



## **COMMUNIQUE ON CLIMATE CRISES, AGROECOLOGY AND ANIMAL WELFARE**

Cape Town Lodge Hotel, South Africa, Cape Town. 25 May 2024. No Embargo

We, multi-faith leaders in the Agroecology space, comprising members of faith communities from across South Africa, gathered in Cape Town from 21-25 May 2024, for a Faith Leader Environmental Advocacy Training (FLEAT). We believe that caring for the community of life on Earth is our shared responsibility and note that food is sacred and must be pure. In the richness of our faiths, and great variety of beliefs and practices, we share a mandate to care for our common sacred home, which sustains and nourishes the whole community of life.

Our different faith belief systems share a common understanding that food is a sacred gift from the Creator and must be kept pure throughout the production system. We have also noted that our faith calls us to be a prophetic voice for the environment and every person, especially for small-scale farmers, the poor and marginalized, including women and children.

In the realm of environmental management, addressing the multifaceted impacts of climate change is crucial for sustaining both human communities and natural ecosystems. We have noted with great concern the ever-increasing frequency and intensity of climate change impacts such as drought, floods and fires in food production systems, the damage to infrastructure, and the negative impacts on businesses and communities, as well as other contributing sectors to the economy of South Africa. We have the duty to encourage everyone to eat healthy foods that have been produced without degrading or compromising the integrity of Creation and or belief systems. We have also noted that some of the responses made by governments in relation to food production for global and national food security are not in line with our different faiths and beliefs and that they do not offer appropriate solutions for small-scale farmers.

We have thus reached consensus regarding our concerns, commitment and response to the following broad food production and environmental issues:

- **Food and food production as a faith issue**
- **Agroecology as an appropriate response to food production and food security**
- **Animals and livestock welfare.**

We are united through our shared calling and common commitment to care for the community of life and to seek justice for the Earth and for future generations.

### **Food and food production as a faith issue**

Our faith and belief systems consider how food is produced, transported, processed and consumed. It also considers seed as a basis of production as an issue of great concern. The promotion of hybrid and genetically modified seed, particularly in small-scale farming systems, contradicts our beliefs, encourages environmental harm and is not appropriate for the people we serve and live with within our communities. Therefore, we call for:

- Reduction in the use of hybrid and genetically modified seeds as it is not a sustainable option for small-scale farmers. It poses environmental threats due to the use of harmful chemicals and the ownership models (Plant Breeders Rights and patents) are not appropriate for small-scale farming systems.
- Policies that protect indigenous knowledge and conservation and the use of open-pollinated local seeds for small-scale farmers.
- Financial assistance for small-scale farmers, the creation of open-pollinated seed banks and for the sharing of indigenous and agroecological knowledge and skills.

### **Agroecology as response to food production and insecurity in South Africa**

Climate change presents a significant risk to food security in sub-Saharan countries; it will affect food crop production and food distribution patterns, as well as reducing the diversity of nutrients and number of calories available for consumption. Climate change, particularly global warming, affects food security through food availability, accessibility,

utilization and affordability in South Africa. Therefore, as faith leaders, we commit ourselves to:

- Training and supporting the communities we serve on acquiring and implementing agroecological principles and practices across South Africa.
- Supporting communities to secure land and financial assistance, open-pollinated seeds and other resources to start or to continue agroecological food production.
- Advocating for and promoting all 10 Principles of Agroecology.

We further call all international and national organisations, government agencies and departments supporting farmers to also support agroecology and related farming practices.

### **Animals and livestock welfare**

Our faith and belief systems also acknowledge that animals are sentient beings that the Creator expects to be treated with dignity. We therefore call for:

- National Government to draft a Bill with the participation of faith leaders and agroecologists for the welfare and protection of domestic and non-domestic animals.
- A prohibition on animals being subjected to unnecessary pain either for trade, domestic and or spiritual use.
- The banning of transportation of live animals (livestock, poultry and/or wild animals) for long and great distances, especially in the export market. In an event where there is a pressing need for such long-distance transportation, proper and safe transport means, including limited/controlled numbers must be observed.
- The banning of practices that restrict the movement of animals such as caged egg-laying chickens, pigs under restricted movement during pregnancy and lactation, dairy cows kept in constant pregnancy and restricted in feeding their calves and kids. Any other such related practices must be banned or undertaken under acceptable conditions.

### **Role of faith communities and faith leaders in climate change and food production**

Approximately 80% of South Africans are Christians, 15% have no religious affiliation and 5% are Muslims, Hindus, Jewish, hold African beliefs or are of other faiths. Most faith communities meet at least once a week. Therefore, taking advantage of faith as a strong social institution in South Africa, as faith leaders we have committed to:

- Partnering with other organisations and institutions in the fight against hunger, malnutrition, environmental degradation and climate change.
- Equipping faith leaders with relevant and accurate information about climate change and agroecology so that they become advocates for clean food production and climate action.
- Making congregations as centres of knowledge dissemination about climate change and agroecology.
- Amplifying the voice of faith communities as major players in climate action at local, regional, national and international levels.

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