

**Date:** 27 Jan 2020  
**Subject:** **Annual Southern African Coal conference in Cape Town**  
**Release:** For release on Thursday, Jan 30<sup>th</sup>, 2019

## Coal conference in Cape Town neglects wellbeing of communities and climate emergency

This week Cape Town will host the Annual Coal Conference at The Westin, a gathering of business executives, lobbyists and government officials, to discuss the future of coal mining, processing and trading, a declining sector in urgent need for radical transformation.

Coal is the dirtiest and most destructive energy source in the world, contributing 40% to the world's carbon dioxide emissions. This makes coal a major factor in our global climate emergency, which scientists say is an existential threat to humanity as a whole and may lead to the deaths of millions of people over the next decades, if emissions are not cut dramatically.

Only a few weeks ago, the World Economic Forum's Global Risks Report 2020 showed that the top five most likely global risks over the coming decade are all climate-related: extreme weather, climate action failure, natural disasters, biodiversity loss, and human-made environmental disasters. The coal business is facing tough times. Banks and asset managers worldwide are divesting from fossil fuels, especially coal. Blackrock, the world's biggest asset manager, recently announced that their fund will no longer invest in companies that generate their revenue from thermal coal.

Meanwhile in Cape Town at The Westin on Thursday, Mr. Gwede Mantashe, Minister of Mineral Resources and Energy, will be giving a keynote address, side by side with coal tycoon Mr. Mike Teke of Seriti resources, South Africa's second largest coal producer. The team is not expected to announce any radical changes. Both have indicated on numerous occasions that coal in South Africa is meant to stay. They seem deaf and blind toward international developments and warnings.

This is ironic, since climate change will hit Southern Africa even harder than more northern parts of the world. The UN's World Food Program (WFP) warned earlier this month that an unprecedented number of people in 16 countries across Southern Africa are gravely food insecure as climate change wreaks havoc on the region. Eswatini, Lesotho, Madagascar, Malawi, Mozambique, Namibia, Zambia and Zimbabwe are among the hardest-hit. Many families across the region are already skipping meals, taking children out of school and falling into debt to stave off agricultural losses, the WFP said. In South Africa, we are facing the worst droughts, floods and storms in a hundred years, putting enormous pressure on people's livelihoods, the economy and food production.

But Mr. Mantashe, Mr. Teke and other proponents of coal have caused even more direct harm to people of South Africa. The "Coal kills" report from GroundWork of 2018 describes the systemic destruction of fertile land, and the irresponsible use and pollution of water by coal mining companies. Mining has already rendered large areas of Mpumalanga a wasteland, much of which will remain poisoned and infertile land after coal mining companies are done with their exploitation of the land. Hundreds of abandoned mining sites will never bear fruit again.

Even more directly, coal causes the premature death of thousands of people in South Africa who live in communities near coal fired power plants. When coal is burned it releases a number of airborne toxins and pollutants, including mercury, lead, sulphur dioxide, nitrogen oxides, particulates, and various other heavy metals. Health impacts can range from asthma and breathing difficulties, to brain damage, heart problems, cancer, neurological disorders, and premature death.

**While coal companies destroy the land and causes death in these communities, only 4% of the region's employment comes from coal.**

Understandably, community organisations in the region are resisting mining companies that open new mining sites on a weekly basis, whilst government fails dismally to enforce the already weak regulations. To avoid community protests, the organisers have deliberately moved the conference venue to Cape Town, 1700 km away from the affected communities, and too far for protesters to travel.

However, the organisers have not accounted for a wide network of activist organisations in South Africa who are committed to join the fight against reckless coal businesses and who will make sure the voice of the most vulnerable communities in the Mpumalanga highveld will be heard.

**For this reason, Extinction Rebellion Cape Town, has organised a protest action and press conference on Thursday, 30<sup>th</sup> January, simultaneously with the Southern African Annual Coal Conference opening at The Westin.**

Several representatives of mining affected communities will be travelling to Cape Town to give firsthand reports on how the coal industry is affecting their lives.

We invite all interested media to our protest action on the morning of January 30<sup>th</sup> at 8.30 (press conference to start at 9.30) in front of the Westin for interview opportunity with community members, coal and climate change experts from the following organisations:

- Women Affected by Mining in Action (WoMin),
- Mining Affected Communities United in Action (MACUA),
- Fossil Free South Africa,
- 90 by 2030,
- Movement for Change and Social Justice (MCSJ) and the
- Alternative Information Development Centre (AIDC).

**For more information please contact**

Name: Jade Vester

Cell: 073 555 0424

Email: [ct@extinctionrebellion.org.za](mailto:ct@extinctionrebellion.org.za)

## **ABOUT XR CAPE TOWN**

---

Extinction Rebellion (XR) is a global network and believes it is a citizen's duty to rebel using peaceful civil disobedience when faced with criminal inactivity by its Government. The Rebellion centres on demands for Government to tell the truth about our dire situation and to act accordingly, including to decarbonise our economy by 2025, in a mobilisation of war-time like proportion.

We declare a non-violent rebellion on behalf of life itself against our criminally negligent government. Our government's abject failure to protect citizens and the next generations from unimaginable suffering brought about by climate breakdown and social collapse is no longer tolerable.

The group's key demands are:

1. The Government must admit the truth by declaring a climate & ecological emergency, reverse all policies inconsistent with addressing climate change, and work alongside the media to communicate this to their citizens.
2. The Government must enact legally binding policy measures to reduce carbon emissions to net zero by 2025.
3. The Government must establish a national Citizen's Assembly to oversee the changes, as part of creating a democracy fit for purpose.