

10 December 2021

For the Attention of:

Minister of Mineral Resources and Energy, The Honourable Mr Gwede Mantashe

Minister of the Department of Forestry, Fisheries and the Environment, The Honourable Ms Barbara Creecy

**OPEN LETTER FROM FAITH LEADERS:
"STOP SHELL'S WILD COAST SEISMIC SURVEYS!"**

The timing of the announcement of a concentrated period of seismic surveys on the seabed of the Wild Coast was sudden, and in our view, deeply cynical. It appears to have been a coldly calculated move, during a time when the world's attention was on the new Covid-19 variant and just before the Christmas season, at the end of a long, hard year which has exhausted everyone. And yet, we must reach deep down into our faith, our indigenous roots and from the depths of our belonging on this planet, to find the energy to defend the Wild Coast as if our lives depend on it. Because they do.

Our Wild Coast and the whole coastal ocean area is in peril. This new threat, hidden from us and never publicly aired until now, makes us wonder if COP26 really happened. Countries around the world, including South Africa, gathered in Glasgow to discuss an agenda that reads: "At COP26 we need to work together to enable and encourage countries affected by climate change to: **protect and restore ecosystems. build defences, warning systems and resilient infrastructure and agriculture to avoid loss of homes, livelihoods and even lives.**" Somewhat ironic, the protection of the Earth's water was one of the points of discussion, which of course includes oceans.

If the seismic blasting is allowed to continue, our precious coastline and marine life will never be the same again. How can this be allowed? How can any marine species or any form of life survive five months of seismic blasting in their habitat? Every 10 seconds guns will fire deep into the ocean floor, exploring the possibility of finding oil and gas. Scientists are calling to halt any new exploration of oil and gas, because if we want to keep below 2 degrees Celsius we can [only burn a fraction of all known oil reserves](#).

As faith leaders and representatives of various beliefs, we have one thing in common - care for the Earth is one of our most fundamental tenets.

When we are faced with our government choosing a model for energy which hurts the environment, as well as being unaffordable, we are compelled to say something, to do something. We cannot be complicit in ecocide!

We note with dismay that this development comes at the onset of 16 Days of Activism against gender-based violence. How do we teach our people that violence towards each other is wrong, and turn a blind eye to violence against the planet, our Mother?

So we call on South Africans to:

- Exercise our democratic rights;
- Register as an interested and affected party;
- Call for conscientious choices when filling up with fuel or purchasing products;

Participate in petitions, demonstrations and protests that make our objections clear;

- Call on our leaders and government to account for their actions.

We will continue to gather on the beaches and garages (and wherever else is needed), to call on the collective energies of our ancestors, the angels and our Creator, to pray and to add our tears for reconciliation to the waves of the ocean.

This is an atrocity in its highest form. It may not happen quickly, but this is murder and we cannot let it happen. On the global scale, Shell is already being held accountable for its eco injustices. The Hague has found that this mega-polluter and human rights violator should pay for its crimes. But what value can be attached to human life, and to all of life? Our voices cannot remain silent. We will not stand by and see Creation be defiled by greed.

Our Government is disturbingly silent. Where is the Department of Forestry, Fisheries, and the Environment in all this? Shell is silent, yet their destructive actions speak volumes.

However, the people have already demonstrated that we will rise, in unison, to protect the oceans, the environment, and the land. The South African government must take note of our intent to strongly oppose any seismic surveys on our pristine Wild Coast, or any part of the ocean or land. The groundswell of support for God's creation is building. The Earth and the oceans will flourish with life in abundance, for no human to plunder and destroy.

HANDS OFF OUR OCEANS!!!

Andre Naidoo (Traditional Khoi)
Cele Esau (Unitarian)
Lydia Petersen (Christian)

On Behalf of Faith Leaders & the **Southern African Faith Communities' Environment Institute, SAFCEI**