

Southern African Faith Communities' Environment Institute

COP28 Statement

December 2023

Urgent climate action needed for a sustainable and just future

The Southern African Faith Communities' Environment Institute (SAFCEI) is an environmental justice organisation committed to supporting leaders of all faiths and their communities across Southern and East Africa to raise awareness, gain skills and take action on eco-justice, sustainable living and climate justice. This statement to COP28 is based on ongoing engagements with faith leaders and communities.

Climate change is resulting in increasing and widespread disasters across the region. We are witnessing the impacts of humanity's quest for profit and power overriding the very fabric of creation, the sanctity of nature and all living things. Faith leaders are disheartened by the lack of urgent action and moral conviction in the face of the climate crisis. Our faiths command us to be the stewards of creation, and we need a global value system of empathy, justice, and solidarity to guide action and for fair, equitable and climate conscious decisions regarding energy and climate policies.

We note that Africa has historically contributed the least to emissions, and yet, rural, informal, marginal and vulnerable communities in Africa bear the brunt of the climate crisis. Africa is warming at twice the rate of the rest of the world, and together with the energy crisis, cost of living crisis, and a hunger crisis- we witness an unfolding poly-crisis, highlighting the need for urgent action.

1. Food and climate justice

Up to a third of all global emissions come from industrial farming practices, particularly animal farming, but agriculture is not given due attention on the COP28 agenda. Africa's rural food systems have been undermined by climate change and the so-called Green Revolution. Africa has borne the imposition of a worldview that prioritises economic gain over equality and existing indigenous knowledge systems; a worldview that is epitomised by the agri-food system that wants to sell a solution to Africa. The approach of big business and the Alliance for Green Revolution Africa (AGRA) grows corporate profits and domination at the expense of all living beings.

We believe that financial support for food security and production in Africa must prioritise holistic solutions such as agroecology that protect biodiversity and recognise the knowledge of African small-scale farmers. Independent studies have shown the Green Revolution approach, rather than reducing hunger and poverty in Africa, has brought an ideology that supports the dominance of corporatisation and commodification of food.

We call on COP28 parties to

- Prioritize holistic policies and initiatives that empower smallholder farmers, rather than profit-driven agribusiness. Support environmentally sustainable practices of sharing seed and land ownership.
- Preserve biodiversity through farming practices that have minimal impact and recognize biodiversity's fundamental role in ensuring resilient ecosystems and sustainable and nutritional food production.
- Implement climate-resilient agricultural practices and promote agroecology, and encourage the adoption of sustainable and traditional agricultural practices.

2. Energy and climate justice

Fossil fuels are the primary cause of the climate crisis, and yet we witness Northern multinational corporations continuing to push for fossil fuel (gas, oil and coal) exploration and the creation of nuclear power plants across Africa. African states are entering into unfavourable deals in order to ensure their relevance on the global stage, while undermining local climate resilience, biodiversity and citizen livelihoods. Nations who have contributed the most to the climate crisis are not meeting climate commitments nor the agreed financial obligations to support developing countries in the Global South, while African leadership is placing the risk of extinction and the burden of debt on future generations.

Access to clean and affordable energy is a fundamental human right, yet many communities in Africa rely on dirty and unsustainable fuel sources such as fossil fuel power stations and biomass. Many African countries face challenges in meeting growing energy demands yet they sit on a great potential for sustainable renewable energy.

We call on COP28 Parties to:

- Reject gas and nuclear energy as being a part of a just energy transition. Gas is a fossil fuel and cannot be included if we are to stay below 1.5 degrees. Nuclear energy power plants are outdated, expensive and highly toxic due to the radioactive waste they produce.
- Encourage investment and the adoption of renewable energy sources and appropriate distribution systems to mitigate the impacts of climate change and phase out fossil fuels in a way that is just, fair, and financed.
- Develop policies and initiatives that ensure equitable access to clean, safe and affordable energy for all, particularly for communities that are marginalised, underserved and at the forefront of climate impacts.
- Support community-led and community-owned renewable energy initiatives that harness local and indigenous knowledge and resources to develop sustainable and culturally appropriate energy solutions.

We, as SAFCEI, moved by our conscience and faith, undertake to shine a light on African communities' daily struggles against climate change-induced disasters

and we petition for communities to secure a seat at the table and have their voice heard in local, national, regional and international forums and be a part of the solution.

We therefore call upon:

- All Parties to take active measures to address the adverse impacts of climate change on those who are historically marginalised and vulnerable, particularly in developing countries in Africa;
- All Parties to commit to more inclusive and ambitious NDCs in order to meet the target of 1.5°C;
- All governments to acknowledge the crosscutting concerns of gender and human rights and to ensure that these are included in conversations and decision-making on climate strategies, and to ensure that gender-responsive climate action is mainstreamed;
- Developed nations to reaffirm and meet their climate finance commitments, with strict monitoring and reporting guidelines, while reallocating funds equally towards mitigation and adaptation;
- Financial institutions to re-purpose the finance architecture, to be equitable, foster low-carbon climate-resilient growth, release fair and affordable forms of finance and support inclusive and sustainable growth;
- And all parties to operationalise the loss and damage fund and offer relief to developing countries through the provision of grant financing for addressing loss and damage.

The decisions made at COP28 will shape the future of our planet and the well-being of generations to come. May our collective efforts at COP28 be guided by wisdom, compassion, and a shared vision of a just and sustainable future. Climate action is a matter of urgency. It is the responsibility of our leaders to deliver on promises made at COP28. We demand no more empty promises.

Sincerely,

SAFCEI