



groundWork

Environmental justice action

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Dear President Cyril Ramaphosa

This is the last action I am undertaking before groundWork closes for 2018.

groundWork believes a Just Transition is urgently needed and that you need to be at the forefront of this as leader of the country to prevent a transition that will cripple South Africa and destroy the promise of democracy.

The recent Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) Special Report on 1.5°C clearly highlights that the present trajectory of reductions by countries will take us to a 3°C world by 2100. This will mean a 4.5°C increase on the continent whereas the temperature increase is predicted to be 1.5 times the global average. Greenhouse gases must be reduced urgently or the consequences for society and especially the poor, will be dire. The report states that “limiting the risks from global warming of 1.5°C in the context of sustainable development and poverty eradication implies system transitions”. This must be a Just Transition.

Our reliance on Eskom’s aging coal powered stations means that Eskom is the largest producer of greenhouse gas emissions on the African continent. According to Eskom’s permits and other related governance documents, Eskom power plants are set to start decommissioning from 2020, just over a year from now. However, already various units at Eskom’s power stations are not operating for various reasons. It has come to groundWork’s knowledge that the Hendrina Power Station is set to stop

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operating all its units by April 2019. This is in advance of the 2020 date. One of the Eskom terms for this process is ‘cold storage’.

For many years, and in particular over the past 12 months, there has been a vigorous debate in the public about a Just Transition for workers and communities who rely on the coal economy. The transition from coal is already happening in a variety of unplanned ways that is resulting in workers and community people being betrayed and robbed of an equitable and just future.

With the closure of Eskom power stations now in the immediate horizon, it is critical that the Presidency responds to the public on the following key issues in order that South Africans reliant on the coal economy can be sure about their future:

1. What plans are in place in order that the future of workers at Hendrina, both permanent and contract workers, are secure?
2. What plans are in place to secure the livelihoods and incomes of the families that directly and indirectly depend on the Hendrina operations?
3. What plans has government commenced with to safely dismantle these coal-fired power stations so that they do not have negative environmental and health legacy impacts like the more than 6 000 abandoned asbestos, coal and other mines across South Africa?
4. What are government’s plans to repair the land and river systems damaged as a result coal extraction and burning throughout the province of Mpumalanga and elsewhere in South Africa?
5. What are government’s plans to repair the health of people who have been damaged by coal?



6. What are government's plans for the very many municipalities that are still dependent on Eskom's coal fired power stations?

groundWork is an environmental justice organization working with community people and organizations throughout the country challenging South Africa's dependence on coal. Under the campaign Life After Coal we aim to discourage the development of new coal-fired power stations and mines; reduce emissions from existing coal infrastructure and encourage a coal phase-out; and enable a just transition to sustainable energy systems for the people.

We look forward to your response.

Kind regards,

Bobby Peek

Life After Coal

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This letter was sent to South African President Cyril Ramaphosa by Bobby Peek, director of groundWork, on 19 December 2018. Ramaphosa is still to respond.

groundWork is one of South Africa's leading environmental justice organization and the local affiliate of Friend of the Earth. It was formed in 1999 to support people's struggles for environmental justice – starting with people living on the fencelines of the petrochemicals industries and waste facilities. It now partners with local organisations in pollution hotspots – amongst others, the industrial areas of south Durban and the Vaal Triangle south of Johannesburg and the coal fields of the Mpumalanga Highveld where 12 large power stations are concentrated – and participates in the resistance to fracking and offshore oil and gas projects. It partners with the South African Waste Pickers Association to work for a zero waste economy.

groundWork introduced the concept of environmental justice to the health care community, starting with health care waste but since broadened into environmental health, and supports their participation in the climate justice movement. It partners with Earthlife Africa and the Centre for Environmental Rights in the Life After Coal campaign which is now established as a significant voice in the debates on climate, energy, health and a just transition.

In the most unequal of countries, groundWork is part of the struggle for an egalitarian society in which people can live well with each other and with the earth.