

27.02.2025

South Africa's Nationally Determined Contributions (NDC) 2035 Faith Consultations

Venue (Hybrid): Protea Hotel by Marriott Balalaika Sandton, Johannesburg
Thursday, 27 February 2025, 09:00 – 13:00

Francesca de Gasparis, Executive Director of SAFCEI (verbal input notes)

Steve did a brilliant job, as usual, explaining the policy framework, what an NDC is and does within the climate change framework at the UNFCCC, and the compelling facts on why we need to change our emissions in South Africa. Excellent questions already were made about what are our local concerns that need to be incorporated into NDCs.

My role today is to give us a bit more of a frame about Why are we here and what role do we play as the faith sector in this process. As we've gone quite far long into the technical aspects, I would like to take a step back and remind us of one very important part of this exercise is to bring everyone along, to be inclusive and make the issues accessible and understandable by all.

We should examine what is our role as the faith sector including the legitimacy of our presence and voice and importance of this part of the NDCs consultation.

People of faith cross cut society, representative of those most vulnerable, ethical and moral imperative, we bring alongside civil society (of which we are part) bring witnessing of decisions and climate impacts, moral accountability, and we have the capacity to share the realities on the ground. The wisdom of those who have studied theology and its message to modern humanity is needed in this process. Some of the deepest thinkers of the problems of humanity with a compassionate lens that I have met, are faith leaders. A mixed (tongue in cheek) quote combining Socrates and the bible: those who live an unexamined life are destined to repeat the sins of the past.

There are many challenges that South Africa faces- we are in a unique position in the world, both dealing with the legacies of past political and thus societal injustices (apartheid and colonialism). We have the knowledge and the experience of what poor governance looks like to those upon which it is wrought. I have long thought that the rest of the world needs to learn from Africa. At this time more than before, I feel the world needs to listen to the lessons of South Africa. No more than the current global geopolitical landscape. Leadership in the north is abandoning sense and science and elections are bringing in fear based leadership that are making the wrong decisions for their countries and the world.

Where does that leave us here in South Africa? What are we being called to do and take action on? Make no mistake if we follow the US and parts of Europe, and these global energy companies like BP and others we will reap destruction and devastation on our communities.

It's important to emphasize South Africa's position on what freedom for all looks like. Our very hard fought freedoms that many of our ancestors gave their lives for. Freedom in South Africa it is not selective of gender, standing in society, wealth, sexual orientation, faith or location. This is enshrined in our constitution one of the most progressive in the world and in Africa. We can stand tall and continue to remind the rest of the world and each other what justice looks like. Justice and love are at the root of all faiths (and for many of us who don't have a faith).

I want to touch a bit more on climate change and its impacts, everyone here knows that climate change is about disruption of our natural weather systems which is already wreaking havoc in our region. South African Climate Scientists are world renown and they tell us that our region will heat at twice the global average, meaning that we will experience far worst droughts, rain bombs, and climate catastrophes.

Our aim with the Nationally Determined Contributions is to agree as a country what we can do to limit emissions that cause climate change. The gas emissions in short come from the burning of fossil fuels, most of the energy systems we use to power our economy and our homes: oil, gas, coal, paraffin, our electricity is mostly still based on coal fired power stations. And we export coal around the world which makes South Africa the 10th largest emitter of greenhouse gases. As we burn these fossil fuels so our world is heating up to unbearable levels. Even the plastic we use is made from fossil fuels, the scourge of plastic waste is directly linked to climate change and our dependence and addiction to fossil fuels. And the closest and affordable alternative to most households- local wood, biomass, will reduce our capacity to adapt to climate change and increase climate impacts on those very same, most vulnerable communities.

My time is limited today, but one of the points I want to make today that it is our job as SAFCEI and faith leaders is to learn and be able to explain the climate feedback loop to our communities and congregations, so they understand the pressure we are putting on our environment, and start to explore as communities what we can do differently including reducing waste, plastic use and for everyone to plant more indigenous trees, the right trees in the right places.

We all have a part to play and in particular as in any democracy, faith communities voices matter. They need to be informed and they need to be able to say what they want to happen. This will help the government to make the right decisions, and where necessary faith leaders need to be empowered to speak out to hold govt accountable for its actions when it strays from the path to a low carbon (emission) future.

I asked a few colleagues as I was prepping for today what do we need to see in the NDCs:

- Ambitious mitigation is needed.
- We need South African leadership more than ever in current geopolitical times.
- We need detailed and realistic plans for adaptation in communities.
- We to make climate science and plans accessible through language and making issues understandable to ensure inclusive participation.
- NDC must enable us to make a just energy transition, centered on justice.
- We need to challenge the re-emergence of carbon markets with Article 6 and carbon capture and storage as false solution that are logically flawed, which reduce

mitigation, and are resource intensive. (and pointing to the potential for repeating the human rights abuses in the past associated with carbon markets.)

- We also need to be careful in our accounting of carbon sinks given in the western cape that we have a fire based ecosystems and also with rising temperatures, natural carbon sequestration rates will lower due to reduced activity of enzymes involved in photosynthesis.
- There is a need for socially owned renewable energy systems that are community owned or led, and actually results in clean and safe and affordable energy that centers the people most affected by the transition (which currently is not the case).
- We need proper waste management systems and legislation to reduce plastic packaging. A large amount of unaccounted emissions comes from landfills and illegal dumps.
- We need functioning local governments and municipalities that can do service delivery at a local level to reduce climate vulnerability. For example, firewood usage increases erosion when heavier rainfall events occur. Poor waste removal causes more flooding, which makes roads impassable for children needing to get to school, ambulances and other transportation.
- Transportation needs to be recognized as a part of a successful just transition and for climate resilience.
- We need local vulnerabilities recorded, and being considered and to be advocated for sharing to inform, and promoting and financing localised adaptation practices.
- We need to get organised and advocate at a national level – which is why I am so pleased the SACC has launched just this week its own climate commission and I am thrilled that the GS of SACC rev Molo will be speaking soon on this.
- Need to continue to work together to understand and translate the complex and difficult challenges of climate change so our communities can understand, raise their voices and respond, and to ensure the national NDC and the local realities link.
- Finally, faith communities need to be recognised as a key societal actor that can facilitate that linkage and be a part of the implementation of solutions we must implement.