

Southern African Faith Communities' Environment Institute COP26 Statement

The climate crisis is upon the tipping point beyond which there will be accelerated and irreversible threats to our survival. Science has warned us with irrefutable evidence that climate change leads to potentially devastating effects on natural and human systems. Communities are facing widespread adverse human, material, economic, and environmental effects that require immediate emergency responses.

Sacred texts all contain stories about how human beings have been instrumental in bringing about the suffering of all other living things. A common warning across faiths is of texts warning us that human beings are, and will be, solely responsible for the destruction of creation. It is written in the Christian Bible, 2 Chronicles 7: 14: "If my people, who are called by my name, will humble themselves and pray and seek my face, and turn from their wicked ways, then I will hear from heaven, and I will forgive their sin, and will heal their land."

As people of faith, we interpret this in our modern context to mean that human beings need to change their behaviour – dramatically and immediately. The climate crisis has been made even more stark with Covid-19, which has deepened the social challenges that our communities have faced. The pandemic has increased inequalities and continues to exacerbate the effects of climate change.

At this time when agreement and serious commitments are needed globally, Covid-19 has brought about greater logistical challenges for southern participants to attend COP26, and disparities in access to the vaccine and other resources have meant that many community representatives, especially from the global south, will be unable to attend in person. Heavily impacted and poorly resourced communities will be barred from attendance even online and therefore excluded from discussions and decision making processes at COP26, and out of sight and out of mind, their recognition will be diminished. Efforts must be prioritised to bring in the voices that will not be present in the physical spaces.

Covid-19 has provided yet further proof of the negative effects of our unbalanced relationship with nature and that our current priorities are distorted. This is an opportunity for a fundamental re-think and re-structuring of our broken systems in a people and planet-centred way. We must seize this moment and put people and our sacred Earth over profit. All of creation matters and must be allowed to thrive. Walking lightly on our shared planet should be at the forefront in all discussions at the COP26; with all living things been given due consideration as we strive to address climate change and achieve a balanced and green development that will bring climate justice.

COP26 is a defining moment for the future of us all. We demand that all our governments enhance ambitions through Nationally Determined Contributions (NDCs) and implement the Paris Agreement. We cannot wait any longer.

Action needs to be taken now, as words without real action are meaningless. To date we have failed to see evidence of any significant ambition before climate consequences become irreversible. In fact, we are often witness to the opposite.

Noting that:

- with the current NDCs, the world is not going to meet the required maximum average temperature increase of 1.5 degrees Celsius, and;
- the impact of climate change is becoming more frequent, intense and widespread;
- the worst affected are those who are least able to cope and have very little or no access to relief;
- industrial agriculture and particularly the farming of animals is contributing significantly to climate change, but is hardly on the COP26 agenda, and;
- Fossil fuel extraction continues to increase especially on our continent, Africa.
- The issue of “loss and damage”, that is reparations to poorer countries for permanent and repairable climate impacts, is not getting the funding that is required to enable the developing countries caught in the climate change impact to recover.

Being witnesses to the devastating impacts of climate change through tropical cyclones of category five, flooding and droughts, and other extreme weather phenomena in our region;

Concerned about the victims of climate disasters that continue to be exposed to weakened economic and natural systems;

Alarmed by the weak response measures and transparency issues, and;

Having deliberated in various fora and reflected on the international, continental and regional development plans and trajectory;

SAFCEI calls upon:

- All countries, Parties, to acknowledge and take measures to address the adverse impacts of climate change on communities and individuals who are historically marginalised and put in vulnerable positions, particularly in developing countries;
- All Parties to ensure the NDCs are more inclusive and more ambitious to meet the 1.5°C target that will allow for further planning for the reversal of some of the destructive effects of climate change;
- All governments to acknowledge that green renewable energy is the solution for a transition from fossil fuel, and that nuclear power is a false solution to climate change and not part of a just transition;
- Developed countries to reaffirm and meet their climate finance commitments. The funds must be reallocated 50-50 for mitigation and adaptation;
- All Parties to agree to utilise a common timeframe of five years for the new NDCs, starting in 2030. This would allow for a continuous practice of reflection and adaptation to the fast-moving crisis that is climate change, as well as being reflective of political timelines in many countries;
- Developed countries to prioritise domestic action to reduce emissions and not use carbon mechanisms to continue with business as usual. Private

sector involvement in article 6.4 of the Paris Agreement must ensure a balance between mitigation and adaptation, and should be subject to strict monitoring and reporting guidelines to ensure that private sector project outcomes apply social and environmental safeguards, as well as the UN Guiding Principles for Business and Human Rights;

- All Parties to consider separation of targets for mitigation, adaptation and loss and damage. For loss and damage, this means acknowledgement of loss and damage finance as a separate category in the future post-2025 finance architecture;
- All Parties to reconsider the definition of climate finance, and specifically the differentiation between mitigation, adaptation, loss and damage finance, and the separation of targets for climate finance that are delivered as grants;
- The post-2025 finance decision to include targets and commitments related to financial flows (article 2.1.c of the Paris Agreement);
- Regional, national and local governments to work towards ending public investments and support in fossil fuel-related activities;
- All governments to acknowledge that gender and human rights are cross-cutting concerns;
- COP26 to strengthen the continuation of the Lima Work Programme on Gender (LWPG) and its Gender Action Plan (Enhanced GAP), in order to ensure that the integration of gender considerations into processes under the Paris Agreement continue to increase;
- The UK Presidency of COP26 to take the discussion of industrial agriculture, that contributes 14-16% on industrial animal farming and 29-35% overall greenhouse gas emission, to the fore;
- The UNFCCC to call to order the multinational corporations involved in industrial agriculture that are causing long-term damage to biodiversity in Africa and other developing regions.

We, as SAFCEI, undertake to bring to the fore communities' struggles against climate change-induced disasters and the negative contribution of industrial agriculture and the continued extraction of fossil fuels. We need a renewable energy future, without coal and nuclear. We continue to support and enable faith leaders to raise the environmentally-harmful issues that our governments and other entities are ignoring or deliberately furthering; and petition for communities to secure a seat at the table in local, national, regional and international forums.

We cannot wait any longer. Climate action is a matter of urgency. It is the responsibility of our leaders to deliver on promises made in NDCs and the Paris Agreement. No more empty promises.