

The Southern African Faith Communities Environment Institute's Response to the Updated NDC

Introduction

SAFCEI (Southern African Faith Communities' Environment Institute) is a multi-faith organisation committed to supporting faith leaders and their communities in Southern Africa to increase awareness, understanding and action on eco-justice, sustainable living and climate change. We are concerned with the accelerated progression of climate change including the rising temperature, increased erratic weather systems that are reaching levels that spell disaster for Africa and the island nations.

Our comments are guided by faith, we use and urge a moral lens to be part of the consideration in the Nationally Determined Contribution by South Africa (SA).

The Need for the Highest Possible Ambition and Progress

The focus of our comments on the updated Nationally Determined Contribution is on the **Progression and highest possible ambition, in the light of equity and national circumstances.**

Climate change affects those disadvantaged in and by society disproportionately, the poor, women and girls, and those affected by HIV/AIDs among others. The target for South Africa's emissions in 2030 should be no more than 300 Mt (net CO₂e) – an upper limit is what is required. The government should explicitly recognise that high mitigation ambition is in our national self-interest – an imperative for the well-being of the majority and particularly the marginalised – and not just a matter of being able to claim to do our "fair share". We should definitely set our target on 1.5°C or below.

In Christianity, we are called to: "Speak up for those who cannot speak for themselves, for the rights of all who are destitute. Speak up and judge fairly; defend the rights of the poor and needy." Proverbs 31:8-9 (NIV). The Holy Quran says, "and when other relations and orphans, and the poor are present at the division of the heritage, give them something therefrom and speak to them words of kindness" (Ch 4:8). We are called to consider those less privileged.

In the Bahaí faith humankind are urged too "bring thyself to account each day", Bahá'u'lláh writes. "Let each morn be better than its eve", He advises, "and each morrow richer than its yesterday."¹ Even though the Paris Agreement is legally binding to the parties, it is the integrity of each of the parties and their agents that will see the world getting to the intended mark of 1.5°C global average temperature rise.

Hinduism advises that sometimes we overrule the truth or make small lapses in our character for short-term gains, or sometimes even with good intentions that we will fix it later. Then as time passes by, these occasional drops in our character become our habit and eventually turn into major obstacles in every undertaking

¹ <https://www.bahai.org/beliefs/life-spirit/character-conduct/articles-resources/selected-letters-subject-chastity> 29/4/2021

we take.² The current weak climate commitment and implementation plans seem at risk of this kind of failure.

In Buddhism, integrity is a truthfulness which is not only within you, but is also in the world before you.³ Climate policy must be rooted in our intentions and actions so it brings about the drop in carbon emissions required by science.

In the Jewish religion, one of the prophets urges all to act justly when he proclaimed “learn to do good; seek justice, correct oppression; defend the fatherless, plead for the widow.” (Isaiah 1:17 RSV). Justice must be done in our climate policy plans otherwise our aims will not be met.

South Africa must raise its contributions to a level where it shows leadership and exerts pressure on other parties regionally, continentally and internationally through its membership in SADC, AU, BRICS and the United Nations.

In its publication on NDCs, the FAO states that; Uncertainty is inherent when accounting for carbon stocks and emissions; **nevertheless, it is important, when possible, to identify, quantify and reduce any uncertainty to give confidence to the figures reported and communicated.**⁴ This is a very important consideration to take into the national NDC planning. The modelling that South Africa used in arriving at its pollution reductions ranges leave most commentators with questions on whether the figures are the most ambitious possible. There is room for further reduction of the emission figures without compromising the economy, lives and livelihoods of the citizens. Good modelling should indeed boost the economy, create jobs and drive forward a just transition that meets our development objectives.

The modelling and analysis upon which the updated mitigation component is based, including the proposed range and projections of likely emissions, should be publicly available; most particularly the assumptions upon which the claim is made that it constitutes the “highest possible ambition” (which is inconsistent with the IRP2019 recognising that our electricity generation capacity plans could achieve lower emissions at less cost).

As people of Faith, SAFCEI urges the experts tasked to develop South Africa’s NDC following the wisdom in the scriptures: “Honest weights and scales are the Lord’s; All the weights in the bag are His work.” Proverbs 16:11NKJV.

There is a moral dimension to this instrument and how we measure, in the face of the existential threat posed by climate change, that requires a principled rather than an opportunistic approach. South Africa’s integrity will be judged by our NDC, which should thus avoid prevarication or vagueness and be founded on sound standards and assumptions.

Putting forward a mitigation contribution that is not consistent with a strong likelihood of keeping global warming well below 2 degrees (much less with the urgent need for stabilization at 1.5 degrees) amounts to inexcusable short-

² <https://indianewengland.com/2018/08/pearls-of-wisdom-truth-integrity-honesty-and-dharma/>

³ <https://www.patheos.com/blogs/americanbuddhist/2005/12/buddhism-what-is-integrity.html> 29/4/2021

⁴ <http://www.fao.org/policy-support/tools-and-publications/resources-details/en/c/1300333/>

termism by the ruling party and a gross betrayal of responsibility to children being born today and who will inherit a world that is in peril.

Since 1990, the national average temperature has increased at a rate of more than twice that of global temperature increases, which is already resulting in more frequent droughts and extreme weather events (Wolski 2019) (Engelbrecht, Adegoke, Bopape, Naidoo, Garland, Thatcher, McGregor, et al. 2015). This amount to accepting that may parts of the country will be subject to an average 4 degrees of warming, with dire consequences for vulnerable groups and individuals.

Finally, the language of communicating the NDC should be inclusive and simplified for consultation purposes, so that public participation is mandatory and should be for all people. People from all walks of life should be able to discuss the contributions so that in their own way they will contribute to the reductions of the emissions and be a part of the projected carbon reduction plans and a just transition.