



GROUNDWORK



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groundWork is a non-profit environmental justice service and developmental organization working primarily in South Africa, but increasingly in Southern Africa.

groundWork seeks to improve the quality of life of vulnerable people in Southern Africa through assisting civil society to have a greater impact on environmental governance. groundWork places particular emphasis on assisting vulnerable and previously disadvantaged people who are most affected by environmental injustices.

groundWork's current campaign areas are: Climate Justice and Energy, Coal, Waste and Environmental Health.

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International POPs Elimination Network

Basel Action Network

Oilwatch International

Global Anti-Incineration Alliance

groundWork is the South African member of Friends of the Earth International

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From the Smoke Stack



by groundWork Director, Bobby Peek

I write this Smoke Stack smack bang in the middle of the ANC and President Zuma's most trying time. Many people have focused on the character of Zuma, and we have had various notable ANC veterans speaking out against Zuma. groundWork shares some of the concerns raised, both about Zuma and about the ANC. I remember the morning of the 18th of February 2012, in the Pretoria City Hall, with the early rumblings about non-delivery and the state of affairs regarding Zuma's presidency. Pan African Congress stalwart Joe Mkhwanazi, in a quite firm although aging voice, said to all of us that we must remember that the party has a set of principles, and that that does not always reflect in the people who are presently in powerful positions and who sometimes do not deliver on these principles. Joe still had respect for the ANC, which was his first political home. For many people today, for those who only knew the ANC as their political home, there is great questioning going on about their loyalty.

When we reflect on the present troubles, we must see beyond Zuma and the leadership of the ANC. We need to consider the impact the ANC has had upon how the state delivers justice and democracy. It is painfully clear that the rot is deep and is not just within the ANC. It has extended to officials in government departments, some of which I believe are not ANC card-carrying members. This is not to say that there is non-delivery in all departments or sectors of government.

What has this got to do with environmental justice, you ask? Well, government, politics and political leadership are about environmental justice because, when decisions are made on the expansion of the fossil fuel industry by the decision makers connected to and on behalf of the elite, for the

benefit of the elite, you know decisions are not going to be according to the sound environmental justice principles embedded in the founding of the ANC and indeed the Freedom Charter of the South African Congress Alliance in June 1955.

What we have today in South Africa – in an era of planetary emergency, as climate change caused by the burning of fossil fuels which feed elite overconsumption really begins to become a reality – is the failure of delivery of the basics to those who are most in need. We have a situation where the poor do not have “the right to live where they choose, be decently housed, and to bring up their families in comfort and security”, as per the Freedom Charter, because the state does not facilitate decent housing, decent services and decent energy. I say this because the majority of poor people in South Africa do not have access to affordable, reliable energy. They are dependent on Eskom's dirty energy from coal-fired power stations or for handouts of coal from Eskom and mining corporates, which they then burn in their homes.

The big Paris jamboree came, and groundWork raised concern that it was going to be a failure and it was. Governments developed a dysfunctional climate agreement and only because of this did they agree to it. But let us not blame the international community for this. It is glaringly evident that the rot starts at a local level, here in South Africa. As government and the ANC seek to praise the outcome of Paris, Rome is burning. And as Nero fiddled, so does our government.

Critically, if one zooms in on just one province in South Africa, you can read the signs of a system going wrong. And it is not only at the top – it is throughout. KwaZulu-Natal has become a fossil fuel nightmare. In the run up to the Paris climate



jamboree, Mike Mabuyakhulu, MEC for Economic Development and Tourism in the KwaZulu-Natal Provincial Government, indicated that Operation Phakisa, which seeks to fast track offshore oil and gas with companies such as ExxonMobil, is KwaZulu-Natal's response to climate change. The operative word here is fast track. Because we can see from various decisions on developments in KwaZulu-Natal that government at all levels is not worried what the impacts on increased fossil fuel development are going to be on the people of the province, let alone the planet. Critically, decisions are no doubt also being made because of pressure from the political elite above.

There is a litany of fossil fuel projects that make KwaZulu-Natal the hotbed of fossil fuel extraction. Firstly, the multi-fuel pipeline from Durban to Gauteng was developed to increase fuel transport. This pipeline was rerouted through black neighbourhoods, a clear sign of environmental racism. During the construction, two children died when they drowned in the water that collected in open pits. No one was held accountable.

There is ongoing talk about the expansion of the petro-chemical facilities in south Durban. These facilities, which are old and now decaying rapidly with age, pose a serious risk to the people of south Durban. But the eThekweni Municipality will not know about this risk because their monitoring of the industry leaves much to be desired.

We have our own coal export terminal in KwaZulu-Natal which, despite a global turndown in coal in 2015, managed to expand the export of coal. This facility has its own environmental health impacts in Richards Bay, about which very little is spoken.

To feed this growing need to export, not only does Richards Bay export terminal receive coal from Mpumalanga, it also receives vast quantities of coal from mines in KwaZulu-Natal, which are expanding with very little meaningful oversight from government. As I write this, community people in Fuleni are about to stop, with a blockade, the Department of Mineral Resources people from visiting the site of the proposed Ibutho Coal mining venture; a venture that will impact on people's commonage, on their livelihoods and their way of life. This is all too evident from the destruction

of peoples' land and livelihoods just across the Umfolozi River at Petmin's Somkhele coal mine.

Coal in KwaZulu-Natal is not only a scourge of the present, it has a long legacy of maldevelopment in South Africa. The early coal fields of South Africa were in the northern areas of KwaZulu-Natal. When the easiest coal had been extracted, local communities were left with acid mine drainage, destroyed land and an economy that was bust, as it had been built on servicing elite wealth creation rather than the poor, something the ANC and the South African Congress Alliance fought against. Today, coal is king again in these areas. Colenso Power, linked to the ANC's investment arm Chancellor House, has had a dodgy EIA for a new coal-fired power station in Colenso approved – all within a matter of a few months. They are planning on new coal mining ventures in the area as well. Just up the road, in Newcastle, local communities are raising concerns about unfulfilled promises of the coal mines in the area, very much like the unfulfilled promises we are hearing from the Somkhele residents in relation to Petmin's mine – the same unfulfilled promises you hear from mining-affected communities globally.

Finally, a story on fossil fuels would not be complete without the new kid on the block, fracking, and all hell is breaking loose in KwaZulu-Natal as Rhino Oil and Gas and Sungu Sungu make bids for prospecting for coal bed methane, which will probably be fracked. In these heated community meetings, it has been said by the Petroleum Association of South Africa officials to groundWork staff – not knowing they were groundWork staff – that the EIAs for the prospecting are going to go ahead despite the resistance of the community. This tells us that there is a rot, even at low-level bureaucracy. We are beyond the Shakespearean remark that potentially “something is rotten in the state of Denmark”; in our case the present State is rotten, as it ignores the people on the ground and the evidence globally that fossil fuel extraction is harming the people and the planet.

We are living in interesting times.

For now,

Bobby X



Colenso Power

by Bobby Peek

Something is rotten in the Department of Environmental Affairs

Which is not unexpected, since this Department specialises in “fig leaf” cover ups for the Departments of Energy, Trade and Industry and Mineral Resources, to mention but a few. The stench is ever so evident when one considers the very extensive groundWork submissions in response to the application for environmental authorisation that gives such credence to the term “maldevelopment”. groundWork’s submissions, developed in conjunction with the Centre for Environmental Rights (CER) and with the South Durban Community Environmental Alliance (SDCEA), were in essence ignored by both the environmental impact assessor, EcoPartners, and the Department of Environmental Affairs. Colenso Power is linked to Chancellor House, the ANC investment arm. Suspicions were raised even further when the Department of Environmental Affairs (DEA) official signing off on the deal – Mr Sabelo Malaza – ducked and dived as he sought to avoid a meeting with groundWork about this proposal.

In June 2015, before the decision on the scoping report was made, we warned Mr Malaza that groundWork “cannot appeal a Final Scoping Report decision if you agree upon it, so that is why it is critical for you to understand our concerns” on the proposal. He, however, backtracked after initially agreeing to meet, indicating that his “team has advised” him that “they are at a very sensitive stage” and a meeting would “not be of any benefit”. After we pushed further for a meeting, he proceeded to say: “If you are unhappy with the outcome and you wish to appeal the decision from a process point of view, you would then do so.”

It was clear then what his decision would be. Thus we were not surprised that, on the 5th of February 2016, he granted Colenso Power an authorisation for the 1050MW coal-fired power station. This was despite groundWork’s submissions clearly setting out why the Environmental Impact Report did not meet the requirements of the law for environmental impact assessments. groundWork and SDCEA appealed the decision on the 2nd of March 2016,

and a decision on the appeal is awaited in June 2016.

In our comments on the Final Environmental Impact Report (FEIR) we highlighted that there has been little to no substantial change in the assessment of the impacts of the project in the FEIR, following our initial comments on the Draft Environmental Impact Report (DEIR), and that we stand by the conclusion that the DEIR – and now also the FEIR – do not meet the requirements of the National Environmental Management Act (NEMA); the EIA Regulations, 2014; Air Quality Act (AQA) and the 2012 National Air Quality Framework; National Water Act (NWA); or National Environmental Management: Waste Act (NEMWA) and their respective regulations and guidelines.

The FEIR was weak and lacked information that is crucial for purposes of adequately assessing the proposed station’s impacts. For example, the report: does not state where and how the power station will obtain two-thirds of the coal it will need to operate; contains incorrect information (for example, estimations of the power station’s greenhouse gas emissions and total water requirements which are significantly below the true extent of these emissions and the actual quantities of water required); and fails to assess adequately the impacts that the power station will have on, for example, climate change, air quality, water and human health.

The appeal also emphasises the impact of the current drought in KwaZulu-Natal. The failure to give this any consideration in assessing the water impacts that the power station will have – particularly on the Thukela river, and the communities and other users who already depend on it – is another ground on which the authorisation should be set aside.

So, as South Africans, we must not be fooled by the signing of meaningless accords that come out of climate state jamborees annually, for they are nothing more than a fig leaf for the maldevelopment practised by a crumbling state. ✕



Get the frack out of here!

by Niven Reddy

You shale not pass

I have always had a different perception of our environment when compared to people I grew up with. From my younger years I found nature to be quite fascinating. I grew very interested in fluvial processes and it led to me exploring formation of waterfalls and meanders. I never really grew out of that phase; I just acquired more detailed knowledge from a wider scope along the way. I always knew that I had a passion for saving the planet; maybe not on the level of changing costume inside a phone booth but I certainly took it upon myself to ensure that I based my actions on being environmentally friendly.

My passion for the environment helped make a decision to pursue an environment-related degree. I first gained work-related experience within the field when I worked for an environmental consultancy. My core responsibilities were to assist in drafting reports that would be sent as an application for environmental authorization. I explored the impacts and never really opened my eyes to see the bigger picture of certain proposed activities. When I joined groundWork I found myself looking at applications for environmental authorization from a different perspective. I now looked at them seeing factors of social injustices rather than just looking at environmental impacts.

On my first day at groundWork I attended a fracking meeting in Howick and, having just arrived on the activism scene, I had no idea what to expect. Seeing local people with banners and flyers, objecting so strongly to what is going on, surely gives an indication that this is not right.

Rhino Oil and Gas want to explore for shale gas located within the Midlands via the hydraulic fracturing process. The communities stood firm on their objection and if this meeting was anything to go by then this topic should be closed – fracking averted. Unfortunately, the decisions are yet to be made. The government seems to believe that this will provide relief to the unemployment strain and put us in contention for financial advancement but

is failing to see that the cost that is involved will surely exceed any benefits this may have.

The water shortage problems that are faced in KZN are extremely severe, as we notice our dams depleting with a simple glance. The process of fracking requires one to eight million litres of water to complete a fracking job from start to finish. That is a substantial amount of water to be used for a process that communities want nothing to do with. It is as much water as every single person in South Africa having two glasses of water.

An average household consisting of three children and two adults uses approximately 250 litres of water a day. With the amount of water planned to be used per fracture, this household would be able to use that amount of water every day for 331 years, way beyond their lifetimes. This water can be used for so much more than the unwanted hydraulic fracturing process.

The use of water in this process is merely the tip of the iceberg of what is required to complete fracking. Water is just one of the ingredients that make up “fracking fluid”, which can include up to 600 chemicals, including lead, uranium, mercury, methanol and hydrochloric acid. Up to 40 000 litres of chemicals are used per fracking.

The fluid is injected into the channels till the rock is fractured and gas is released. There is no guarantee that there will not be any negative impacts on the environment or the community. In fact, there is a decided possibility that methane gas and toxic chemicals will leach out from the system and cause contamination of groundwater resources.

If we frack, we run the risk of turning our beautiful Midlands into barren land, and converting amazing scenery to the sight of trucks docking at drilling sites. Fracking is not a viable option under any circumstances. It has no consideration for the natural environment or the local communities. It is simply not sustainable. ✖



Fracking in our backyard

by Megan Lewis

While Shell has stepped out of the Karoo region and taken its proposal to frack with it, other players in the energy field have popped up in the province of KwaZulu-Natal, as well as in parts of the Eastern and Western Cape. These key proponents are namely Rhino Oil & Gas, Sungu Sungu – the South African branch of the Indian energy giant Jindal – and smaller companies such as Motoane, Badimo and Kinetico.

FrackFreeSA was born in November 2015 out of the recent application for exploration rights in KwaZulu-Natal, by Rhino Oil and Gas South Africa, a subsidiary of the Texas-based company Rhino Resources. Since the first gathering in 2012 at KZN Wildlife, things had been quiet in KZN, until November 2015, when Rhino sought to hold eleven public participation meetings in a six-day period across the KZN Midlands to tell people about its plans to acquire “high quality oil and gas assets in under-explored regions in Africa”.

At these public hearings, communities displayed their unwillingness to move from their land for fracking – or drilling for oil, as the company has called it. Throughout the country, applications have been made by the company to appropriate land for this extractive process, which would see water and land contaminated, sick people and a massive release of emissions impacting on climate change.

According to Francois du Toit, CEO of the African Conservation Trust based in Pietermaritzburg, for one frack up to twenty million litres of water is needed, and soil-contaminating chemicals, such as arsenic, are used. This does not even include the infrastructure on the surface of the well, which would be waste water dams and 2 000 trucks that would form part of the industrial process.

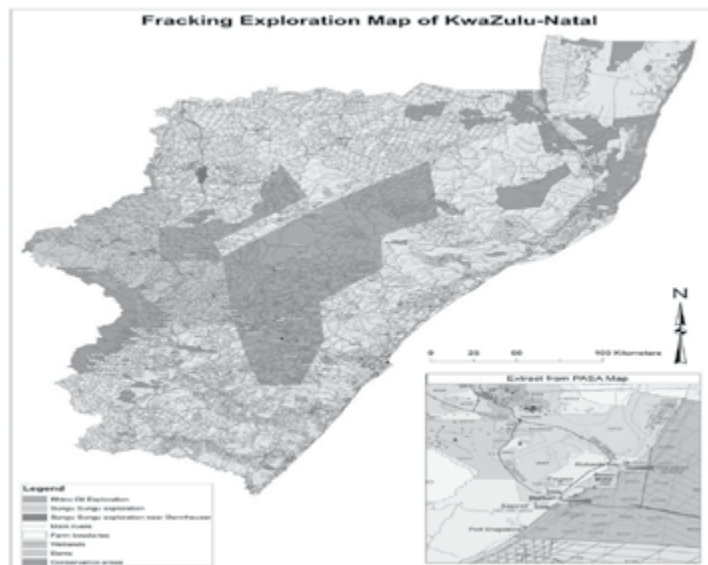
“Of what value are lights and energy if the price we and future generations have to pay is an ever-decreasing supply of contaminated water,” says Sheila Berry, Global Environment

Trust member and spokesperson of the iMfolozi Communities and Wilderness Alliance (ICWA).

During the month of March, Rhino Oil & Gas will hold another round of public meetings at which the communities of Ulundi, Pongola, Dundee, Melmoth, Dannhauser, Vryheid and Newcastle will no doubt show their strength in opposing the proposed “development”.

Whilst the government is suggesting this will be a boon to the economy and relief to the unemployment figures, what is concerning is that the output will likely be smaller than the financial input. This is certainly the case when considering externalised costs to people’s health and environment. Employment created will most likely be menial with little security or proper benefits.

What is critical is that, if people are successful in pushing back on fracking completely, transformative development takes place whereby land is equitably distributed amongst all. At the moment, as is the case in the Karoo, previously disadvantaged people’s access to land still mirrors an apartheid picture. ✂



Introducing our new CEJ Campaigner

by Kevashinee Pillay

I am an admitted attorney of the Republic of South Africa with a passion for the promotion and protection of fundamental human rights, and have recently been appointed as the Climate and Energy Justice Campaign Manager.

My professional career commenced with a yearlong legal internship (2007) at the South African Human Rights Commission (SAHRC-Durban), where I was involved in enforcing the rights of poor, marginalized and vulnerable groups of people through enforcing the provisions of the South African Constitution. Some of these matters included violations of environmental rights. It was in these early stages that my commitment to human rights and the protection of the environment was born.

My subsequent employment with Lawyers for Human Rights (LHR), from May 2008 to 2010 as an intern, candidate attorney and attorney, afforded me the opportunity to work with refugees and asylum seekers, mainly from the Great Lakes region and the horn of Africa. During this time I learned of the failure on the part of some governments to address environmental concerns, including the high levels of political conflict that impact negatively on the advancement of human rights. I then wanted to do something more to contribute to improving this dire situation on the African continent.

I was thereafter afforded a scholarship to complete the LLM in Human Rights and Democratisation in Africa (the LLM) at the Centre for Human Rights (the Centre), University of Pretoria (2011). This programme not only provided me with the theoretical basis to advance my larger purpose to serve humanity but also provided me with the practical tools to implement such.

Practical aspects of the programme included a field mission to Botswana where I collaborated with various stakeholders, including the SADC Secretariat, in concluding a paper titled *Climate change, human rights and food security: The case of Botswana*. A further component of the LLM was an exchange programme at Université Gaston

Berger de St Louis in Senegal, where I completed my thesis titled *Local integration as a durable solution: the situation of Mauritanian refugees in Senegal*. Whilst completing my thesis, I interned at Recontre africaine pour la defense des droits de l'homme (RADDHO), a human rights nongovernmental organization for the region of West Africa, where I was involved in a successful campaign protesting against President Wade's amendment to the Constitution to serve another term as President. It was a momentous time in Senegalese history.

After completing the LLM, I then participated in a United Nations (UN) Learning Exchange Programme at the CIVICUS UN liaison office in Geneva, (2012). During this time I was involved in various UN sessions, including a discussion on Climate Change convened by the UN Food and Agricultural Organization.

My experience in Geneva provided a solid basis for my subsequent appointment as the senior researcher to the UN Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in Eritrea (2013) at the Centre for Human Rights. Here I was afforded the opportunity to serve the people of Eritrea violated by systematic human rights abuses as a result of military dictatorship.

I consider all of the above experiences as having shaped my path to continue with serving humanity as the Climate and Energy Justice Campaign Manager at groundWork. I am yet again grateful to groundWork for providing me with a space to empower communities at grassroots level to take charge of their destinies as active agents of change. At a time when the impacts of climate change are an ongoing concern, the poor are at the forefront of its scourge. The time is now ripe to act!

I am reminded of a quote from Rumi: *Out beyond ideas of wrongdoing and right doing there is a field. I'll meet you there. When the soul lies down in that grass the world is too full to talk about. And so, let us meet together somewhere out there on the battlefield of human rights.* ✕



Teaming up to expand forces

by Robby Mokgolaka

A new team on the block has joined up with groundWork seeking solidarity in the fight for environmental justice. The team, based in Newcastle in the KwaZulu-Natal Province, is called *Phezu Komkhono* (Rolling up the sleeves) and is facing social and environmental injustices caused by the Chelmsford coal mine owned by an Australian company called Continental Coal.

Continental Coal is renowned for causing injustices within communities as they are also violating environmental laws in the Arbor community in the Highveld, in Mpumalanga province.

The Chelmsford mine is located on the Normadin farm on the outskirts of Newcastle. The mine commenced operation in 2011 without consulting with the community as part of their Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) requirement in terms of the National Environmental Management Act 107 of 1998.

The company promised jobs to the affected community people but only a few members of the community were employed by the mine and the rest of its employees were migrant workers. What exacerbated the fury of the community was when a security guard employed by the mine was attacked and killed by wild pigs at night while on duty, and another employee was run over by a company truck and also died. The company did nothing for the families concerned.

In reaction, the community held a demonstration protesting against unfulfilled employment promises and failure to compensate the families of the deceased persons. The protest was held in May 2015, when one of the company trucks was burnt.

The community is also frustrated by the local politics being played out between their ward councillor and the mine. The community is failing to engage with the company to resolve the issues amicably because the councillor elected his own people to "represent"

the community in negotiating with the mine about the issues. This frustrates the community because the representatives are not acting in the people's best interests.

The community contacted groundWork for assistance in their environmental struggle. In January 2016 groundWork visited the community to establish a working relationship in the struggle for environmental justice. groundWork had a community meeting subsequent to the brief discussion on issues with the community representatives elected by the people. The members of the community were given a brief presentation about groundWork and its focuses, and a short workshop on environmental justice. This made a big difference to the community as it gave them knowledge on their environmental rights and what is required of the coal mine.

The discussions bred mutual interests and established a working relationship between groundWork and the community. In the meeting the community decided that they will have another protest against the mine, since the company has failed to respond to their remonstrations from their previous demonstration and has refused to recognize them as a representative structure.

groundWork is strategically planning to give a full workshop to the embattled community to enable them to have a voice with substance and strengthen solidarity with their communities. It was agreed in the meeting that there has to be a meeting between groundWork and the community prior to the contemplated demonstration to develop a strategic approach, including the legal right to have access to the company licenses.

A continuous engagement with community representatives is taking place and groundWork is pleased to make an impact in its quest for environmental justice. ✕



Influx of waste to energy projects

by Musa Chamane

Waste incinerators are notorious for polluting the air, which is of course vital for all life.

Due to various challenges experienced by government regarding waste, incinerators have been pitched as a solution although they are, in fact, a false solution. Under the guise of waste-to-energy, pyrolysis, gasification projects and a myriad of other euphemisms, waste companies, as well as cement companies, have consistently knocked on government doors for approval of incinerators to deal with waste. Incinerators are camouflaged as waste-to-energy projects in response to Eskom experiencing challenges in its ability to meet the power demand.

There are a number of waste incinerators that are being proposed in different areas in South Africa and in KwaZulu-Natal in particular, such as in Newcastle and Pietermaritzburg. All these incinerators are proposed by private developers. Community people will not benefit from any of these incinerators since they will only provide high tech jobs.

The incineration debate started as early as the 1980s in South Africa. Incinerators were mostly found in hospitals for medical waste. The municipal waste incinerator has been proposed more than once and it has received serious resistance from communities. In the past there have been medical waste incinerators that have shut down due to the pressure exerted by civil society. We have seen the Ixopo incinerator closing due to the complexity of its activity. The Bloemfontein incinerator has also shut down following a string of complaints from communities.

It is a known fact that incinerators need huge upfront capital investment by the developer. In most cases, implementing companies require agreements with municipalities to supply them with huge amounts of waste per month. Ludicrously, should the municipality fail to provide these tonnages,

penalties are incurred by the municipality. This contravenes the Waste Act 2008 that promotes reduction of waste through minimisation from source.

Incinerators encourage waste generation. Therefore, waste beneficiation of communities through incinerators is not sustainable. Just because, potentially, five people will collect waste to feed an incinerator, this does not mean it is a waste beneficiation project. Waste incineration is a false solution because it muscled waste pickers out of the economy. It is not easy to have an incinerator and a materials recovery facility co-existing.

Countries with municipal waste incinerators have gone to the extent of burning recyclables. Recyclables are burnt to keep the high temperatures needed in incinerators. In most instances, municipalities sign binding agreements with the incinerator owners to supply waste to the incinerator – and failure to do so results in the municipality having to pay.

Communities that reside next to incinerators are against these incinerators, due to toxic emissions that come from these plants. In the UK there is the Veolia incinerator that has caused an outcry from the community due to foul emissions. It is not just the smoke and the smells, but the cancer-causing dioxins and furans that are found in these emissions.

Landfill gas capturing from decomposing waste is also regarded as waste-to-energy. Pipes are horizontally inserted through waste. These pipes suck up or capture any gas that is emitted from the decomposition process. Capturing of this gas is not easy; a large percentage of gas escapes without being captured. The gas that is captured is not ready to use as electricity and it still needs some conversion. Purification of this gas becomes another process that requires a huge amount of money. Gas capturing is also not financially self-



sustainable because of the capital investments that have to be made before the project takes off. Due to the complex nature of gas capture most municipalities have opted for gas flaring, where all the types of gas captured through the pipes end up being burned up. Burning is mostly done to convert some gases that are detrimental to the atmosphere. This methodology also proves to be a false solution to both the energy and waste challenges the country has.

Companies like cement companies believe that by burning car tyres they can recover energy that was invested during the manufacturing of that particular tyre. The cement companies are hoping to replace coal with tyres. The tyre regulator has to pay even more through retrofitting the cement kilns for the cement plants. Cement plants will benefit greatly from this process. They will benefit through tonnages of tyres disposed at their plant, substitution of coal with tyres and the kilns being retrofitted for free.

Cement plants are for manufacturing cement, not a solution to the waste problem. Therefore this is regarded as a false solution as well, since even as it stands most cement companies fail to operate according to their licence conditions. Dust is still a challenge for all the cement companies in South Africa.

Tyres can be crumbed to recover the rubber and can be used in various processes, ranging from making tennis courts to road construction. Tyres will create more jobs when they are crumbed than when they are burnt.

Municipalities have been convinced by private companies to consider waste incineration. Incineration is a very complex and polluting technology and therefore it is important that municipalities enforce the licence requirements. To have an operating incinerator one requires a licence or approval from government. Municipalities are known for maladministration and one wonders

how such a risky technology can be approved with an expectation that the municipality will monitor operations.

The waste hierarchy makes it clear that waste has to be reduced, but if we have technology that wants us to generate more waste, surely that means that the technology is against our hierarchy. Re-use of materials is also important in recycling because that minimises waste going to the landfill. Some waste materials can be re-used and become valuable again. In developing and developed countries, the reused materials are sold on the open market where children's toys or clothing, books, furniture and so on are sold. That is part of recycling because each material reaches the end of life with one consumer and the next consumer might fix or repair or use it again.

Treatment of waste is also a component of a hierarchy. Some waste materials can be treated to be less harmful, for example health care waste. If the health care waste is sterilised and shredded, it can be disposed of at a general waste site because the toxicity of such material has been dealt with. Once it's properly treated it is no longer harmful to the environment or people. Waste incineration is sometimes referred to as treatment, when they burn, "treat" and recover energy, but no matter how it is dressed up, it is still incineration.

The challenge of waste can only be dealt with if the waste hierarchy is stringently applied. Those waste materials that cannot be reused or recycled, such as polypropylene, need not be produced. The modern way of dealing with waste is through reduction, reuse, recycling, treatment and disposal. One cannot go straight to treatment without exhausting the other phases or stages of the waste hierarchy.

It is clear that waste recycling is the way to go because it has so many advantages as opposed to waste incineration. ✕



Incinerator rubber stamped

by Rico Euripidou

*NPC-Cimpor granted environmental authorisation by KZN
authorities to become a hazardous waste incinerator*

In mid-November 2015, the KwaZulu-Natal Department for Economic Development, Tourism & Environmental Affairs (KZN DEDTEA) (Ugu District) granted an Environmental Authorisation for the use of alternative fuels and resources at NPC-Cimpor (NPC) Simuma.

NPC disguised the process of applying for authorization to incinerate hazardous waste under the guise of what they call the "Proposed Storage and Utilisation of Alternative Fuels and Resources at NPC's Simuma Facility near Port Shepstone". In reality, NPC are proposing to burn any hazardous industrial waste materials (called "alternative fuels" by them), in their cement kilns to save costs (to them) by replacing coal and selected raw materials with waste tyres and undefined hazardous wastes. This is effectively a cost saving initiative with disregard for any other social or environmental consequences. SRK Consulting are acting on behalf of NPC as the "independent environmental consultants". It effectively puts the fox in charge of the henhouse!

At the outset we have to be absolutely clear that the global scientific literature unequivocally demonstrates that all hazardous waste incinerators produce the most toxic compound known to science, namely, 2,3,7,8-tetrachloro-dibenzo-p-dioxin and other similar compounds which we can simply call dioxins. These chemicals can bio-accumulate in the food chain, are persistent in the environment and toxic at very low levels.

There is no such thing as "clean incineration". All incinerators release toxic particulates, dioxins, greenhouse gases, acid gases such as hydrogen chloride and toxic metals. Air pollution control devices are always needed to limit the releases to the air, but most of these pollution control devices, such as filters and electrostatic precipitators, merely move the pollutants from one environmental medium (the air) into another (solid filters or wastewater). If they are not maintained up to first

world standards they invariably fail, as has often happened with medical waste incinerators in South Africa over the past ten years.

Furthermore, the toxic pollutants do not disappear; they are concentrated into other media that have to be treated as hazardous waste. Importantly, ash from incinerators is toxic, heavily contaminated with dioxins and leachable metals, and under the Stockholm Convention BAT/BEP guidelines, ash requires special land disposal as hazardous waste. Often, these added costs are not included in economic and human health analyses but they should be.

Dioxins are also proven to cause cancers, including leukaemia, soft tissue sarcoma, non-Hodgkin's lymphoma, prostate cancer, as well as cancers of the lungs, larynx and trachea. They can cause birth defects, alter the reproductive systems of foetuses, impact the IQ of children, suppress the immune system, decrease fertility, cause ovarian dysfunction, and reduce the sizes of male genitalia. They are highly persistent in the environment, so any dioxins produced today will remain for up to 150 years if on top of the soil, more than 500 years if in bodies of water, and up to 1 000 years if the dioxins are covered by a few centimetres of soil surface.

South Africa is a party to the Stockholm Convention on Persistent Organic Pollutants. Under this treaty, South Africa is obligated to reduce and, where feasible, eliminate releases of dioxins to the environment. This authorisation as it currently exists does not take into account that no dioxins testing has been undertaken at this facility and makes no provision for meeting the objective of our obligations.

Furthermore, the KZN DEDTEA will not be able to enforce the current dioxin limit, much less a more stringent dioxin limit to protect public health, either now or in the foreseeable future.



This is because South Africa does not have the technical in-country capacity to analyze dioxins from incinerators. Globally, there is a limited number of approved laboratories capable of testing for dioxins since it is a very difficult test to conduct. There are currently no labs in South Africa that can analyze for dioxins. Samples have to be sent to the EU, the US, Japan or other countries to undergo these expensive tests.

Most industrialized countries require testing for dioxin emissions every six months or every year. Some countries conduct frequent spot checks of dioxin emissions, since high levels of dioxins are formed during transient conditions in incinerators and waste-to-energy plants and many manufacturers submit dioxin results under ideal conditions. Spot tests are how many incinerator facilities in the US and elsewhere have been shut down or heavily penalized for violations.

Given that South Africa does not have the in-country capability to conduct regular testing for dioxins from incinerators, much less frequent independent spot checks by regulatory bodies, these dioxin limits may just be limits on paper and not in reality, thereby threatening public health.

Additionally, this authorisation is effectively a move away from environmentally sound best practices of segregation, waste minimization and environmental protection. By their very nature, hazardous waste incinerators are technologies that need waste as an input to operate. Therefore, they encourage generation of more waste in order for the operators to make a profit. There are case studies worldwide that have shown that when industries and communities decide to reduce waste, increase recycling, improve composting, and so on, incinerators and waste-to-energy plants end up losing money and have to shut down.

Relying on hazardous incinerators will do the opposite: they will discourage segregation and produce more waste so that incinerator operators can make more profits. Moreover, investing in incineration and waste-to-energy plants commits communities to these dirtier technologies for the long term, commitments that require communities to generate more waste for incinerators to operate profitably. We should be moving in the opposite direction: encouraging less consumption of materials, greater demand side management,

minimization of waste, and more protection of the environment and public health.

Good waste management begins with preventing waste being generated in the first place – after all, what is not produced does not have to be disposed of. Hence, waste prevention and minimisation should have top priority in any waste management plan. Where waste material is produced, planners and managers must always choose the optimal treatment option with the lowest possible risks to human health and the environment. Each treatment option brings with it different impacts to different parts of the environment.

There is no blueprint that can be applied in every situation, but there are firm principles upon which an approach to waste management is based, namely:

- Prevention principle – waste production must be minimised and avoided where possible.
- Producer responsibility and polluter pays principle – those who produce the waste or contaminate the environment should pay the full costs of their actions.
- Precautionary principle – we should anticipate potential problems, and err on the side of caution.
- Proximity principle – waste should be disposed of as close as possible to where it is produced through reduced waste movements and improved waste transport regulation.

This authorisation flies in the face of implementing these principles in KZN. Furthermore, the NPC cement kilns are neither properly designed for the purpose of incinerating hazardous waste, nor will they be held to the same regulatory standards as other purpose-built hazardous waste incinerators in similar jurisdictions. While it is claimed by NPC-Cimpor that the very high temperatures and long residency times within NPC's cement kilns result in high incineration efficiency and low emissions, the NPC cement kilns are simply not designed for burning heterogeneous waste streams in the first place.

And because they are not regarded as hazardous waste incinerators, they will generally avoid having to meet stringent emissions regulations! ❌



GGHH calls members far and wide

by Luqman Yesufu

groundwork held its second community planning meeting for members of the Global Green and Healthy Hospital (GGHH) initiative in January.

It was a three day meeting aimed at engaging GGHH members, government and other interested parties on the issues of sustainable health care. Attendees included sustainability coordinators from the nine GGHH member hospitals, three representatives from the Centre for Public Service Innovation (CPSI), and four representatives from the KwaZulu-Natal Health Infrastructure and Infection Control.

This was the first time we had such a large and diverse group of participants and it provided us with an opportunity to have a meaningful discussion around the issue of responsible health care practices, challenges and solutions for the future. The sustainability coordinators each had an opportunity to present their achievements in the form of case studies, as well as their plans for the year. It was a very interactive forum as participants all received constructive criticism and solutions to the common challenges they faced.

The Centre for Public Service Innovation (CPSI), which is mandated to develop innovative, sustainable and responsive models for improved service delivery, was represented by the Chief Director for Research and Development, Pierre Schoonraad, who explained during his presentation that the CPSI facilitates the implementation of innovative ideas through facilitating pilot projects aimed at demonstrating the value of innovative solutions, and through activities that create an enabling environment within the public sector to support and sustain innovation.

He encouraged hospital sustainability coordinators to continue their green projects, stating that government through the CPSI is always open to funding such innovative ideas, especially when it will help government save money in the process. This was the case with Helen Joseph Hospital, where sustainable energy initiatives such as installation of solar PV panels and retrofitting of LED lights are

being implemented with funding coming directly from the CPSI. The idea that government was looking to fund sustainable innovative projects in hospitals was an instant motivation for the group.

The Head of Department for KwaZulu-Natal Health, Dr Sifiso Mtshali, was represented by colleagues from Health Infrastructure and Infection Control. They attended this planning meeting to hear firsthand experiences from sustainability coordinators, explore options of replicability in the province and finally to provide feedback and recommendation on whether the department should consider becoming a member of this initiative. They all raised the concern that they did not want to be left behind in the quest for a sustainable health care in the province, highlighting that some of these green projects, such as waste separation at the source of generation, were already been carried out in the province. The architect and engineer from health infrastructure also stated that some of the current infrastructural projects in the hospitals have to adopt some of this green technology during construction to ensure that adequate ventilation and natural lighting can be used, which will save energy consumption in hospitals.

We also had a very interactive group exercise. The purpose was to ensure that the community planning participants got an in-depth understanding of the core purpose of GGHH through the lens of their colleagues. So we had two groups with each containing old, new and potential GGHH members in it. The questions were based on the responsibility of their individual hospital in terms of the surrounding community, their experience so far and the opportunities for promoting GGHH, the challenges and success and the support they will need in future.

What came out of this was that there was an urgency on the part of the participants to look beyond the



care of their patients, to ensure that the community surrounding the hospitals is also considered during service delivery. Victoria Hospital has developed a food garden and are producing lots of fruits within the hospital. Khayelitsha Hospital is engaged in educational programmes to raise awareness on expired medication and disposal. The Gauteng Department of Infrastructural Development has started to encourage biogas production from composting in some hospitals as they already have such projects running in some government schools.

The group also made recommendations in terms of structures that could aid the promotion of GGHH which included engaging in community development programs such as “Sukuma sakhe” meaning “lets come together and build” programmes to introduce climate change issues. They also suggested that regular talk shows on radios and opinion pieces could be key to spreading the word. Marcia from Helen Joseph Hospital further pointed out the need to engage with environmental health practitioners, as the new regulations on waste clearly state that trained environmental health practitioners will be charged with the responsibility of waste handling in the hospitals. Other strategic forums, such as provincial health management committee meetings, public health conferences and interdepartmental forums on environmental health issues, were all recommended for GGHH presentations in the future.

As the GGHH community continues to expand in network depth and breadth in Africa, our hope is that we can continue to support our members through consistent and continuous engagement through events such as our annual community planning meeting and on a regular basis through the multilingual internet platform called GGHH Connect. Some of the upcoming activities include the meeting with Management Committee at Johannesburg Health Department, responsible for 108 clinics in the metro city of Johannesburg. The world hospital congress is also coming up in November and GGHH is looking forward to it as we are planning to host a side event for GGHH hospitals

in the region. These activities and many more will promote our network base in Africa and hopefully hospitals and health professionals in the region will begin to add their voices to environmental issues that affect health. ✎

Case study: Valkenberg Hospital

Hospitals consume large amounts of energy and the majority of this energy is derived from fossil fuel combustion of coal, oil or gas. In South Africa, the majority of the energy – over 70% – is from combustion of coal and, with hospitals needing twice as much energy as any commercial building, hospitals have an enormous carbon footprint. A recent survey on the energy spectrum of provincial hospitals in the Western Cape shows that air conditioning consumes more energy in their hospital buildings than other energy-consuming activities such as equipment, hot water, ventilation, IT systems and lighting. This was a massive eye opener for the hospital and emphasized the need for hospitals to engage in energy saving strategies. The sustainability coordinator for Valkenberg Hospital, Thomas Koorts, presented the technology that was developed by Robert Boyle in the United Kingdom called the Air Pump Ventilator. This technology is now being installed within the Valkenberg hospital as the new buildings are constructed. The fascinating thing about this air pump ventilator is that it ensures that the building is cool in summer, that there is regular fresh air within the building, with a zero carbon footprint and neutral effect in winter. This in turn will save enormous amounts of money currently being spent on electricity/energy.



National Summit of the R2K Campaign

by Megan Lewis

The Right to Know celebrates its fifth anniversary

Five years ago, a handful of people came together as our Constitutional right to freedom of speech was set to be crushed by the State in the form of the Protection of State Information Bill, aptly dubbed the Secrecy Bill. With growing support, these few became a coalition of organizations and individuals that had a common understanding of what this Bill meant for democracy in South Africa: repression of an integral civil right. The campaign was called the Right to Know (R2K).

While “many commentators said the Bill was the result of incompetent drafting, the R2K asserted that with the unfolding economic and social crisis in South Africa, the compromise negotiated in 1994 was reaching its limits and the Secrecy Bill formed part of a broader agenda of Securocrats preparing to rule by repression”¹. Today, the Secrecy Bill remains on President Zuma’s desk waiting either to be signed into existence or tossed into the bin of other ridiculous legislation realised under apartheid.

Five years later, the Right to Know Campaign has broadened its scope beyond just one bill concerning secrecy to form five major thematic areas, namely securitisation and surveillance, access to information, media freedom and diversity, access to telecommunications and the right to protest.

Over the last weekend of February, the Campaign held its National Summit, which was preceded by summits in the three provinces in which the R2K is active – KwaZulu-Natal, Gauteng and the Western Cape. Last year, throughout the three provinces, the Campaign organized over seventy-six public meetings and protests, hosted forty-one activist

workshops and training courses, and produced and distributed fifteen publications. Some of the key highlights of 2015 were the release of the list of National Key Points, a partial victory on Digital TV when government announced that five million households would receive free Set Top Boxes (for when the change from analogue to digital television is made) and a defence of democracy in Parliament in the wake of last year’s State of the Nation address.

This year looks to be an exciting one for the R2K and civil society broadly. A Right to Protest Hotline is coming to fruition after an agreement between the R2K and the Centre for Applied Legal Studies (CALS) at the University of the Witwatersrand was reached in 2015. This will enable protestors to gain advice on their rights and establish a legal referral network to assist those who face arrest. A coalition of organizations, including the R2K, Earthlife Africa and the Southern African Faith Communities’ Environment Institute (SAFCEI), are challenging in a variety of ways the Energy Minister’s plans to keep details of the proposed Nuclear Deal secret. Lastly, there is the increasing possibility of launching a national social justice television station.

As the Open Government Partnership prepares to meet at a regional level in Cape Town in May, R2K continues to push back on the hypocrisy of South Africa being the chair of an international body which purports to promote access to information both nationally and globally, when our country’s own transparency and accountability mechanisms are marred by corruption and secretive processes. X

¹ Right to Know, National Summit Narrative Report 2016, page 12



Greenfly gets hot

by Greenfly

February was hot. In fact, the hottest February ...ever. It followed the hottest January ever. That followed the hottest December, the hottest November, the hottest October... July is usually the hottest month of the year because there is more land and less ocean in the northern hemisphere. July 2015 was the hottest month ever.

What really has the climate scientists hot under the collar is how much hotter. February was 1.35°C hotter than the average of all Februaries from 1951 to 1980. Hotter than what? Hotter than forty or fifty years ago.

So that's not exactly pre-industrial, is it? It's not even the end of the 19th century when there were enough thermometers around to take the world's temperature. Climate boffin Michael Mann says you can add 0.3°C for the temperature rise from the late 19th century to 1951-80. But he's a tad irritated with his fellow boffins at the International Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) for treating 1875 as "preindustrial". If you are seriously talking preindustrial, you need to go back to 1750 which adds another 0.3°C. So that makes February 1.95°C hotter than a preindustrial February.

So why should we seriously talk preindustrial? Because emissions from the fires of industry – first coal and then oil and gas – is what are seriously changing the climate. Put simply, climate change is the product of industrialisation.

Since the 2010 climate negotiations, the world's nations have agreed that global warming must be limited to 2°C above preindustrial. Regrettably, they have avoided agreeing to anything that would keep the temperature to 2°C. Being politicians, they are very happy to have numbers massaged so that it sounds as if 2°C is a long way off and they can keep burning coal, oil and gas.

At 1.95°C, it is suddenly right here. True, this is an El Nino temperature spike. But it is 0.5°C hotter than the last El Nino spike in 1998. So maybe 2017 will be a bit cooler than 2016. But still hot. Greenfly's colleagues at groundWork have been warning for some time that the average world temperature will top one degree by 2020. Apologies from them. One

degree is done already. The average temperature for the decade 2004-2014 was 1.07°C above preindustrial. The 2014-2024 average will be well up on that. And at the rate we're going, we should hit two degrees around 2035.

The floods and droughts are already coming thick and fast. Just this month (March 2016), the floods have hit Brazil, Indonesia, China, Australia and the UK. In Brazil and Australia, the floods are following long droughts. At home in Southern and South Africa, the drought continues. Millions of people are already hungry and the price of food is rising sharply.

South African industry, meanwhile, has retired to the fantasy land where climate change isn't happening – or isn't urgent. Colenso Power has put out the latest piece of denial. It has decided that, "from a scientist's point of view, there is still considerable uncertainty that man-made CO₂ causes significant global warming ... To the present day there is still no scientific proof that man-made CO₂ causes significant global warming."

The company has been cobbled together – with some help from Chancellor House, the ANC's premier investment wing – to bid for government's Base-Load Independent Power Producers Procurement Programme (BLIPP to you too). In short, they want to burn coal – and lots of it – to generate electricity. Their fantasy "scientist's point of view" was downloaded from Friends of Science, a Canadian organization associated with oil industry lobbying and with Canada's Tory party, which has long been in the pocket of the tar sands mob.

Colenso Power's climate-denying statements are made in a response to groundWork's appeal against an environmental authorisation for the power station granted by the Department of Environmental Affairs. In Greenfly's view, the appeal is very necessary as their environmental impact report seems short of a full deck. Alongside the climate nonsense, their fantasy scientist seems to have been engaged in their treatment of water, air quality, coal supplies and much else. ✖



Devastation of offshore exploration

by South Durban Community Environmental Alliance

Oil and gas exploration in the Indian Ocean will hurt the environment and communities.

The recent granting of licenses for seismic testing by the Petroleum Agency of South Africa (PASA) and the Department of Minerals and Energy without proper public consultation will inevitably affect all people in South Africa who have enjoyed our beautiful coastline and pristine beaches for pleasure and livelihoods. Offshore oil drilling will potentially produce petroleum, along with a mess of other toxic substances including mercury, lead, arsenic, and barium. These toxins are devastating to the health of fish, wildlife and the people who live and feed off the coast.

The country risks serious ecological consequences when biological ecosystems are disturbed by human activity. These repercussions extend beyond the immediate marine life surrounding the drilling area to the overall health of the coast and the health of the people who live near the site, and has socioeconomic impacts for those whose jobs, quality of life and livelihoods will be displaced by such activity.

Overwhelming industries in residential and tourist areas, air pollution, water pollution, irreversible environmental destruction, as well as severe and chronic health impacts, already plague Durban. Allowing oil exploration off the Eastern Coast will perpetuate this already extreme plight that local citizens face in their daily lives.

Another threat to both human livelihood and the health of the marine life is the potential for oil spills and their subsequent damage. While the trauma of large-scale oil spills is often the principle fear of oil exploration, it is frequently smaller accidental spills and purposeful discharges during normal operations that prove to be most pervasive.

Offshore drilling will shatter the tourist industry in Durban. At the nearest point, the drilling will only be fifty kilometres off the coast, and the necessary vehicles, power poles, noise compressors and other unsightly infrastructure that drilling encompasses

will detract from the country's natural beauty. It will compromise both the outdoor recreation and tourism industries and lead to a significant economic downturn.

Many of the companies that intend to drill are international, and are willing to risk the health and beauty of South Africans and South Africa, while reaping and keeping the benefits for themselves. While the rig will create jobs, many of the jobs will be beyond the scope of what local citizens are trained to do, and foreign employees will be brought in to do the work.

Oil rigs spew drilling muds, hydrocarbons and other toxic materials in their daily operations. These cause cancer, reproductive failure, organ damage and hypothermia to marine mammals and fish. For the subsistence fishermen in Durban, this wipes out an entire food supply and livelihood. Even after drilling is complete, potentially in twenty to thirty years, the coast will be devastated by permanent structures that are dangerous and expensive to remove and will further damage the marine and ocean life.

Oil drilling is very risky and dangerous; we have witnessed the evidence of its destruction in the likes of the Gulf of Mexico and the Niger Delta.

Changes in climate, variable water conditions, untested laws and regulations, and complex flora and fauna make it difficult to apply previous studies to the distinct South African coast, but there will certainly be negative consequences caused by oil exploration.

These unknowns extend to whether or not significant oil reserves even exist under the South African seabed. Given the precarious nature of this development, South Africa should evaluate the benefits of investing in other sources of fuel, including renewable energy, that do not have as great a prospect for havoc, before committing to offshore oil and gas exploration. ✕



Victory for Kodaikanal

by The Other Media, Chennai Solidarity Group and Jhatkaa.org

Activists Celebrate as Unilever Settles with Kodaikanal Workers

The settlement between Hindustan Unilever and 591 former mercury workers from its thermometer factory in Kodaikanal is an unprecedented victory and a fitting culmination of the fifteen-year campaign by workers and the hundreds of thousands of supporters worldwide, said campaign organizations The Other Media, Chennai Solidarity Group and Jhatkaa.org.

According to activists, it is public outrage, not corporate responsibility, that prompted Unilever to do what it had refused to do for fifteen years. Millions of people shared the viral music video Kodaikanal Won't, and more than 150 000 people in over 100 countries petitioned and tweeted to hold Unilever CEO Paul Polman accountable.

"The much-delayed settlement is great news, but Unilever still has unfinished business in Kodaikanal. You can expect a high-decibel global campaign in the coming months to ensure that Unilever cleans up its mercury contaminated site in Kodaikanal to international standards," said Nityanand Jayaraman, a Chennai-based writer and activist who has been part of the campaign since 2001. Unilever is insisting on leaving up to 25 milligrams/kg of mercury in the soil – 250 times higher than naturally occurring background levels – even after clean-up. According to activists, that is far laxer than global standards and will harm the environment. The factory is located on a ridge surrounded by the densely forested Kodaikanal Wildlife Sanctuary.

In the United Kingdom, where Unilever is headquartered, even the residential standard for mercury in soil is 1 mg/kg – twenty-five times stricter than what Unilever is proposing for an eco-sensitive area in India. "With its refusal to clean up Kodaikanal as it would a site in the United Kingdom, Unilever is begging for another global campaign,

and we are happy to oblige," said Shweta Narayan, an activist with The Other Media. Campaign organizations have declared that they will build pressure on Tamil Nadu Pollution Control Board and Unilever to commit to a world class clean-up in the lead up to the state Assembly elections in May 2016 and Unilever's Annual Shareholders Meetings in England, the Netherlands and Mumbai in the coming months.

"People power works. That's the key lesson we're drawing from today's big announcement. We'll continue to lift up the hundreds of thousands of voices that have joined this campaign since last July to ensure that Unilever now cleans up its mercury mess in Kodaikanal," said Rachita Taneja of public mobilisation group Jhatkaa.org. Jhatkaa.org was one of the coordinators of the successful social media campaign that broke the media silence surrounding Unilever's pollution in Kodaikanal. Additionally, concerted actions by corporate accountability group SumOfUs in the United States and 38 Degrees in the United Kingdom helped draw in more international support and build pressure on Unilever.

A mercury thermometer factory operated by Hindustan Unilever in the South Indian hill town of Kodaikanal was shut down by state regulators in 2001 after the company was caught dumping toxic mercury wastes in a densely populated part of town. By the company's own admission, more than two tonnes of mercury have been discharged into Kodaikanal's environment. A 2011 Government of India study on workers' health concluded that many workers suffered from illnesses caused by workplace exposure to mercury. ✕

<http://kodaimercury.org/final-report-of-the-goi-committee/>



Remembering #BertaCaceres

Jagoda Munic, Chair of Friends of the Earth International

On International Women's Day, the 8th of March 2016, we raise our voices in indignation at the brutal murder of our sister Berta Cáceres – indigenous Lenca leader, community organizer, grassroots feminist and environmental justice activist. Berta was murdered in her home in the Intibuca department, Honduras, early in the morning of the 3rd of March, at the side of Mexican activist Gustavo Castro Soto from Otros Mundos / FOE Mexico, who was badly hurt by the same gunmen.

Honduras has been the scene of a widening crackdown on peaceful dissent since the coup in 2009. Communities and organizations opposing destructive projects, such as Berta and her comrades at COPINH – the National Council of Popular and Indigenous Organizations of Honduras – organization co-founded by Berta in 2003, have been intimidated, persecuted and murdered. The government is aiding and abetting the theft and appropriation of the commons and peoples' territories by large transnational corporations. Mining and damming projects are being rolled out with little or no consultation with the peoples affected.

Berta Cáceres is a leader who has inspired us for many years as an indigenous woman activist raising her voice in the defence of women's bodies – our primary territory – and community territory, land, water and the commons. Through her actions, she has strengthened the role of women in resisting destructive transnational corporation activities and state-level repression, and in constructing alternatives based on centuries-old knowledge and collective practices. In recent interviews, she once again encouraged us to rise up in collective solidarity, in the global South and North, against the predatory capitalist, patriarchal system in order to save women's lives, human lives and the planet.

Berta has shown us in practice that there is no environmental justice without

an end to all forms of violence against women and to the exploitation of women's reproductive and productive work. Violence is used as a tool to control women's lives, bodies and work within the patriarchal, racist capitalist system, just as it is used to control community territories and the commons. Capital accumulation in a time of multiple crisis – economic, social, environmental – is made possible through the oppression and domination of both nature and women's work: both are considered infinite, elastic resources, to be exploited according to the interests of elite groups.

Friends of the Earth International is working for a peaceful and socially just world. This world will remain out of our reach for as long as the majority of women have to limit their daily movements and choices, and take risks in the most ordinary of settings because of the threat of violence. We express our solidarity with our sisters around the world who are fighting for sustainable societies and for equality between women and men. We stand in solidarity with Berta's family and the Lenca community and renew our commitment, as women and men FOE activists, to continue the feminist and socialist fight for an end to violence against all women, and against environmental human rights defenders who are harassed, threatened or killed for their activism around the world.

On International Women's Day and everyday... We are all Berta Cáceres!

Mobilise, Resist, Transform! ✕

