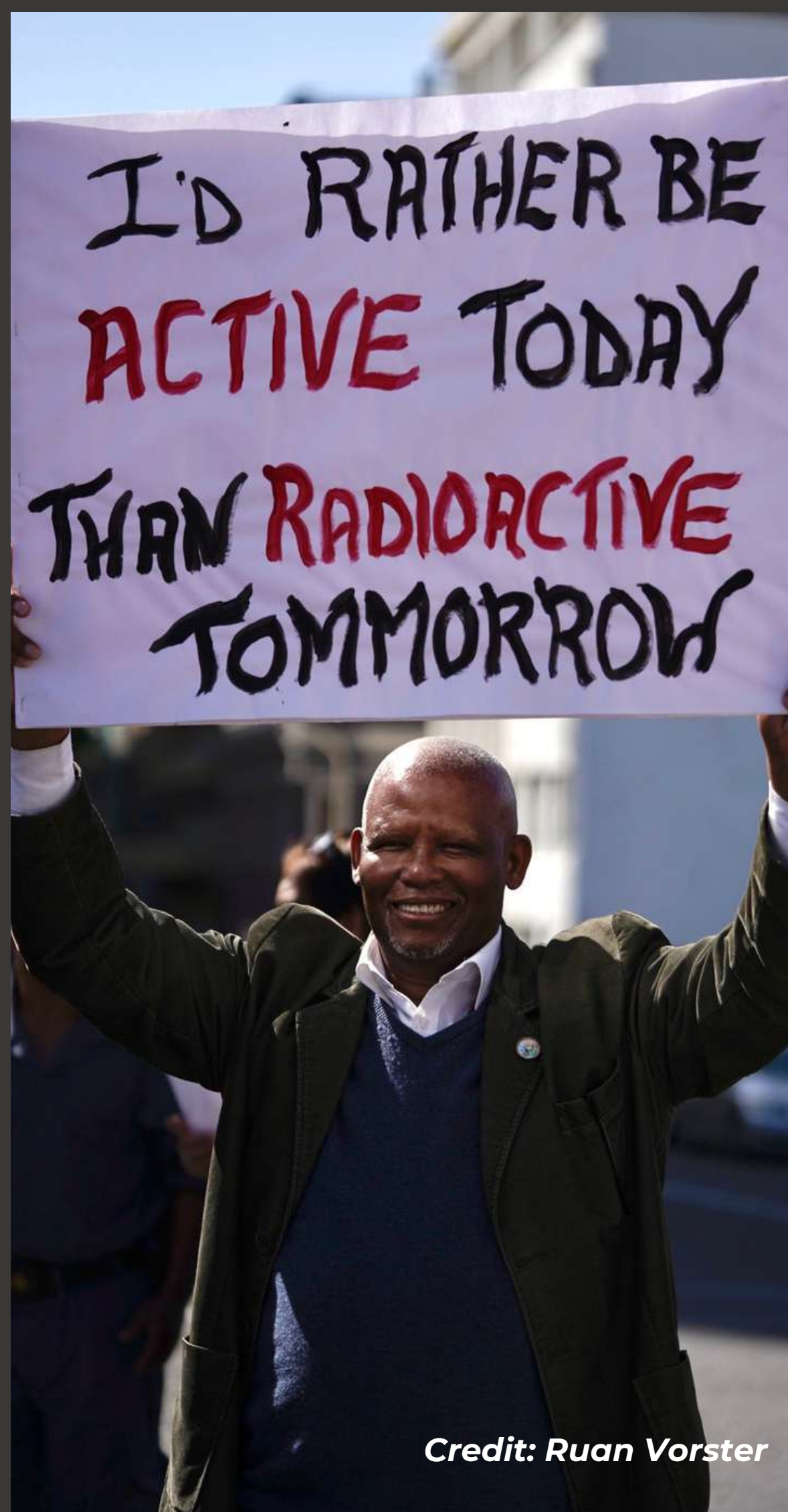
The event was held at the Desmond and Leah Tutu Legacy Foundation and culminated in a peace march and vigil at Parliament.



Credit : Ruan Vorster

Photo: Earthlife Africa's Ulrich Steenkamp and Liziwe McDaid from The Green Connection join the march to Parliament in Cape Town.

“Eskom’s plans to extend the lifespan of Koeberg – by another 20 years – has also left many South Africans uneasy about the safety of the plant, especially with the aging facility’s ongoing troubles.”



Credit: Ruan Vorster

Photo: People from the Karoo also oppose nuclear energy.



Credit : Ruan Vorster

Photo : Outside Parliament, communities and activists call for an end to nuclear energy in South Africa.



Photo: Nomalizo Xhoma



Earthlife Africa is a non-profit organisation, founded in Johannesburg, South Africa, in 1988, that seeks a better life for all people without exploiting other people or degrading their environment. We want to encourage and support individuals, businesses and industries to reduce pollution, minimise waste and protect our natural resources.

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Facebook

Twitter

Telephone:

(+27) 011 339 3663

Email:

seccp@earthlife.org.za

Address:

87 De Korte Street
Braamfontein
Johannesburg
2000